

The Big Sur 'UFO': An Identified Flying Object

KINGSTON A. GEORGE

The Air Force obtained some unusual photography while experimenting with very sensitive optics equipment during ICBM launches on the West Coast nearly 30 years ago. Three years ago, in an article titled "Deliberate Deception: The Big Sur UFO Filming" (Jacobs 1989), one of the members of the experimental team claimed that the objects observed were beyond normal technical explanation and implied that the government had been communicating with aliens from outer space. Specifically, he claimed that the team had photographed an "intelligently controlled flying device." He asserted that it emitted "a beam of energy," its capabilities were beyond the science and technology of our time, and it was therefore probably "of extraterrestrial origin." He concluded that we had knowingly photographed a "demonstration . . . put on for our benefit for some reason by extraterrestrials." I was the project engineer for these experiments. This article is intended to provide a more rational account of the sightings of September 1964 and to supply firsthand facts that should loosen any attachment the uninformed might have to Bob Jacobs's version.

The Deployment

The United States Air Force conducted a test of a special light-sensitive telescope high up in the coastal mountains in the Los Padres National Forest above Big Sur, California, between August and November 1964. The objective was to collect low-light-level photography of missile launches into the Air Force Western Test Range from Vandenberg Air Force Base, situated a little



Some unique Vandenberg Air Force Base telephoto data of an Atlas launch were obtained in 1964. But the imagery had nothing to do with UFOs or extraterrestrials.

over 100 miles to the south. The Big Sur angle presents a unique side-look during test launches, and paper studies convinced some of us that photo data from that location could be of significant value. Local telephoto-lens coverage from Vandenberg AFB is often obscured by the prevailing fog, while the special telescope could be placed at 4,000-foot altitude. Nine of eleven launches from Vandenberg were successfully covered during the three-month deployment (George 1964).

The 24-inch mirror telescope we borrowed was built in the 1950s on a modified 5-inch gun mount by Boston University under government contract. Owned and operated by the Range Measurements Laboratory of the Air Force Eastern Test Range, the B.U. Scope, as we called it, later supplied the television network feed during Saturn rocket launches in the sixties and seventies. It employed one of the most light-sensitive systems of the time, an image orthicon television camera tube.

An image orthicon "sees" stars quite well even in twilight. The brightest ones would bloom on the closed-circuit TV monitor to form a blob, with size related to brightness, and also leave a persistence tail behind as the telescope panned across it. The tracking operators used handwheels to constantly make tiny adjustments, and the TV screen resembled a pool of vigorous tadpoles. Today, a similar modern instrument detects stars several orders of stellar magnitude less bright than the best

Deliberate Deception: The Big Sur UFO Filming

A Critical Analysis of the Curious Events at
Vandenberg Air Force Base in September, 1964

By Bob Jacobs, Ph.D.

This is an article about the filming and subsequent U.S. Government denial of a UFO which occurred on a cloudy, stormy night over the Pacific Ocean off Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. It is a first-hand account of an event before dealing with it and the subsequent revelations which have come from a variety of sources since 1964. Consider this brief discussion about UFOs and The Press.

1: It is a sad and curious fact that most of the literature surrounding the UFO phenomena appears in the form of sensationalized "tabloids." Once regarded solely as pulp magazines, the form of disc information has now moved into television with personalities like Gerardo Rivera, Morton

We know, for example, that at the beginning of his involvement with the subject, the late Dr. J. Allen Hynek, later Chairman of the Department of Astronomy at Northwestern University, was employed by the United States Air Force with Project Blue Book to "debunk" all "lying saucer" sightings. His famous "Saucer Gap" conclusion has led in the popular mythos long after the good Doctor's formal reevaluation of it. And, in spite of some of the general popularity of the subject in *Time*, the *Life* magazine, and other television talk show heroes, all get caught in the net of sensationalism. The frequent theories who claim to be "objective" science often do so only in the name of sensationalism.

There are facts. Another fact is that I have been a participant in an official United States Government-ordered UFO cover-up. The red red studied by some of my colleagues in academia because in 1982 I wrote an article about the cover-up and it appeared in *The National Enquirer*. It was not my intention to become a tabloid writer then or now. The *Enquirer* turned out to be the only publication I could find which was interested in writing the article at all. Both academic and mainstream journals and periodicals turned a down cold over the period of nearly a year during which I submitted and resubmitted it. I was told by editors after the fact that UFO stories weren't "publishable" and that the story was "silly."

Portion of Bob Jacobs's article in the January 1989 *MUFON UFO Journal*.

we could do in 1964.

The project was remarkably successful. Soon after we returned the borrowed instrument, a long-term plan was started for a permanent site. An up-to-date telescope is operated today in the Big Sur area by the Western Test Range's successor, the 30th Space Wing of the Air Force Space Command.

I was the project engineer for the telescope experiment, and Lieutenant Bob Jacobs was one of the key field team members who, it later developed, was technically not authorized to view

'The Truth Is Too Important to Hide Any Longer'

A University of Wisconsin professor has finally broken his 17-year silence — and revealed full details of how he filmed a UFO on a remote island off the California coast in 1964. Dr. Robert Jacobs, Ph.D., was an Air Force officer in charge of filming the test when the sighting happened. It was headed up by the Air Force and U.S. government, he says, but never Dr. Jacobs, an assistant professor of radio-TV-film, reveals the story exclusively for *TIME* magazine.

UFO Spied on Space Missile — And I Captured It on Film

By DR. ROBERT JACOBS, Ph.D.

I was ordered by the U.S. Air Force to keep quiet about an incredible UFO sighting filmed by official cameras under my control.

An Air Force major and two mysterious men from Washington, D.C., banned the press ever mentioning the astonishing footage of an actual close encounter between the UFO and an Atlas missile.

The cover-up has continued right up until this day that now I am speaking out — because I feel the American people have a right to know.

As the name of the second-biggest air encounter — Jan. 8, 1966 — I was an Air Force first lieutenant in charge of plane operations at Vandenberg Air Force Base.

My mission was to film the test when the sighting happened. It was headed up by the Air Force and U.S. government, he says, but never Dr. Jacobs, an assistant professor of radio-TV-film, reveals the story exclusively for *TIME* magazine.

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He said WASH. that "I told you I had no idea. We received the film around 1965 and I was told to keep it under a very tight seal. I didn't see it until 1982, and I said, 'This is a UFO'."

He added one more, "You are in the room, where I believe to be CIA agents. I am a little bit of a spy, I am concerned, I never believed in UFOs."

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The film was turned over to the new men, whom I believe to be CIA agents. I am a little bit of a spy, I am concerned, I never believed in UFOs."

The major added "I don't have to reveal you, off course of the reputation of a security breach."

It's been 17 years since that encounter, and I've told nobody about it until now. I have been afraid of revealing what I saw. But the truth is too important to hide any longer. I've seen it, and I've told you I had no idea. We received the film around 1965 and I was told to keep it under a very tight seal. I didn't see it until 1982, and I said, 'This is a UFO'."

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Jacobs had earlier (1982) written this piece in the *National Enquirer*.



Part of the team that used the special light-sensitive B.U. Scope at Big Sur mountain site in 1964 to photograph Air Force ICBM launches. The author, Kingston A. George, who was project engineer for the tests, is at far right, sitting on a wheel and pointing at the camera. Lt. Bob Jacobs is not in this picture. In front of George in uniform are Major Florenz Mansmann and Chief Warrant Officer Guy Spooner. The three men at left are enlisted men from Vandenberg AFB, and the other civilians are B.U. Scope operators and technicians from the Eastern Test Range. (All photos supplied by author.)



Lt. Bob Jacobs is at left with blocked military cap.

the pictures we were collecting. Bob was named the on-site commander by the 1369th Photo Squadron and managed the logistics of the operation at the Big Sur location. Years later, for reasons I can't fathom, Bob claims we witnessed an intelligent UFO in action around an Atlas warhead, followed by an Air Force cover-up. He provides details of his weird claims in an article for the *MUFON UFO Journal* (Jacobs 1989). What we saw was indeed unique and startling, but it definitely does *not* require invoking UFOs with purposeful goals and advanced weapons.

The Threat to National Security

The immediate success of the 1964 project led to a serious problem: we not only could see and gather data on the missile anomalies as hoped, but we also were viewing details of war-



Another photo of the group, with Jacobs at far right holding a camera and standing behind Chief Warrant Officer Spooner.

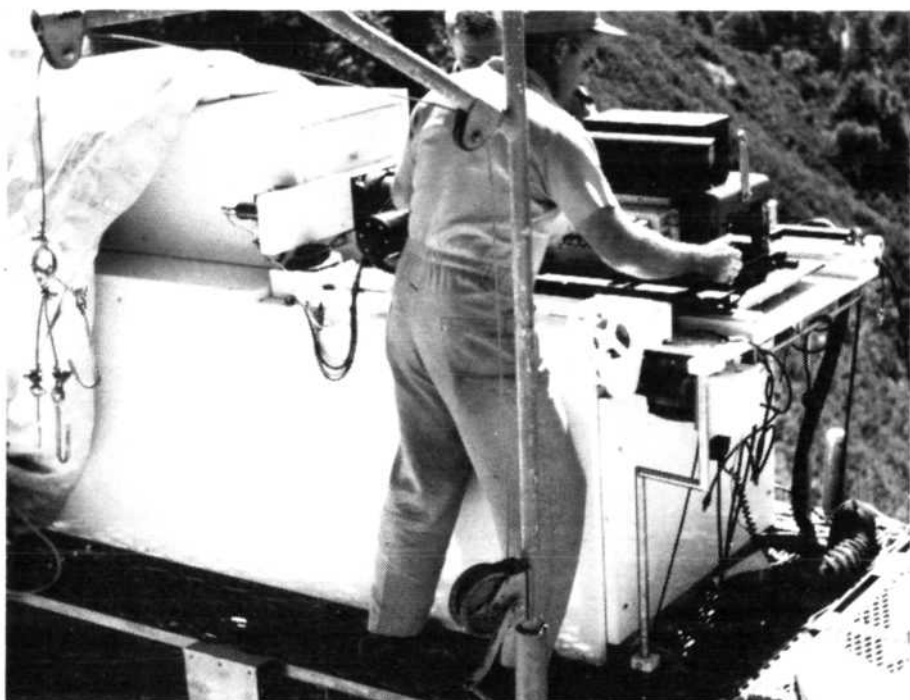
head separation and decoy deployment that were considered by the Air Force to be highly classified. The Air Force strives to be quite rigid in its approach to handling classified information, yet there were suddenly dozens of airmen, civilians, and contractors viewing data normally reserved to a few persons with the highest level of clearance. Of course at first no one realized the significance of the data.

By the early 1960s, the USSR had beaten the United States into space and set numerous "firsts," demonstrating an alarming degree of sophistication in rocketry and the space sciences. The limits of what was technically possible in space were not well defined for the military leadership. The United States owned radars that could detect incoming warheads

thousands of miles from their targets and anti-missile missiles that could theoretically knock out an incoming reentry vehicle above the atmosphere. Could the Soviets nullify our land- and submarine-launched missiles with an anti-ICBM system? Today we can say it was naive to think either we or the USSR could have fielded much of a defense against ICBMs with the technology available in the sixties. But in 1964, the military leadership had to react as though a defense against the ICBM forces was around the corner.

Dawn on September 22, 1964

Just after sundown and just before sunrise, there is a period of time when objects at high altitude overhead are sunlit to an observer who is in dark-



The Image Orthicon and chassis on the top of the telescope.

ness on the earth's surface. About 15 to 20 minutes before dawn, when the sky is quite dark, conditions are poised for optimizing the contrast and range of detection for objects hundreds of miles distant.

Such was the case during an Atlas launch nicknamed "Buzzing Bee" before sunup on September 22, 1964. On the TV screen, we watched the Atlas climb into the sunlight and shed its booster engine section about two minutes after launch. The sustainer engine shut down some two and half minutes after that, all normal for the Atlas, and we could still see the missile tankage against the dark, starry sky! And then, astonishingly, we saw a momentary puff of an exhaust plume, bright enough to "bloom" on the television monitor, and an object separated from the tank—the reentry vehicle (RV) was released to follow its

own trajectory to the target area. This was followed by two smaller puffs that also bloomed on the monitor, and then two groups of three objects became distinct from the sustainer tank and the RV. We watched all the objects slowly grow in separation from one another for another minute and a half. Then the objects grew so dim, and the tracking so erratic, that the operation was halted. We had watched the flight for about 8 minutes.

The Atlas was supposed to release decoys, simulated RVs to confuse and overload a missile defense system. The timing of the puffs we had seen was in the right ballpark. Beyond that, we needed expert assistance to help explain the images. We carried a canister containing a thousand feet of 35mm black-and-white film (at that time, video was recorded by a synchronized film camera viewing a

kinescope) to Vandenberg AFB, processed it, and began showing it with some excitement to the Atlas missile development people.

The reaction was startling! Soon after the first showing to the director of operations, all the top brass at Vandenberg had seen it and a copy was being made to fly to HQ Strategic Air Command at Omaha. The classification was quickly changed from Secret to Top Secret. Buzzing Bee had opened an entirely new chapter in ICBM tactical thinking.

Jacobs's Observations

Jacobs reports in the MUFON article that he witnessed a saucerlike UFO circle the Atlas warhead, then direct a laser beam at it that bumped it out of the way and caused it to tumble out of orbit [*sic*] and miss the intended target by hundreds of miles. There are several fundamental flaws in that statement. To begin with, the Atlas was sub-orbital, as all ICBMs are, and it did not miss the target.

The image of the warhead, even if viewed exactly side-on, would be less than six-thousandths of an inch long on the image orthicon face, or between two and three scan lines. We could not resolve an image of the warhead under these conditions; what is detected is the specular reflection of sunlight as though caught by a mirror. Practically all the data collected by the B.U. Scope on hard objects was through specular reflection. The same principle is involved in the little hand mirrors provided to military pilots so that an air search can find them by the glint of reflected sunlight if necessary.

We could also see the engine exhaust as a large gaseous plume that dissipated rapidly outside the earth's atmosphere. The small charges that released the decoys were seen as short

flashes about as bright as a dim star. Nothing "circled" any of the images.

A laser beam (or any directed-energy beam) is invisible in the vacuum of outer space. We are able to see the path of a laser beam in a surface environment only because of dust particles and ionization in the surrounding atmosphere. A laser beam damages a target not with momentum, but by heating and melting it.

Six conclusions are given by Jacobs in the MUFON article requiring comment.

Jacobs Conclusion 1: "What we photographed that September day in 1964 was a solid, three-dimensional, intelligently controlled flying device." Bob is referring to his impression of something circling the warhead when he says "intelligently controlled." Nothing of the sort happened.

Jacobs Conclusion 2: "It emitted a beam of energy, possibly a plasma beam, at our dummy warhead and caused a malfunction." As noted above, the fact is that energy beams cannot be seen unless they hit something or pass through an atmosphere. We might see a target begin to glow with heat if we were close enough.

Jacobs Conclusion 3: "This 'craft' was not anything of which our science and technology in 1964 was capable. The most probable explanation of the device, therefore, is that it was of extraterrestrial origin." This remark must be Occam's Razor upside-down and backwards! Everything detected was indeed a product of our science and technology, although we had never had a direct view of it before. The Eastern Test Range people who operated the B.U. Scope for us had never seen views like this either, mainly because the telescope was situated to look "up the tail" of the launches on the East Coast. Also, images are seriously degraded by the

light passing through a great deal more atmosphere than on our 4,000-foot mountain.

Jacob Conclusion 4: "The flashing strikes of light we recorded on film were not from laser tracking devices. Such devices did not exist then aside from small-scale laboratory models." In 1962 I evaluated the feasibility of using a carbon-dioxide laser to illuminate launch vehicles hundreds of miles away! In the late sixties the Range Measurements Laboratory at the Eastern Test Range operated two high-powered lasers in the visible spectrum for imaging space objects at night on a regular basis. But Bob is correct in saying that the observations in 1964 did not involve lasers—and, I would add, neither intra- nor extra-terrestrial.

Jacobs Conclusion 5: "Most probably, the B.U. Telescope was brought out to California specifically to photograph this event which had been prearranged. That is, we had been set up to record an event which someone in our Government knew was going to happen in advance." My supervisor at the time, Gene Clary, and I would have been thrilled to have had any kind of support from anywhere in the Government! The truth is, getting permission to use the national forest site, arranging air and ground transportation, finding \$50,000 to pay the air freight, and attending to myriad other physical and monetary obstacles, took us the better part of nine months.

Jacobs Conclusion 6: "What we photographed that day was the first terrestrial demonstration of what has come to be called S.D.I. or 'Star Wars.' The demonstration was put on for our benefit for some reason by extraterrestrials." Then what was the reason, and why did nothing come of it? No, the *terrestrial* demonstration period was so fruitful and successful that we

established a permanent site at Anderson Peak above Big Sur!

Finding the 'Real' RV

What had we really photographed? Both the U.S. and the USSR had ongoing research programs in the 1960s for defense against ballistic missiles and to develop options to outwit possible defenses. Omitting the technical details, what had happened on Buzzing Bee was that two decoys were fired off by small rocket charges on schedule, but some of the decoy packing material also trailed along and could be seen optically and also by certain kinds of radar. A little cloud of debris around each decoy warhead clearly gave away the false status, almost as well as coloring the decoys bright red.

This, of course, led to more than a little consternation at SAC Headquarters and in higher military circles. Although correctable by redesign, the alarm in the minds of the strategic analysts was that the Soviets could defeat our ICBM decoys by using a few telescopes on mountain peaks in the USSR and relaying information on which objects were decoys to the Soviet ICBM defense command center. An immediate concern was that, although few understood its significance, a raft of people at Vandenberg AFB had seen the data. Vulnerability of a major weapons system is normally classified Top Secret. How could this matter be kept from leaking out?

Issue Resolved

As might be expected, the military reaction came swiftly. Everyone who was at the telescope site or had seen the film had to be identified. All, including Jacobs and myself, had to be questioned on what they had seen and what they thought it meant. Each was

cautioned not to mention what was on the film to anyone and not to discuss it with others—even fellow workers who had originally seen it at the same time! None of us had more than a guess at the meaning, and the civilian intelligence experts who did the “debriefing” gave no hints.

Weeks later, my clearance level was increased to allow me to see the films again and analyze them. I don’t think Bob Jacobs ever gained the required clearance. The people later assigned to operate the equipment and carry the films around were subsequently cleared to the required level. The Top Secret film was marked for downgrading and declassification after 12 years, but its utility was over after a few months. Top Secret storage is too difficult and expensive for keeping items of dubious worth, and the film and related materials were all destroyed long before the 12 years were up. Only a few of us even remember the incident today, and Bob Jacobs is being both safe and cagey in observing that the Air Force denies the existence of the film or other hard evidence.

The photo site established on Anderson Peak has undergone many changes and improvements over the years, and has continued to collect data during ICBM launches of high value to national defense. Much of the

photography has needed security protection and the processes are in place to provide it without fanfare. There has never been a repetition of the security panic that followed the events of September 22, 1964, when Buzzing Bee literally and figuratively lit up the sky over the Pacific.

References

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Physicist/engineer Kingston A. George retired recently after 30 years of Air Force Civil Service and continues as a private aerospace consultant. His initial appointment in 1961 was as an operations research analyst for the 1st Strategic Aerospace Division at Vandenberg AFB, California, where he pioneered many aspects of range safety and range instrumentation systems deployment. As chief engineer for safety at Vandenberg AFB in 1989, he was honored in Washington, D.C., as the recipient of the Air Force Association's Senior Civilian Manager of the Year Award. He currently resides at 937 Diamond Drive, Santa Maria, CA 93455.

Truth and Consequences

The consequences of a claim that something is true are entirely irrelevant to the issue of whether the claim is true.

—Steven Goldberg, *When Wish Replaces Thought: Why So Much of What You Believe Is False* (Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y. 1992), p. 21.