

UFOs: It Has Begun

In the mid-Seventies, a documentary appeared that to this day has yet to be rivalled in its scope or magnitude. *UFOs: It Has Begun* has become legendary, its contents becoming the stuff of myth. It even has its own conspiracy theory surrounding one particular segment.

Originally released in 1976 and hosted by the creator of *The Twilight Zone*, Rod Serling, *UFOs: It Has Begun* is an almost two-hour exploration of the UFO phenomenon that takes us into the stark halls of the Pentagon, the subdued efficiency of air-traffic control towers, the bleak landscape of the American Mid-West and to Holloman Air Force Base for its puzzling climax. More on that later.



Assisting Serling were two Hollywood greats, Academy Award nominee, Burgess Meredith and Academy Award winner, Jose Ferrer. Also providing input were former officers of the US armed forces and ex-government spokesmen. Last, but not least, the legendary J Allen Hynek made a major contribution.

The film was re-released in 1979 with major segments added that were hosted by renowned French

ufologist, Jacques Vallee, in which the US-centric slant of the film was softened by reports from around the world.

The film had incredibly high production standards for the time and included some impressive effects to recreate the various cases it covered. We are also shown actual photographs and little-known footage of UFOs.

I was lucky enough to pick up a copy of the video from a second-hand market a few years ago. It was the 1979 version and it is this that I shall now review.

Walking towards camera amid a swirling vortex of lights, Rod Serling queries the origins of man. Are we the product of natural evolution on Earth, or do we owe our existence to the intervention of beings from another world?



November 2nd, 1967 – At 11pm, two Texans are driving in their pick-up truck when it suddenly stalls and the radio goes haywire. As they get out to investigate, a brilliant, dome-shaped UFO glides above them, casting them with its electric-blue glow. They report their sighting, but the US Air Force debunks the event

as nothing more than globular lightning.

So begins the documentary. The animated title fills the screen and we are off and running.



Burgess Meredith reads from Ezekiel, recounting the prophet's vision of his famous 'wheel', generally agreed to be one of the earliest UFO encounters.

Serling describes other reports from ancient times, from Rome through to Charlemagne.



Jose Ferrer tells of an event in Lyon, France in the 10th century in which several people are seen descending from some sort of flying vehicle. The townsfolk obviously want to burn them at the stake, but they are saved by the intervention of the bishop, who concludes that everybody is lying and that these people could not possibly have descended from a flying craft.

Meredith: November 12th, 1887. The crew of the sailing ship, *Siberian* watch in amazement as a sphere of fire emerges from the ocean, approaches the ship and then zooms away. The event lasted five minutes.

Serling then describes the Airship Invasion of the American Mid-West during 1896-1897 in which many sightings of these mysterious craft were reported.

Jacques Vallee explains that UFOs are not just an American phenomenon. They have been sighted all over the world. In fact, the first major wave of modern times was in Scandinavia in 1946, the year before ufology was 'officially' born in the USA after Kenneth Arnold's famous sighting. Other major waves have occurred in Africa, Latin America, Mexico, the Soviet Union, China, Australia and New Zealand and many other places.

May 1975 – Manitoba, Canada. UFOs had been reported near the town of Carman and on May 13th, a TV cameraman captures on film UFOs moving very fast across the sky.



Serling: On June 30th, 1973, A French Concorde was flying over Chad, Africa at 17,000 metres. A strange, disc-shaped, orange object is photographed.



Next we have a selection of NASA reports:

Gemini 4: James McDivitt sighted an object that he described as having 'arms and antennae'.

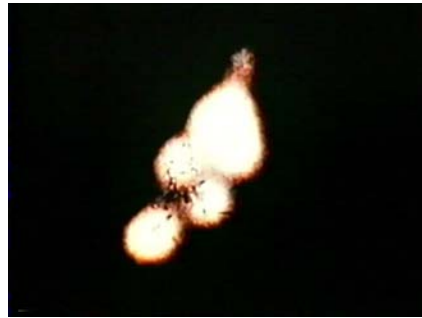
Gemini 5: This mission had a UFO pacing the capsule and was picked up on radar. The astronauts reported that it approached to two thousand metres before disappearing.

Gemini 10: Michael Collins and John Young photographed a formation of three orange objects. It has never been explained.



Gemini 11: On the 18th orbit, some 27 hours and 47 minutes after lift-off on September 13th, 1966, a strange

object was photographed and, again, it has yet to be explained.



Apollo 11: on July 11th, 1969 an object was photographed that could resemble Storey Musgrave's famous 'worm'. Like the other images, it has no explanation.



Skylab 3: During the second manned flight of this mission on January 23rd, 1973, four photographs were taken of strange objects that NASA claimed were satellites.



The tragic tale of Captain Thomas Mantell is told, with a dramatic

reconstruction. On January 7th, 1948, Kentucky police reported seeing a bright object in the sky. Mantell's flight of P51s was diverted to investigate. They followed the UFO and Mantell described it as travelling at half their speed. As his colleagues descended to land, Mantell ascended to 20,000 feet until radio contact was lost. The wreckage of his plane was found later, with Mantell's body inside.



Six months later, over an airbase in Georgia, an Eastern Airlines flight sighted a cylindrical object with no wings, travelling at 700mph. It was described as 100 feet long with flames at the rear.



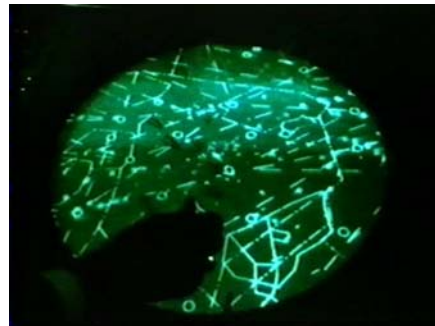
Two rows of windows were seen on the object. One of the passengers also witnessed this and he appears on film to recount his observations. In total, three aircraft, the passenger and people on the ground all saw

this UFO, which to this day remains unidentified.

Speaking from inside the Pentagon, Colonel Bill Coleman, Chief of Public Information for the US Air Force from 1969-1974, recounts the formation of Project Sign, which would go on to spawn Project Grudge and Project Blue Book. He explained how the authorities at first accepted that UFOs *might* be extra-terrestrial in origin, before later rejecting this notion completely.



In 1952, Washington DC was the centre of one of the most famous 'flaps' of UFO sightings. A spokesman for the US Air Force tells us about what happened during that time. They had definite radar fixes on many objects, with some travelling in excess of 7300mph. The UFOs also invaded the restricted airspace over the White House.



A week later, the UFOs returned and F94 jets were scrambled to intercept. However, as soon as the jets approached the UFOs, all the unknown traffic on the scopes vanished. When the fighter planes turned to leave the area, the UFOs reappeared again.

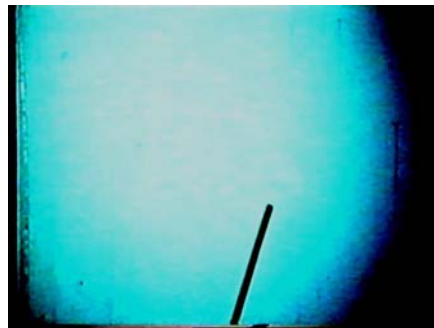
Because of the public's interest, the largest and longest press conference since World War II was held at the Pentagon. This was the famous one in which General Samford said that he was happy in the knowledge that the UFOs seen on the radar scopes were nothing more than temperature inversions.



Despite the USAF downplaying the events, the CIA set up a panel of experts to investigate the UFO problem. One of the panel was astronomer J Allen Hynek. He explains how they were shown the Tremonton and Great Falls, Montana films and given the reports by the Air Force that concluded that the objects in the films were not birds, but self-luminous objects. To Hynek's astonishment, the panel ignored the expert analysis and decided that the objects were, in fact, birds. Hynek felt that the panel intended to do nothing but debunk the footage without giving it the serious, scientific study it clearly deserved.



Rod Serling introduces L Michael Drummond, a man who filmed a UFO in San Francisco in 1965. Drummond explains how, after he reported his sighting (in which others witnessed the object as he filmed), the USAF asked to see his footage. He complied and sent them his 8mm cine film. He then received a letter explaining that the film had been sent to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base for further study. Several weeks later, his film was returned. Unfortunately, it was not his original film that he got back, but a poor quality copy. The object he filmed, which was clearly visible in the original, he says, is hardly discernible at all in the copy he got back.



Lt. Col. Robert Friend is a former head of Project Blue Book. In 1969, Friend attended a meeting in which an admiral claimed that a woman in Maine was in contact with alien

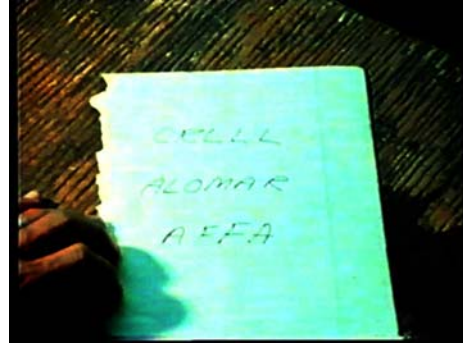
beings. Two naval officers were despatched to see her. The woman went into a trance and the officers asked her technical questions that she should not know the answers to. She answered them easily, allegedly receiving telepathic assistance from the aliens.



The aliens were willing to communicate directly with one of the officers, a man with the rank of commander. He agreed and went into a trance-state too. He began answering questions about the future of the world and told them that there would be no World War III. When asked for proof, he told the others to go to the window. They did and saw a UFO outside in the sky. The local radar tower was contacted to see if they had a fix on the object, but they reported that that entire quadrant of the scope was 'blacked out'.

In the presence of Col. Friend, the commander did some automatic writing in a style that was not his usual handwriting. He named some of the aliens:

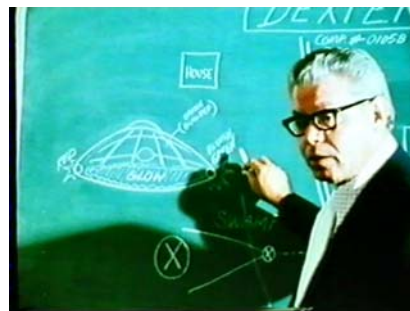
CRLLL, ALOMAR and AFFA (who claimed to be from Uranus??!!)



Serling claims that he has the actual report of the incident in which all of those present are named, but he does not go into the details.

Col. Coleman returns to explain more of Blue Book's methods.

In 1966, an incident so profound occurred that future president, Gerald Ford, asked that a Congressional Hearing be conducted about the subject. Only three people are called to testify: the Secretary of the Air Force, J Allen Hynek and head of Project Blue Book, Major Hector Quintanilla.



The major describes the report in question in which a police officer reports a UFO near a swampy area in Michigan. This was the case in which Hynek suggested at a press conference that swamp gas *might* have been the culprit. The press pounced on this remark and Hynek has regretted it ever since.

Socorro, New Mexico – April 24th, 1964. In one of the most famous UFO cases ever, we hear from the actual people present, including the man who saw the UFO, Lonnie Zamora. The despatch officer explains how he received the radio calls from Zamora, while Zamora describes what happened. Hynek and Quintanilla review the evidence, with the major coming to the conclusion that what Zamora saw was some sort of NASA test.



Jacques Vallee returns to recount a tale from 1897. A Kansas farmer and his family are awoken by a commotion and go outside to see a bright airship descending on their farm. One of the farmer's cows is caught by 'a red cable coming from the airship'. The next day, he finds the cow's hide, legs and head many miles away. This is one of the earliest recordings of cattle mutilations connected with a UFO sighting.



In over thirty states (at the time of filming), there have been hundreds of reports of cattle being found dead, with sexual organs, tongue and other organs removed with no signs of struggle. The animals are usually almost completely drained of blood, with none on the ground around the animal.



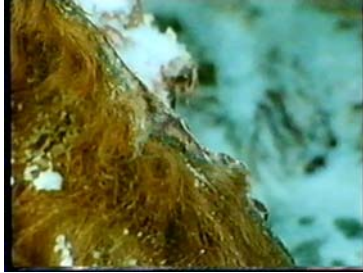
Bill Jackson, a Colorado reporter, tells us of the cases he has covered and goes into grisly detail. Satanic cults, drug smugglers, UFOs and the government have all been blamed.

Carl Whiteside, of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI), claims that 99% of mutilation reports were caused by natural predators. Of the 203 reports he received, his office only got 45 tissue samples. Of those 45 samples, only 2 were found to have been mutilated with a sharp instrument.



Jackson refutes the CBI statement by saying that these ranchers and

rural policemen know predator attacks when they see them. A local sheriff and another deputy agree with Jackson. In most cases, predators, such as coyotes, will not approach a mutilated carcass. We are shown in detail, a mutilated cow, with clear incisions and whole organs removed.



As the lights in the sky and mutilations of 1975 continued, the ranchers, dismayed at the lack of interest from officials, began arming themselves. When they saw lights in the sky near their herds, they began taking shots at them!

Dr William Fitzgerald is one of the few vets who is willing to talk about the subject. He performed an autopsy on a mutilated bull and came to the conclusion that no natural predator was responsible for the condition of the animal. He says that the cuts to the carcass were likely done with a very sharp, surgical blade. He describes how it is possible to drain blood from an animal by using a needle through the jugular vein. The animal's heart will then pump almost all of the blood from the beast, except for the most vital internal organs. He said this could be done if the animal was anaesthetised or restrained.

The animal he autopsied was restrained by something other than rope. It was washed completely clean. Dr Fitzgerald has no explanation.

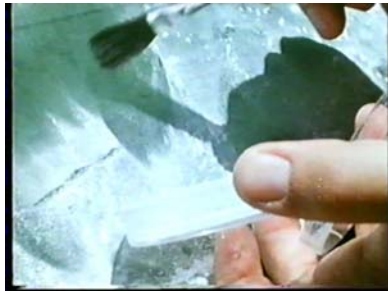


In Dulce, New Mexico, state policeman, Gabe Valdez calls on the assistance of Howard Burgess, a scientist famous for the development of Kirlian photography, in regard to mutilation cases. When they got the first mutilation report in 1976, Burgess suggested that the cattle may have somehow been marked before the mutilation occurred. Marked with something that would show up in Ultra-Violet (UV) light.



He and Valdez found that out of 80 cattle they inspected, 5 had been marked with a powdery, white substance that, indeed, only showed up under a UV light. They removed hair from the marked areas and also control samples from unmarked cattle. When analysed, it was found that the marked hairs contained high

levels of potassium and magnesium. Burgess didn't really know what to make of it until a UFO was seen over a town in New Mexico shedding what appeared to be an ash-like residue. This substance was also found to contain high levels of potassium and magnesium.



In 1975, deputy Tex Graves took his men out into the countryside around Sterling, Colorado. Bill Jackson went along as they tried to track down the lights in the sky that had been reported. They could not keep up with them, though and any photographs they took did not produce anything significant.

Eighteen months later, the lights returned and the mutilations continued. Jackson loaned a Lentar lens from the Honeywell Corporation and coupled this with some high-speed Kodak film. This time they got some images of the UFOs that defy explanation.



In 1974, Vallee recounts how he received a call from a woman in California. She had been travelling in her car towards Los Angeles when she saw a light in the sky. Thinking it was a helicopter, she and her passengers paid it scant attention. Then the light began moving very strangely. It darted around their car, affording them a closer look. The woman (going under the pseudonym of Helen) described it as being as wide as eight lanes of freeway, brilliant white and saucer-shaped. Four beams of light appeared, struck them and they felt as if they were being teleported out of the car. The next thing they knew, they were 'beamed' back into the car and the UFO had gone.



Years later, Helen underwent regressive hypnosis. She recalled seeing a human-looking man in a long robe. They were in a large, white room, with curved walls. She as shown data on various screens and felt very peaceful. The man spoke English, but she said that telepathic signals were used at the same time. He said he and his people were thousands of years old and had influenced many people through history. It was a typical contactee case.

Col. Coleman reported how that in 1969, the Condon Committee

concluded that UFOs were of no defence significance and that no further study was warranted. Over twelve thousand case files were placed into storage and official investigations ended with the closure of Project Blue Book.



However, UFO reports continued to appear in the media. By early 1974, there were over one thousand unexplained UFO cases in the United States alone. Jose Ferrer and Burgess Meredith describe some of these cases, many of which are long-duration events and also multiple witness sightings.



Jacques Vallee recounts the case of the Tasmanian pilot, Frederick Valentich, who reported a UFO over the Bass Strait in 1978 before disappearing. He has never been heard from since and no trace of his plane has ever been found.

Vallee also recalls some other cases from 1978 and 1979, including the famous Wellington, New Zealand

sighting, which made headlines around the world. He goes on to explain how NORAD and its counterparts cannot track all objects in the sky, as we are led to believe. They can only track objects, says Vallee, which they know about, such as aircraft, incoming missiles and conventional spacecraft.



In 1973, an army helicopter crew had just finished their annual physicals and were declared fit for duty. They took off from Port Columbus airfield in Ohio and a few minutes into the flight, they saw a red light on the eastern horizon. The light paced the chopper to their right. Then suddenly it began to head towards them. The pilot estimated it travelled fifteen miles in almost no time at all. They braced for impact and began to descend in an attempt to avoid the object. The UFO descended with them, still on a collision course. Then the cockpit was washed with a strange, green light for several seconds. They got a good look at the object, describing it as cigar-shaped with a dome and metallic in appearance. It reflected the lights around it. Somehow they found themselves ascending, even though their instruments were still set for descent. The helicopter went from an altitude of 1700 feet to 3800 feet. The men cannot explain their

encounter, but filed a report as ordered.

Serling returns and suggests that we should consider that these objects are real, extra-terrestrial spacecraft. Humans have designed many different aircraft configurations in only a few years of powered flight. The same could be applied to UFOs, which are seen in all shapes and sizes.

He then goes on to describe the aliens themselves, based on reports:

*“Ashen skin, possible with a protective membrane.
Large eyes with a wraparound appearance (a drawing is shown with cat-like pupils).
Nose indefinite save for two, small breathing holes.
A slit mouth, opening or no mouth at all.
Behaviour cautious, curious, firm.
Ability to paralyse on touch.
Sounds emitted –mmm – humming.
Oohs in a foreign language or some accent.
Buzzing as if electronic from their head and chest.
Wearing head protection or overall body protection.”*



Lt. Col. Friend, Major Quintanilla, Dr Hynek and one other contributor, whose name I did not catch, appear

together and muse about the nature of these alien beings. Where are they from? How does their intelligence differ from ours? Can we truly communicate with them? Will we ever find a logical explanation?



Serling asks how would the public react to an open admission about the existence of extra-terrestrials. He calls on an academic to explain. The professor tells us that research has shown that our populace might be worried about an advanced race visiting us, but they would not panic, unless given cause to, say if the race were hostile or threatening in some other way. In fact, such an admission might help unite the peoples of the Earth, *especially*, if the aliens were indeed an enemy.

Now we come to the climax of the show. The section that has caused the most discussion and controversy.

Serling asks what of the future? It is likely that contact *will* be made. Take the following scenario that might happen in the future *or may have already happened*.

On a clear day at 5:32am, at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico. A recon plane is on the runway, ready for take-off. Sergeant Mann in the control tower receives a call that a UFO is approaching the

base. We hear what sounds like control tower chatter about an approaching UFO, followed by a quick clip of a bright object descending.



More names are revealed as a Sergeant Whitmore reports to the base commander, Colonel Horner. He orders a red alert. Alarms blare and emergency vehicles are deployed.



Two fighter jets are dispatched to escort the UFO out of the area. A helicopter, containing a tech sergeant and staff sergeant, on a routine photographic mission run off several feet of film of the three objects, one of which breaks from the group and begins to descend.



A high-speed camera crew on the ground runs off about 600 feet of film. They continue to film the UFO as it approaches. It hovers about ten feet above the ground for about a minute, yawing like a ship at anchor. It then sets down on three extension pads. The commander, two officers and two base air force scientists arrive and wait apprehensively.



A panel opens in the side of the craft and three beings emerge one at a time. They are wearing tight-fitting jumpsuits, are short and have a blue-grey complexion. Their eyes are set far apart and they have a large, pronounced nose. A head piece with a rope-like design is worn. The commander and the two scientists step forward to greet them.

Arrangements are made 'by some sort of communication' and the group retires to an inner office in the King One area. A stunned group of military personnel are left behind. Who the visitors are, where they are from or what they want is unknown. We are then shown a padlocked gate, as if to affirm the secrecy of the event.

Serling concludes by saying that we have a responsibility to learn what we can about these visitors, as we may discover new energy sources or

learn more about our place in the universe.

So ends one of the most amazing documentary films recorded.

It is said that the producers of the film were promised unprecedented cooperation from the US military, and the inclusion of many military reports and interviews seems to confirm that suggestion. It is also said that actual footage from a real incident at Holloman AFB would be provided to them and that this would be used as the startling finale to the programme. Unfortunately, it seems the authorities got cold feet and we ended up with some hastily-prepared footage and artwork. But was it all a fiction? During the segment, we are shown a bright light descending towards the desert. Is this a real UFO, or just an out-of-focus aircraft coming in to land?



Why are specific names used, exact times and usage of precise amounts of film? What is the King One area at Holloman AFB? Apparently, in the novelisation of the film, the King One area is described as being on Mars Street in Building 930. I have been unable as yet to find a plan of the AFB with Mars Street or Building 930 noted.

So, was *UFOs: It Has Begun* simply an impressive documentary about the subject, given incredible access by the authorities? Or was it an attempt at disclosure, hastily retracted before broadcast? We may never know, but it has certainly made for compelling viewing.

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