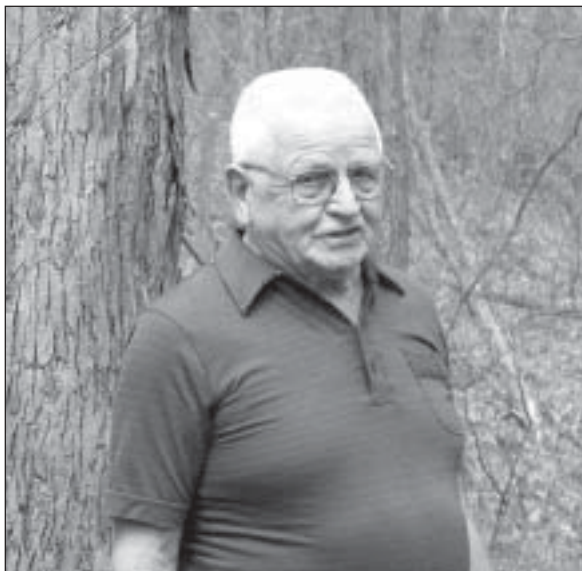


Artist's conception (above) by Charles Hanna of the object that crashed near Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, December 9, 1965. Statement of jazz musician Jerry Betters (left), who was ordered at gunpoint to leave the area after he and his friends saw a large acorn-shaped object on the back of an Army flatbed truck the night of the alleged UFO crash.



Nearby resident Bill Bulebush saw the object descend and located it before the military arrived.



John Podesta, White House chief of staff under President Clinton, backs the Kecksburg initiative.

## FORTY YEARS OF SECRECY: NASA, THE MILITARY, AND THE 1965 KECKSBURG CRASH

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# FORTY YEARS OF SECRECY: NASA, THE MILITARY, AND THE 1965 KECKSBURG CRASH

BY LESLIE KEAN

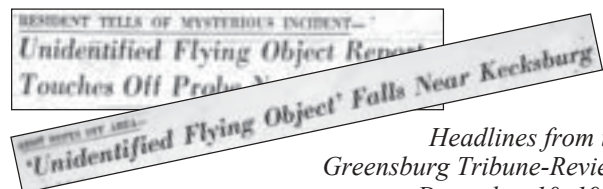
**T**his December marks the 40th anniversary of one of the most thoroughly researched and intriguing crash/retrieval cases in America. Despite a top-notch investigation spanning more than three decades and world-wide attention in recent years from a new campaign probing the case, the Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, UFO crash of 1965 remains unsolved, due mainly to the stubborn silence of American government agencies.

Unlike the Roswell crash, this case has been relatively uncontaminated by commercialism and the popular media. It does not feature bodies found at the scene; it involves an atypical object, suggesting a range of explanations; and it includes many living witnesses. The central witnesses remain unknown to most people interested in UFOs, and none of them have benefited from coming forward. Also in contrast to the Roswell case, the dramatic military response to the crash was reported by television, radio, and newspapers as it developed, and was witnessed by hundreds of people who descended on the tiny town from miles around. Unfortunately, no high-level Army, Air Force, or intelligence personnel involved with the Kecksburg retrieval have come forward in any way that can be of use to the case, as they did for the Roswell case many years after it occurred.

The sheer volume of witness and local news reports show that on December 9, 1965, an object landed near the village of Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, about 40 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, after being observed as a fireball in the sky across several U.S. states and Canada. Some Pennsylvania residents saw the object moving slowly in the sky; others saw smoke and brilliant bluish-white lights like an electric arc when it first crashed. Five witnesses eventually provided independent, corroborated descriptions of the object and its exact location in the woods. Dozens of others—including



*Leslie Kean is an investigative journalist who has published pieces related to the UFO subject for the Boston Globe and the Providence Journal, and through wide distribution by the New York Times and Knight Ridder-Tribune wire services.*



*Headlines from the  
Greensburg Tribune-Review,  
December 10, 1965.*

firefighters, newspaper reporters, and a radio news director at radio station WHJB (who was on the scene taping interviews)—describe the large military and police presence at the impact site and the cordoning off of the area. Observers provided detailed descriptions of an object being transported out on a flatbed truck. Many witnesses have signed statements for investigator Stan Gordon of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, who has been working on the case for over three decades. (See his website at [www.stangordon.com](http://www.stangordon.com).)

To this day, no one knows what triggered the interest of the U.S. military, or why the Army was so intent on hiding the object that it threatened civilians with weapons. The subsequent Air Force denial that anything at all came down is even more perplexing, and has led to heated speculation. In the ensuing 40 years, members of the once tightly knit community in rural Pennsylvania have been torn apart by the continuing unanswered questions about what happened. As American citizens, they have not been granted the information due them by law under the Freedom of Information Act. This case addresses issues that go beyond the question of determining the origin of the strange object that—as indicated by so many accounts—was recovered by our government that night.

However, two exciting breakthroughs occurred in 2003 that have moved the investigation forward many steps: a scientist's discovery of physical evidence showing that something crashed through the trees in 1965 at the location designated by witnesses; and the elimination of the possibility that the object was a Russian satellite or any man-made object at all, according to the world's leading authority on space systems. These two developments demolish the two preferred explanations used by the skeptics—that the object was either a meteor (the Air Force explanation) or a Russian satellite—and heighten the mystery by further reducing



*The full CFI team, including Larry Landsman (far left), Lee Helfrich (second from left), and Stan Gordon (far right), at a Washington, D.C., press conference in October 2003.*

possible conventional explanations.

These breakthroughs occurred after the Sci Fi Channel launched its historic “UFO Advocacy Initiative” in which, for a few years, unprecedented resources were applied to the investigation of a UFO case. As an independent journalist, I was asked by Larry Landsman, Sci Fi’s director of special projects, to spearhead an effort seeking new government records on a well-documented American UFO case that included the retrieval of physical evidence. The Kecksburg incident satisfied these and other criteria used to select a case, and the Washington law firm Lobel, Novins & Lamont came on board to assist with FOIA appeals and lawsuits, if they should become necessary. “This was, and still is, a freedom of information story,” says Landsman. “Many witnesses say something occurred that night, and so we provided our support to those investigating.”

In addition, a private investigator who formerly worked for the congressional General Accounting Office and an independent archival research firm joined the team, expanding the scope of the investigation beyond FOIA. Working with the Washington public relations firm PodestaMattoon, the core group undertaking this project called itself the Coalition for Freedom of Information (CFI), for which I was appointed director of investigations. See our website at [www.freedomofinfo.org](http://www.freedomofinfo.org).

The CFI Kecksburg initiative won the support of Washington insider John Podesta, President Clinton’s former chief of staff and member of the 1997 Moynihan Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy, who at the time was a law professor at Georgetown University and now heads the Center for American Progress. Podesta was instrumental in the declassification of 800 million pages of documents during the Clinton administration and is an outspoken critic of unnecessary government secrecy. “This initiative will help keep the pressure on,” he explained.

“I think it’s time to open the books on questions that have remained in the dark, on the question of government investigations of UFOs,” Podesta told the media at CFI’s first press conference launching the Kecksburg initiative in October 2002. “It’s time to find out what the truth really is that’s out there. We ought to do it because it’s right; we

ought to do it because the American people quite frankly can handle the truth; and we ought to do it because it’s the law.”

“Clinton Aide Slams Pentagon’s UFO Secrecy” was the headline on the CNN story that day. “The new initiative is not setting out to prove the existence of aliens. Rather the group wants to legitimize the scientific investigation of unexplained aerial phenomena,” CNN reported. “Podesta was one of numerous political and media heavyweights on hand in Washington, D.C., to announce a new group to gain access to secret government records about UFOs.”

## “UFO FALLS NEAR KECKSBURG”

The CFI campaign could not have proceeded without the solid base of meticulous work on the Kecksburg case performed by researcher Stan Gordon for close to 40 years.

Gordon’s curiosity was piqued when, as a teenager in nearby Greensburg, he spent the evening of December 9, 1965, glued to the radio and television as events unfolded. He heard reports that something crashed in the woods near the tiny village of Kecksburg at approximately 4:45 p.m. that evening, after being seen over a number of other states and Canada. “Many persons in the Greensburg area saw the phenomena. State police say there is a fire in the Kecksburg area. They are investigating,” said the 9 o’clock news on KDKA radio in Pittsburgh.

On his black-and-white TV, Gordon watched the local news and occasional special bulletins that broke into regular programming to state that the military had arrived on the scene and that the area was cordoned off. A search was underway to locate the object.

“Unidentified Flying Object Falls near Kecksburg, Army Ropes off Area” exclaimed the front-page headline on the *Greensburg Tribune-Review* the next morning. The article said that “the area where the object landed was immediately sealed off on the order of U.S. Army and State Police officials, reportedly in anticipation of a close inspection of whatever may have fallen.” U.S. Army engineers and scientists were brought in. “Excitement caused by the apparent landing produced a massive traffic jam,” as hundreds drove to the site from surrounding areas.

*Tribune-Review* reporter Robert Gatty interviewed an eight-year-old boy who saw the object fall into the woods, and his mother, Mrs. Arnold Kalp, who saw blue smoke rising and



*Tribune-Review reporter Robert Gatty (left) with news anchor Bryant Gumbel, host of the Sci Fi Channel documentary on Kecksburg.*



alerted the authorities. Gatty's December 10 story, headlined "Unidentified Flying Object Report Touches off Probe near Kecksburg," recounts that he was denied access to the site, by order of the Army.

Gatty's stories were quickly superseded by reports in numerous late-edition papers with the headlines "Searchers Fail to Find Object" and "Fireball a Meteor, Astronomer Explains." Reports said that 25 state policemen and members of Army and Air Force searched a 75-acre area until 2 a.m. and found nothing. The Air Force explained the incident as "a meteor or meteors," adding that "there has been no evidence of space debris . . . and all aircraft and missiles have been accounted for."

In a recent interview, Gatty said that his editor sent him out that night to cover "the story of the century," and that he is convinced something did indeed come down in the Kecksburg woods. "The Army appeared to be protecting something," he wrote in a 2003 statement for a CFI press conference. "At this point in time, nearly 40 years later, what possibly could be the reason for continuing this cover-up?"



*Mabel Mazza*

Reporter John Murphy, news director for local radio station WHJB, made it down to the site before the authorities arrived, in response to a flood of calls from alarmed citizens to the station. His former wife Bonnie Milslagle (Murphy died in 1969) and WHJB office manager Mabel Mazza both later reported that Murphy had photographed the object.

"He got down there before the police, before any of the armed forces were there," said Milslagle. "He called me and told me he'd gotten pictures of it, but some of the film had been confiscated. But he'd gotten one roll through."

Mazza says she saw one picture. "It was very dark and it was with a lot of trees around and everything. And I don't know how far away from the site he was. But I did see a picture of a sort of a cone-like thing. It's the only time I ever saw it," she said.

In the weeks that followed, Murphy became obsessed with the case and developed a radio documentary called "Object in the Woods" that included interviews conducted that night. One day, he received an unexpected visit from authorities in plain clothes. WHJB employee Linda Foschia recalls that some of Murphy's tapes were confiscated; no one knows what happened to the photographs. A week after this visit, which left him at first very agitated and then uncharacteristically despondent and depressed, Murphy aired a censored version of the original documentary. Some interviewees had requested he remove them from the broadcast due to fears of getting in trouble with the police and the Army, Murphy explained on the air. (The sudden fear of these previously forthcoming sources,

initially excited by the mysterious event as was Murphy, raises the possibility that they too were visited by intimidating officials.)

After airing the documentary, Murphy clammed up and would no longer talk about what had initially been the story of his lifetime, according to his wife. Yet Murphy had no idea how important his special documentary report would become to investigators years later, providing an intriguing, first-hand window into the drama as it unfolded. The resolute reporter did everything he possibly could to probe and document the story. In the beginning of the piece, for example, he provides the crucial fact that "the control tower at the Greater Pittsburgh Airport definitely confirmed the fact that there was an object in the sky at that time, 13 minutes before 5."

"Object in the Woods" chronicles Murphy's movements and encounters throughout the evening in great detail. At 8:30 p.m., after arriving on the scene at Kecksburg, he saw State Police Fire Marshal Carl Metz and another investigator go into the woods with a Geiger counter and flashlight, returning up the hill about 16 minutes later. While Metz headed for his car, Murphy stopped him where no one else could hear and asked if he had found anything. "He looked puzzled for a second and said, I'm not sure," Murphy says in the broadcast. Murphy then decided to ask the question in a different way. "After you make your report to the captain, do you think you or the captain, perhaps, may have something to tell me? And he [Metz] said, 'You better get your information from the Army.'" Sounding a bit stunned by this statement, Murphy makes the point that it was "very unusual" for the fire marshal, examining a fire "in almost a clear blue sky," to turn him over to the United States Army, indicating that something there in the woods "showed some significance of military value."

A little later, at the Greensburg State Police barracks, Murphy reports that he saw members of the army and the air force there in uniform, along with Carl Metz. The captain told him that he had an official statement for the record: the state police had conducted a thorough search and "there was nothing whatsoever in the woods." Murphy called this in to WHJB headquarters for broadcast during the station's ongoing news coverage of unfolding events. When Metz and others then got ready to leave the barracks and return to the wooded area a second time, Metz told Murphy that he could go with the group to the location.

While Murphy waited in his car to follow the caravan of vehicles heading to Kecksburg, a state police officer came from the barracks and approached him. "We got something out there," the officer told the radio news director, only moments after the release of the official statement to the contrary. "It's blue and it's pulsating and there's a light on it," he said, adding that the military wanted to go see this pulsating light. Murphy notes that this report matched earlier eyewitness descriptions of blue lights emanating from the woods right after the object landed and that, in fact, several people said they saw a light. "I myself did not see any

Stan Gordon



*Photos of damaged trees near the crash location which were used by scientists in 2003 to locate the site and conduct a forensic investigation revealing new, physical evidence.*

particular light that I could have definitely said was the light everybody was referring to,” he adds.

When they finally arrived back at the scene of the crash, Metz firmly forbade Murphy to accompany them into the woods, and, despite Murphy’s pleading for permission based on his earlier invitation, Metz offered no explanation for the sudden change.

## THE WITNESSES

During the following decades, Stan Gordon, interviewing countless people with varying levels of involvement, became increasingly unable to accept the official explanation that what was seen in the sky was a meteor, and that nothing at all came down. For example, Pennsylvania residents saw the object moving slowly and making turns, as if under intelligent control. Randy Overly told Gordon that the object passed about 200 feet over his head and stayed level, maintaining the same height the whole time, moving about as fast as a single-engine plane. The acorn-shaped, brownish object made a hissing sound as it spewed greenish fire from its rear, which terrified the young Overly and his friend.

Bill Bulebush said he was working on his car in nearby Mammoth when he saw the object hesitate and make a turn before descending into the woods. He and other observers saw the object go down slowly, as if controlled.

Hundreds of people, along with the media, witnessed different aspects of the extensive military and state police presence in the area that night. Fireman Bob Bitner saw a small convoy of military trucks going into the ravine and coming out later, and was refused permission to go into the woods himself. From his nearby upstairs bedroom window,

young John Hays watched a spectacle of flashlights, cars, and trucks going into the woods while military officials gathered in his living room downstairs, talking in small groups and using his parents’ telephone. These are just a few of the many independent reports Gordon acquired following the event, all in great detail.

Later that night, witnesses saw an object transported out of the area at great speed on the back of a military flatbed tractor-trailer truck. “Not only did we see the flatbed going up empty, we saw the flatbed coming down—loaded,” reports Mike Slater, who said that Army officials asked him to provide false directions to people looking for the crash site. Sometimes these officials pointed guns at civilians when they were too close to the barricades.

Jazz musician Jerry Betters said he was harshly ordered at gunpoint to leave the area after he and his friends caught a glimpse of an acorn-shaped object, “a little bigger than a Volkswagen,” on the back of an Army flatbed truck as it struggled up through a field. For some reason, it was not fully covered. “I could see this hieroglyphic stuff all on the back,” Betters said. “I would swear on the Bible and take a lie detector test,” he wrote in a notarized statement with a drawing, for one of CFI’s FOIA requests to the Army.



*James Romansky*



*Bob Bitner*

Firefighter James Romansky saw the flatbed truck speeding down the hill in a military convoy, past the Kecksburg firehouse. “I and many others could see the object and its shape under the tarpaulin. There is no meteorite in the world that looks like that,” Romansky said in a recent interview.

Romansky, one of the very first to see the object on the ground before the military arrived, has been a crucial witness, providing a detailed description from a few feet away. He said he saw a bronze-colored, acorn-shaped object with no windows, doors, or seams, partially buried in a gully. It was about 10–12 feet tall, large enough for a man to stand up in, and 8–12 feet in diameter. Romansky said he saw strange symbols that looked like Egyptian hieroglyphics on the back, or “bumper area” of the acorn. He stayed on the scene with a group of firemen until ordered to leave by two men in trench coats followed by uniformed military.

In August 1987, Romansky was the first witness to take Gordon to the impact site, which turned out to be the same area where Gordon had previously photographed damaged trees. Six months later, John Hayes escorted Gordon to the same location, where as a boy he had seen the disturbed area around the wash the morning after the object was removed. In 1988, Gordon received a tip that Bulebush had also approached the object at close range. After providing Gordon with a detailed description, Bulebush went into the woods to find the location from a different entry point than that used by Romansky. He found a particular tree that he remembered, and pointed to the exact same spot in the streambed that Romansky and Hayes had previously identified.

The most extraordinary part of this story is that Romansky, Hayes, and Bulebush independently took Gordon to the same location, without having ever discussed the case among themselves, and each had no idea what the other had said to Gordon. The descriptions of the object provided by Romansky and Bulebush (who had never even met at the time) were extremely similar. Since then, three additional people have reported to Gordon that they too saw the object before it was removed from the ground, although they are not willing to go public.

State Police Fire Marshal Carl Metz, whom John Murphy witnessed going into the wooded impact area twice that evening, apparently saw something extraordinary but kept the information close to his chest until his death in 1989. Former Pennsylvania State Trooper Bob Koveleskie, who was working in eastern Pennsylvania that night, says that he asked Metz shortly after the event what had happened, and Metz replied that he was sworn to secrecy by the Army and couldn’t discuss it. Years later, former Greensburg Police Dispatcher Howard Burns reported in a videotaped interview with Gordon that Metz took part in a group discussion at the Greensburg police station in the early 1980s. Burns says that Metz told the group that he was one of the first at the Kecksburg impact area and initially thought he had come upon a crashed aircraft due to the tree damage. According to Burns, Metz reported that when he saw the object close up,

“it was like no object he had ever seen before” and he was ordered not to talk about it. Burns says Metz wasn’t revealing everything he knew by keeping the details secret. He wouldn’t say what it was—only that it was like nothing he had ever seen before. Both Koveleskie and Burns told Gordon on tape that Metz was highly respected, honest and had great integrity, and that they would believe anything he said.

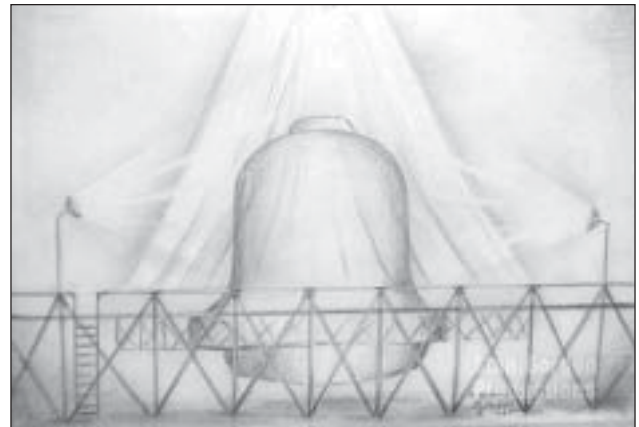
In April 2005, Gordon interviewed another retired police officer with an extensive and distinguished law enforcement background who verified that he also spoke to Metz, a good friend at the time, within a day or two of the incident. Metz told him that he had seen the object in the woods.

“Multitudes of people had some association with this incident,” says Gordon. “Most do not accept the government’s explanation.” If this were simply a meteor, then these witnesses to the acorn-shaped object—in the sky, on the ground, and on the flatbed truck—are either lying or suffering from some kind of mass hallucination. Neither possibility seems plausible.

In the 1980s, investigators obtained copies of the Air Force Project Blue Book file on the case. A handwritten memo stated that a “three man team” was sent out from Oakdale, Pennsylvania, “to investigate and pick up an object that started a fire.” The files say that members of the 662nd Radar Squadron searched until 2 a.m. and *found nothing*.

Maxwell Air Force Base sent CFI the December 1965 Historical Record of the 662nd Radar Squadron based in Oakdale—the same document released to Stan Gordon years earlier—that provided the relevant names. The squadron had a liaison officer with Project Blue Book, and it was from the Oakdale base, about 50 miles from Kecksburg, that the “three man team” was sent to search for the object. One officer, James Cashman, later called Blue Book headquarters from Oakdale to report that nothing was found, according to the Blue Book files, although he was not one of those sent out on the search.

Our private investigator was able to locate Cashman



*Sketch by Charles Hanna of the Kecksburg object seen in a building at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, based on an eyewitness account.*





*A model of the object that sits behind the Kecksburg Volunteer Fire Department, made for the Unsolved Mysteries TV series in 1990. According to James Romansky, the back, or bumper end (bottom of the acorn), is too wide in proportion to the rest.*

and three other key personnel from the 662nd, and Gordon interviewed a fifth in 1991. Only one of these, a lieutenant whom I will not name to respect his privacy, said he actually went out to search for the object that night. This officer said he did not observe any Army presence in the area, any excess civilian activity, or the large spotlights in the woods observed by witnesses and reporter John Murphy. This seems impossible if he was anywhere near the correct location and directly contradicts press reports about the large military presence and civilian crowds. He said he and three other members of the 662nd searched the woods with flashlights and found nothing.

It is revealing that puzzling discrepancies exist among key points of the various accounts, as well as between aspects of the statements of these officers and reports from both the media and Project Blue Book. For example, the lieutenant who searched the woods said there were four in his search team; another officer told us that he had driven with the team to a nearby barrack while two from Oakdale conducted the search with a state trooper. (This could have been the “three man team” referred to by Blue Book, although Blue Book said that the three were all from Oakdale.) Another officer told me there was no search at all, and that the reports coming in to the Oakdale base concerned only an object in the sky and not an object on the ground. He remembers very well the high volume of calls from the local area and speaking to some of the callers, and says that if there had been a search, he definitely would have known. He was adamant that there wasn’t one. And yet another told me that the object was a Russian satellite, but insisted that he made that determination only from newspaper and television reports.

According to Project Blue Book records, Cashman called Blue Book headquarters at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base twice from the Oakdale base, including a final call at 2 a.m., to report that nothing was found. Oddly, Cashman says he has no memory of any event, phone calls, or heightened activity at that time. He stated that he was the Blue Book liaison officer (as stated in the Blue Book files), as opposed to the lieutenant who told me *he* was the Blue Book officer.

We are not certain whether these contradictory and

sometimes confusing reports are simply a question of jumbled memories after all these years, or if other factors are at play. Is it possible that this small group was taken to a different location from the one that was cordoned off by the Army, and that they searched the wrong site? If this did occur, was the state trooper who took the Air Force team to the wrong site instructed by someone to do so? If so, the officers are honestly reporting that nothing was found. Would it therefore have been possible—since Project Blue Book did not have access to cases higher than a secret clearance—that Blue Book actually never knew about an object retrieved from another location by the Army?

On the other hand, Murphy reports seeing what appeared to be members of the 662nd Radar Squadron at the edge of the woods after leaving the police barracks where he had first encountered them. If the lieutenant was one of these men, he could not possibly have missed the surrounding military and civilian activity. Were these officers perhaps sworn not to reveal what happened for national security reasons, and thus their cover stories have differences? We don’t know, and we won’t know until the government releases the records.

After the Air Force search for the object was completed, the lieutenant who searched prepared a handwritten investigation report as required by Air Force regulations, which was then typewritten by an administrative specialist (the same person who told me he believed the object was a Russian satellite, oddly enough). For reasons unknown, this report, which documented the unsuccessful search for the object, was not included with the Blue Book case files on the Kecksburg incident at the National Archives. “It was an inconclusive report that it could have been a meteorite,” the former lieutenant, now 62, told me in a 2003 telephone interview. He provided CFI’s attorney with a signed affidavit regarding his writing and filing of this report, and we submitted the affidavit to the Air Force requesting a copy of this crucial document. “Because the investigation was under Project Blue Book, a copy of my report would have eventually been forwarded to the Project Blue Book headquarters, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base,” he wrote in the affidavit. So far, no response has been forthcoming to this request.

## WHAT WAS—OR WASN’T—THE OBJECT?

“Based on the accounts of the many eyewitnesses whom I have interviewed, I am convinced that an object did fall from the sky and apparently was removed by the military,” said Stan Gordon. “Many have asked me what I believe the object was, and my reply still is ‘I don’t know.’ As I have stated in the past, the most likely possibilities are (1) a highly advanced man-made space probe with some controlled-reentry capability, (2) a secret military or government experiment, (3) an extraterrestrial spacecraft.”

In looking at item (1) above, many have proposed that the object may have been some kind of Soviet satellite or debris that was secretly hidden away during the cold war.

The leading contender, argued mainly by space consultant James Oberg, has been Cosmos 96, a failed Russian Venera probe that the U.S. Space Command reported reentered the earth's atmosphere over Canada at 3:18 a.m. the same day—far from Kecksburg and more than 13 hours earlier.

In 2003, I conducted a series of decisive interviews exploring this question with Nicholas L. Johnson, chief scientist for orbital debris at the NASA Johnson Space Center, who is recognized internationally as the leading authority on orbital debris and foreign space systems. Among many other works, Johnson authored the book *Handbook of Soviet Lunar and Planetary Exploration* (American Astronautical Society, 1979), in which he wrote about Cosmos 96 and related spacecraft.

At my request, Johnson examined the orbital data for Cosmos 96 and was able to calculate when it would have passed over Pennsylvania if it had continued in orbit that day (which means disregarding the U.S. Space Command information). That time, when it would have traveled from north to south, was approximately 6:20 a.m. “I can tell you categorically that there is no way that any debris from Cosmos 96 could have landed in Pennsylvania anywhere around 4:45 p.m.,” Johnson told me. “That’s an absolute. Orbital mechanics is very strict.” One part of Cosmos 96 could not have stayed in orbit until 4:45 p.m. after the object came apart hours earlier in Canada, as some had speculated.

In an April 2005 email to Towers Productions during its production of a documentary for the History Channel, Johnson summarized his investigation as follows:

In response to a request by Ms. Kean, I researched the NASA Orbital Debris Program Office data files for tracking data (aka two-line element sets from the U.S. Space Surveillance Network) on Cosmos 96 (U.S. Catalog Number 01742); however, no data for that object were found. I later contacted Air Force Space Command and received historical tracking data for Cosmos 96. Using these data and an Air Force Space Command



*A drawing of the Soviet space capsule from Cosmos 96, about three feet in diameter, which reentered the atmosphere 13 hours before the Kecksburg incident.*

software package, I was able to reconstruct the possible flight path (groundtrack) of Cosmos 96 on 9 December 1965. I sent to Ms. Kean on 10 October [2003] an email containing two graphics depicting the only possible southbound pass of Cosmos 96 on 9 December 1965, if it had not already reentered the atmosphere. No part of Cosmos 96 could have landed in Pennsylvania in the local afternoon of 9 December 1965.

Even more intriguing than the fact that the Kecksburg object could *not* have been any part of Cosmos 96 is that Johnson stated that Cosmos 96 was the only catalogued object to reenter on December 9, and that *no other man-made object from any country came down that day*. He explained that anything not catalogued would have been so small that it would not have survived reentry, and anything larger would have been detected. “I cannot absolutely confirm that it was not some completely unreported event, but the chances of that are virtually nil,” Johnson said. “You can’t launch something without somebody seeing it. By 1965 the U.S. and Soviets were both reporting their launches.”

The possibility of a U.S. reconnaissance satellite dropping a large film canister for recovery on that day has also been ruled out. These capsules were dropped following secret missions over the Soviet Union, and Johnson said that sometimes they fell where they weren’t supposed to. The CIA recently declassified data on the reconnaissance flights, and by checking launch and retrieval times, Johnson determined that there was no secret mission that could have led to an inadvertent reentry of a capsule on that day. “This was the only other thing I could think of that could have fallen out of space and was man-made,” he said.

Before consulting Johnson, I had spoken with Phillip S. Clark of London’s Molniya Space Consultancy by telephone in the U.K. Another renowned expert who studied the Soviet and Chinese space programs for more than 20 years, Clark also eliminated Cosmos 96 as a possibility, based simply on the comparison with the many eyewitness reports providing almost identical descriptions of the object. The Cosmos capsule was only three feet in diameter—much smaller than the object reported by Kecksburg witnesses. Clark also pointed out that the Cosmos capsule could not have made turns or descended slowly at an angle, since it would have been propelled only by the pull of gravity towards earth, and it most likely would have created a crater upon impact. The letters CCCP (Russian for USSR) which appear prominently on the body of Cosmos capsule would have been easily recognized by the witnesses, if the letters had not burned off upon reentry.

In 1965, unlike today, the U.S. government did not have the technical means of detecting natural bodies, such as a meteor, suddenly coming into the earth’s atmosphere, so NORAD space surveillance radar could not detect meteors. Therefore, unfortunately, we do not have tracking data that can tell us anything about the 1965 fireball shooting across

*(continued on page 28)*



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critical of what they viewed as his excesses, including a penchant for lacerating personal attacks on those who too firmly dissented from Klassian dicta.

I met Klass on a few occasions, the first of them at his condominium in Washington in September 1980, and found him a hard man to like, and not because we disagreed about UFOs. He simply struck me as a man not overflowing in social graces. Still, we corresponded at great length between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, when Klass angrily terminated the exchange.

I once wrote a comprehensive survey of his methods (“Klass vs. the ‘UFO Promoters,’” *Fate*, February 1981). Even then, it seemed to some observers that ufology had been transformed into Klass’s personal Satan; in some of his polemical excesses, he appeared to view ufologists as something like the personification of evil, once even depicting them as *de facto* allies of the Soviet Union because, like the Communists, UFO proponents judged some U.S. government pronouncements to be dubiously credible.

As I remarked in the *Fate* profile, “Klass never has missed an opportunity to portray himself as the martyr, the outcast whose sole interest is in finding and perpetuating Truth . . . while ‘UFO promoters’—he can no longer bring himself to call them UFO proponents—cynically exploit public credulity and ignore his reasonable explanations of cases.” In a sense Klass was less a UFO antagonist than a demonologist.

Some excitable UFO proponents returned the favor, with dark hints or overheated charges that he was actually a CIA agent tasked to cover up the reality of extraterrestrial visitation. Klass, of course, was no such thing. If anything, he suffered from too much sincerity. More sober ufologists provided point-by-point refutations of his explanations for prominent cases. But as with all crusaders, Klass barely noticed. Facts were not ends in themselves, only a means to a larger end, and if they did not serve, they were discarded.

He attracted an audience of those who, if they knew nothing else about UFOs, know they are nonsense, and they had Klass to speak for them. For years he published a newsletter which catered to UFOphobes and to those who like their sentences italicized, underlined, set in bold type, and ending in exclamation points—sometimes all at the same time. Though Klass more and more came across as a self-parodist, he was—and doubtless will remain—the hero of a movement of true-believing disbelievers. To the more open-minded, however, he will serve as the personification of the fanatic: one who, having lost sight of his objective, redoubles his efforts.

—Jerome Clark

### FUND FOR UFO RESEARCH

As a partner with CUFOS in the UFO Research Coalition, the Fund for UFO Research has long been engaged in the support of scientific research and education. Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to: Fund for UFO Research, P.O. Box 277, Mt. Rainier, MD 20712.

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### KECKSBURG—continued from page 9

four states before entering the Pennsylvania skies; we have to rely on witness reports and amateur photographs for this part of the object’s journey.

In order to address whether the object was a secret military or government experiment, we need a greater understanding of the technology our government possessed in 1965. Could the military have created devices with the capabilities that this object demonstrated? If this is something so secret that there is no accessible paper trail, there may not be any way to definitively answer this question, no matter how far-fetched the possibility becomes.

The more we learn about the Kecksburg case, the fewer the options become to explain the mysterious object, making the case all the more compelling. As Peter Sturrock, emeritus professor of applied physics at Stanford University, says: “In principle, we can prove a hypothesis not only by finding strong evidence in its favor, but also by finding strong evidence against every other possibility.”

### STONEWALLING AND THE NASA LAWSUIT

CFi’s initial round of requests under the Freedom of Information Act, sent in January 2003, targeted over a dozen federal and state agencies for information on various aspects of the Kecksburg incident. In most cases, we received a “no records” response or were referred to other agencies.

NASA was unique, however, in that it denied us records that we knew were in the agency’s possession as recently as eight years ago when materials were released to other investigators. We had asked NASA for documents on four specific items which we knew they had, including the “Fragology Files” from 1962 to 1967, described as “reports of space objects’ recovery, [and] analysis of fragments to determine national ownership and vehicle origin.”

In 1995, NASA sent Gordon a “records transmittal and receipt” listing the fragology files by name. However, he could not view the content of the files because NASA claimed that they had been missing since 1987. This was questionable, since the first list that Gordon received had a handwritten notation saying that the files were at the Federal Records Center in 1994. A subsequent copy of this same document released by NASA had the “1994” notation removed, when NASA informed CFI that the files were missing.

The list of fragology files includes the name “Richard M. Schulherr” as custodian of these files during the time of the Kecksburg incident. Schulherr, a NASA engineer, also served as NASA representative for Project Moondust in the 1960s, as indicated by a Moondust report signed by Schulherr and released through FOIA. Thus, along with the fragology files, we requested records on NASA employee Schulherr and on Project Moondust in general.

The highly secret Project Moondust would have very likely been involved with the Kecksburg retrieval if the

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event occurred as witnesses report. According to an official 1961 Air Force Intelligence memo, classified at the time, Project Moondust's function was "to locate, recover, and deliver descended foreign space vehicles." The memo also states that the same Air Force Air Intelligence Squadron responsible for Moondust, which had field units stationed throughout the U.S., was responsible for the "investigation of reliably reported unidentified flying objects within the United States." It goes on to say that these functions involve "employment of qualified field intelligence personnel on a quick reaction basis to recover or perform field exploitation of unidentified flying objects, or known Soviet/Bloc aerospace vehicles, weapons systems, and/or residual components of such equipment."

Since we already had a document confirming that Schulherr was indeed on NASA's staff in the 1960s, a "no records" response to this request, among others, pointed to a "no effort" non-search on the part of NASA's FOIA office.

The appeal to NASA's rebuff, filed on behalf of CFI by Lobel, Novins & Lamont in May 2003, included five exhibits demonstrating that the agency had previously released the requested information, including documents on Project Moondust and Cosmos 96 which we had also requested, and that Schulherr did indeed work for NASA.

Among the exhibits was an intriguing news article about Schulherr's activities in 1968, when he "flashed fancy government credentials" and required the person in possession of a mysterious cone-shaped object found in the North Carolina woods to release it for testing in Washington. The reporter states that Schulherr was "a staff engineer" with NASA. In his letter about the analysis of the object—determined to be junk from a metal refining operation—Schulherr explains that the object was tested since "potentially it could have been a fragment of space hardware, a meteorite, or terrestrial material of uncommon shape." This illustrates his role at NASA only three years after the Kecksburg incident, particularly of interest since two witnesses reported seeing clearly identified NASA officials on the scene. (Unfortunately, we found out that Schulherr is deceased, and his family members declined to speak with us.)

In June, NASA granted CFI's appeal and remanded the request back to its FOIA office for a new search, at which time it committed to undertake responsive searches on an "expedited basis."

Since no response was provided, despite this promise, and after waiting a total of 10 months for information pertinent to the Kecksburg case, CFI announced its intent to file a lawsuit at a Washington press conference in October 2003. As had occurred the year before at our first press conference, this event was widely covered by national and international media, including Reuters. A piece on the national television channel MSNBC opened by stating, "You know stories in small towns often tend to take on a life of their own. . . . Well now the Sci Fi Channel is trying to get to the bottom of it all, going so far as to join a lawsuit against the government to reveal what it knows."

"I think it's fair to say that we have truly entered the realm of science fiction in Washington, D.C.," commented John Podesta at this second press conference, "when it's fair game to disclose the identity of a clandestine CIA agent [reference to Valerie Plame] but not the records of an unexplained crash in Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, that occurred 38 years ago."

Within hours of the press conference, NASA informed our attorney, Lee Helfrich, that the agency would release 36 pages of documents immediately, an apparent attempt to thwart legal action. However, the material proved to be useless and unresponsive. The lawsuit, in which I am the plaintiff, was filed in Washington, D.C., on December 9, 2003, the 38th anniversary of the Kecksburg incident. "I'm hopeful that our lawsuit will be successful because NASA has given us a great record to show that it's recalcitrant and acting in bad faith," Helfrich said.

As of this writing, the court is still considering the case. Helfrich summarizes the status of the case as follows:

The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia denied NASA's request for a ruling that its search for records was adequate, but gave the agency another opportunity to make its case. NASA took the court up on its offer and filed new affidavits of agency officials, under penalty of perjury, to support its claim that the FOIA search was exhaustive. Kean immediately filed papers with the court highlighting that NASA's new affidavits contained factual representations that were flatly contrary to the facts relied upon by NASA in support of its original motion. The court is now considering this new round of information.

The lawsuit against NASA could be the first of several against government agencies, including the U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, and the Department of Defense, which continue to stonewall efforts to obtain records on the Kecksburg incident under the Freedom of Information Act.

Another amazing example of recalcitrance occurred when we sent a second request to the U.S. Army following its initial unwillingness to take action. We provided the Army with newspaper articles that clearly state the Army was on the scene, along with excerpts from a detailed radio broadcast revealing the same. We included signed witness statements of encounters with Army personnel, some stating that soldiers pointed weapons at civilians, and descriptions of clearly marked Army vehicles. Reporter Robert Gatty's account stated that he saw 10 or more Army personnel preventing people and reporters from entering the area where the object was believed to have landed, and that he questioned some of them.

We documented all of this for the Army, but it made no difference. Helfrich points out that the Army regulation on specificity advises the public to provide "descriptive information" that "is event related and includes the circumstances that resulted in the record being created or the date and circumstances surrounding the event the record cov-

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ers.” CFI’s information established the participation of the Army, including military personnel from the U.S. Army Support Detachment in Oakdale, in a publicly acknowledged investigation of a landed object on December 9, 1965, at 4:45 p.m. near the town of Kecksburg. Even so, the Army FOIA office told CFI that we had not described what we wanted with sufficient specificity to enable it even to begin a FOIA search!

Throughout this process, the archival research firm History Associates conducted extensive searches at federal records centers and other government and military repositories outside the Washington, D.C., area. Files at some of these locations are not publicly available and can only be examined through permission of the agency that created them, which of course makes access difficult, and in some cases they may be classified. History Associates was able to provide us with specific accession numbers for files in various repositories that we then presented to NASA and the Army. These other facilities may contain the requested documents that FOIA offices have not been able to locate, but the process of acquiring them is laborious and costly, if it’s possible at all.

To this day, no government agency other than the Air Force (in Project Blue Book) has even acknowledged that anything took place on December 9, 1965, in Kecksburg, let alone released any relevant information about the incident.

## THE SMOKING GUN

Perhaps the most important breakthrough since I became involved in the case took place back in the Kecksburg woods, at the crash site that Romansky and Bulebush had independently shown to Stan Gordon years earlier. In the spring of 2003, the Sci Fi Channel brought geomorphologist and geoaarcheologist J. Steven Kite and Professor of Forestry Ray R. Hicks, both of West Virginia University, to the site.

Kite conducted an investigation with two archeologists from the Department of Geology and Geography to search for “physical evidence of landscape disturbance or artifacts that might be associated with the 1965 event,” supplemented by a magnetometer and radiation survey.

Kite did not find any relevant surface disturbance or artifacts associated with the incident and could offer no confirmation that anything exceptional occurred at the site in 1965. “The evidence was either so meager as to be easily overlooked, or was subsequently obliterated or obscured by natural or artificial processes,” he stated. He noted that the methods of his team “would have been sufficient to discern any digging, bulldozing, or burial done to ‘cover-up’ the evidence of the 1965 event. In fact, a cover-up would be easier for trained geomorphologists to identify than the evidence of a low-energy impact event.” Gordon and others have noted that since the object landed in a stream bed with water running through it intermittently, erosion would make detection of soil disturbance extremely difficult after all these years. In any case, Kite pointed out that no past event

can be ruled out based on negative evidence.

However, Kite went on to make another important observation based on his study. “The obvious lack of widespread destruction from the 1965 impact allows one possible explanation to be eliminated as a cause of the December 1965 observations: high-velocity impact by a large, intact satellite or meteorite. At least one account related an object ‘about the size of a Volkswagon’ being hauled away from the site during the night after the event. If such an object, especially a dense meteorite, impacted the earth at high velocity, the impact would have created havoc for the surrounding forest vegetation and left a pronounced impact crater.” He notes that the vegetation and landscape he studied “record neither such a high-velocity impact nor the major reclamation effort that would be required to cover up the evidence of such an event.”

Ray Hicks, on the other hand, made a significant discovery through his study of the trees, providing solid physical evidence that something came down. With the help of witness John Hayes, who lived next to the location in 1965 and observed tree damage at the time, Hicks was able to find the damaged trees which matched photographs of large broken branches taken by Gordon at the same location in the mid-1980s. The falling object is believed to have made this damage.

“I utilized the photographs as a primary source of information and based on the tree species, as recognized from the photos and the crown architecture, I was able to find the exact trees pictured in one photograph,” Hicks explained in a written statement.

He presented his findings following the airing of a November 2003 Sci Fi Channel documentary making the new discoveries public for the first time. He writes:

The trees were approximately 70 years of age, which would make them approximately 40 years old in 1965. The growth pattern was determined for the trees by observing the width of annual rings. One of the trees in the photo was a black cherry which had its top broken out (presumably after being struck by the object). Unfortunately this tree was now hollow from decay that was probably a result of the wound. This made it impossible to look at the growth rings of this tree. But an adjacent undamaged black walnut tree, also pictured in the photo, did display a slight increase in growth for a few years following 1965. This would be consistent with the fact that the adjacent black cherry tree was broken in 1965, since it would provide additional growing space for the undamaged walnut tree.

Hicks attempted to reconstruct the most likely trajectory path of the object using plastic flagging. He states:

One of the trees (a white ash) along this path displayed a forked and crooked stem at a height that would be consistent with the assumed trajectory. We obtained an increment core from the tree and again looked at the growth pattern of the rings. There was a dramatic



reduction in growth of this tree that appeared to begin in 1967 or 1968 and lasted for about 20 years. If I missed one or two rings in the count, it would put the year of reduced growth at 1966. This would be consistent with this tree being damaged in 1965. An adjacent ash of similar age and size, but outside the assumed trajectory was cored and it did not display the dramatic growth reduction of the ash that was in the path. This would suggest that the reason for the dramatic growth reduction of the tree in the path was not due to a climatic event, such as drought, but was probably due to some specific injury to the tree.

Standing in the woods at the time, and speaking to the producers of the documentary, Steven Kite spontaneously commented on the significance of his colleague's discovery. "The damage that Ray [Hicks] identified formed a pattern. It formed a clear trajectory. It is a reasonable trajectory from some of the other observations that were made. And the real nice thing about it, it has a date to it: 1965. And since there is obvious, visible damage, that is a smoking gun so to speak, as to what caused the decrease in growth of that individual tree."

The Air Force stance that nothing came down is now even more untenable. Trees do not tell tall tales or engage in group hallucinations. The saying has it that we often can't see the forest for the trees, but in this case, it's the trees that show us the true nature of the forest.

What was the importance of the object that caused the military to rapidly respond to the tiny village of Kecksburg? Who authorized soldiers to brandish weapons at local citizens approaching the landing site? For how long will the citizens of Pennsylvania be denied information that is rightly theirs under American law? We still don't have the answers to these and many other questions, despite the four decades that have passed. The U.S. government may never reveal the true identity of the Kecksburg object, but the investigation has been well worth the effort—and it's not over yet. ♦

### EX-MINISTER SPEAKS AT UFO CON

Paul Hellyer, Canadian Minister of National Defence from 1963 to 1968, announced in September that he believes UFOs are extraterrestrial visitors and that some governments—the United States at least—know all about it and are covering up. He also believes American scientists have re-engineered alien wreckage from the UFO crash at Roswell, N.Mex., in 1947 to produce modern technical marvels.

Hellyer spoke September 25 at a conference sponsored by MUFON Central Canada and held on the University of Toronto campus. He described a UFO sighting he had while camping out with his wife and some friends: "A bright light appeared in the sky and appeared to zig and zag across the horizon." He added that he started taking the issue much more seriously after watching ABC-TV's UFO special with Peter Jennings in February 2005.

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Beyond Bennewitz." The parallels with Redfern's encounters with his sources are obvious and depressing.)

Redfern was first approached in London by a man with British Home Office credentials who claimed to be a UFO buff and who gave him the broad outlines of the Japanese Paperclip Roswell tale. But there was no follow-up, and Redfern forgot about it until five years later, when he was approached by . . . The Black Widow.

"Because she does not want her identity revealed, for reasons that will shortly become apparent, I will refer to her as the Black Widow. From the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, she had been assigned to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Tennessee, and she said she had firsthand knowledge of the Roswell mystery that I 'might find interesting.'" She approached him after a speaking engagement in Los Angeles in 2001: "Those bodies—the Roswell bodies—they weren't aliens," she said quietly. "The government could care less about stories about alien bodies found at Roswell—except to hide the truth. Those bodies were Japanese people."

The widow has some of the picture, but not all. Mostly, she is an expert on radiation experiments at Oak Ridge circa 1947, but drops important clues throughout the book as the story develops. Somehow, she picked up a great deal at the Oak Ridge water cooler, especially that there were three classified balloon flights at White Sands in May, June, and July 1947, and that at least two were disasters.

The Black Widow soon sends friends, such as "Bill Salter," described as "a former employee of the Psychological Strategy Board" seconded to Oak Ridge to do counterintelligence work. Salter has much to add to the Widow's story.

And then we meet "Al Barker," who worked with the Army's Psychological Warfare Center. Here is what Barker has to say: ". . . if the Soviets uncovered the truth about the Nazi and Japanese links to the 'high altitude idiocy' at White Sands and elsewhere, this would have caused major repercussions between the United States and its allies in the postwar world. Hence the cover story put out by the Psychological Strategy Board and, later, by the Army's Psychological Warfare Center that the bodies were from a crashed UFO in case the Soviets, the press, UFO researchers, and America's allies came snooping." (Never mind that nobody thought Roswell was ET until 1978, and the public didn't hear about that until 1980. This tiny fact demolishes the credibility of Barker's story.)

And then there is the main informer, "the Colonel," a man who buttonholed Redfern at the Henderson, Nevada, UFO conference in 2003. "Having spent fifteen years operating deep within the heart of American intelligence, the Colonel claims that in 1969, while working with the Defense Intelligence Agency, he read a top-secret document that, as far as he is concerned, laid to rest the tales about flying saucers and alien bodies recovered from the desert of New Mexico in the summer of 1947 and told the true story about the Roswell events." And further, not exactly to our surprise,