



The Strange History of UFOs - Founded by Curt Collins & Yvan Defoy

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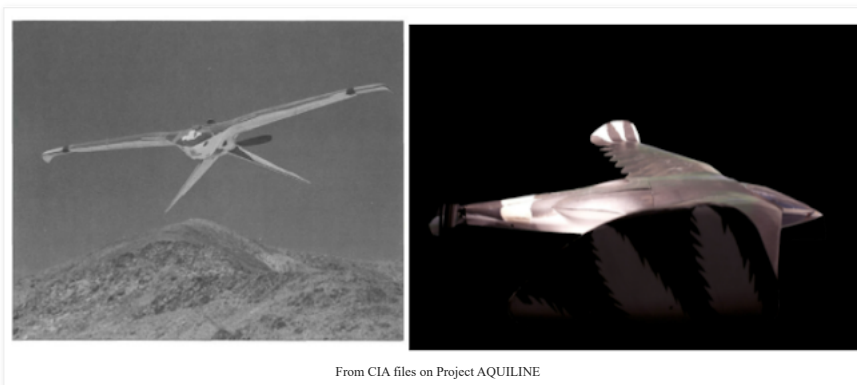
Thursday, September 9, 2021

SKYLITE: The Project to Mimic UFOs



The US government asked the McDonnell Douglas aerospace company to research the construction of an imitation flying saucer in 1970. At the time, the United States was led by President Richard Nixon, and Richard Helms served as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Cold War with Russia was hot. The US was mired in the Vietnam war and facing an expansion of the Soviet Union's military forces in Cuba.

The UFO project may have been an offshoot of a prior contract with the CIA. In 1967 the CIA was doing business with McDonnell Douglas Company, and Project AQUILINE was to develop expendable unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicles. According to CIA files, "Concentrated study was performed on a wide range of aerodynamic lift devices including balloons, ballistic glider, powered glider and helicopter types for this application. The powered glider was selected..." Aquiline was a small bird-like drone, test flown at Area 51.



From CIA files on Project AQUILINE

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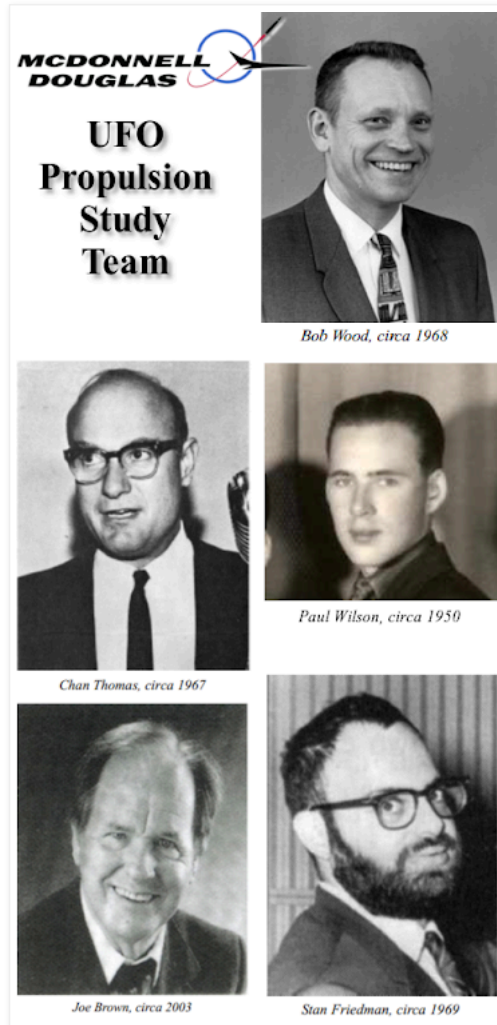
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“Dr. Robert M. Wood (was) the deputy director of Research at Douglas Aircraft Company, in Santa Monica, California... Wood believed that unidentified flying objects (UFOs) were spacecraft built and manned by extra-terrestrials... Furthermore, he had great confidence in his ability. ‘If extraterrestrials can build a flying saucer, so can I.’”

Describing the team, Dr. Brown said,

“Dr. Darell B. Harmon, Jr... held beliefs about UFO’s similar to Dr. Wood... that UFO’s were powered by anti-gravity propulsion and I was researching gravity so he hired me in spite of my disbelief in extraterrestrials. Thus the Wood-Harmon-Brown team was formed to invent a new propulsion system... In addition to the mathematical physicist, Leon (A. Steinert), we hired an experimentalist Harvey Bjornlie, a retired Los Angeles, California police detective Paul Wilson, a UFO ‘buff’ Stan Friedman, and a psychic Chan P. Thomas... Our budget was less than \$100,000.00 per year.”



Dr. Wood described the group’s origin in his article for the October 2008 issue of the *MUFON Journal*, "[McDonnell Douglas studied UFOs in 1960s](#)," saying, “we opened up an account with an insipid title (Advanced Concepts) and internally called it the BITBR project (for Boys In The Back Room).” Wood said he managed a team saying he devoted only about 10% of his time to the project, “Only Brown, Thomas and Wilson were full time (and later, Friedman).” During its four years of operation and \$500,000 expended, the group conducted research including everything from lab experiments to field studies, investigating haunted houses, ESP and interviewing UFO Contactees.

In BITBR’s 59-page “[Advanced Vehicle Concepts Research](#)” presentation, May 2, 1968, the team summarized the goals of the project for management and stated what they had achieved to date. Page 50 mentioned the goal of building a UFO-like spacecraft, a *DFO*, (possibly for Douglas Flying Object).

“A DFO can be built within our scientific limits.” It also mentioned, “analysis and duplication of UFO data.” The presentation closed by asking for another year’s funding, and stated, “Bring in DoD at end of year if results warrant.”

The company hoped to build flying saucers for the US government. That almost happened. In a section near the end of Wood’s MUFON article he revealed:

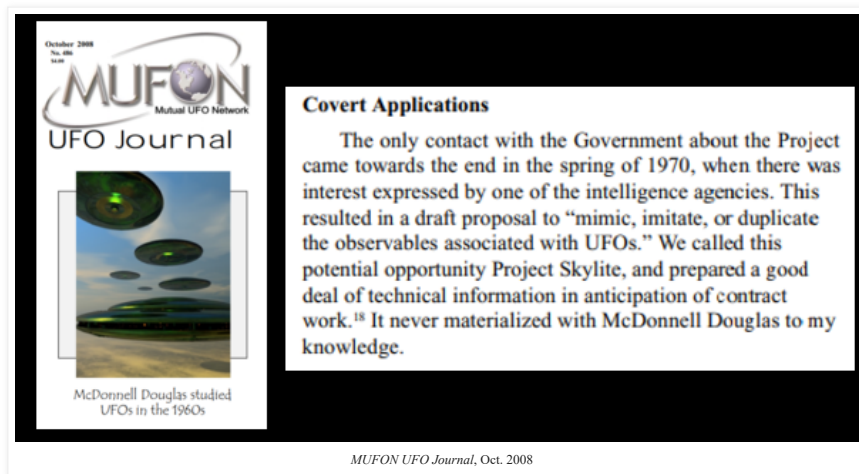
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materialized with McDonnell Douglas to my knowledge."



The footnote for the passage cited: "Wilson, P. 'Charts Defining Parameters of Design.' Six pages, dated June 2, 1970."

The timing for Skylite was strange. The US government shut down Project Blue Book at the end of 1969, so this would seem to have been unrelated to any study of UFOs. They must have been working towards some other goal. Earlier Project Aquiline CIA documents stated that "The obvious risk is loss of an unmanned aircraft over denied territory and the resulting political implications therefrom." They thought that since the aircraft was small and unarmed, the risk was minimal. However, it's possible the CIA considered developing *another* spy platform, something that would be *unrecoverable*, vanish like something unearthly.

The Project Skylite Documents

BITBR hired W. Paul Wilson, Jr. for his detective skills to be used in interviewing UFO witnesses, but he was also an [engineer](#), and he also assisted the team in technical research. Files on the McDonnell Douglas UFO study and Project Skylite surfaced when UFO archivist Louis Taylor purchased them from the owner of a house previously occupied by Paul Wilson's widow. "The documents were found rotting away out in the barn." Material on the BITR study was published online back in 2007. The Project Skylite material was finally [published online by Louis Taylor](#) in October 2020, documents and parametric studies, all hand written by Paul Wilson between April and June of 1970.

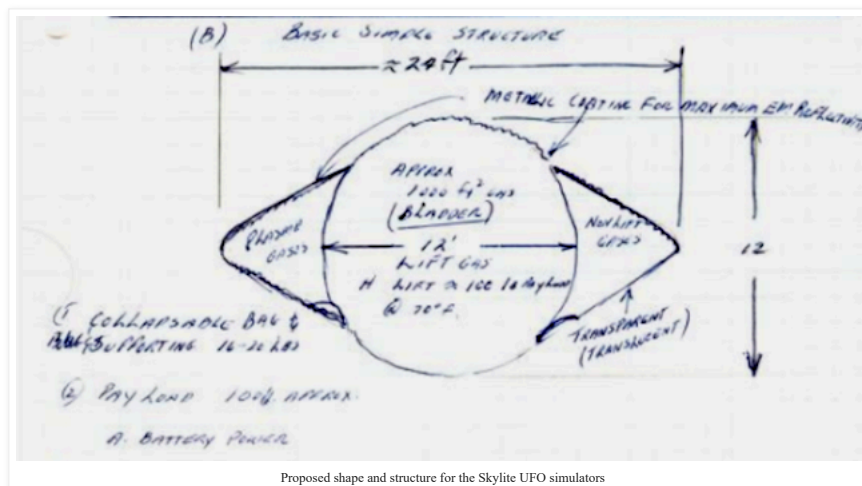
Paul Wilson's first page of an outline of the Project Skyline objectives, dated 4/5/70.

Electrical & Mechanical Systems to Produce Simulated UFO Observables

1. Illusion of physical objects with three-dimensional positivity in space - long & short term affects.
 - A. Sensed by visual, acoustical, photographic, radio and other EM instrumentation.
 - B. Large, very light, transparent bags inflatable with ionizable combustible gases. Spherical or saucer shaped.
 - (1) Bag should be constructed of highly combustible materials that completely vaporize or disintegrate without residue when contain gases or plasma is ignited.
 - (2) Ionize contained gas is by means of high energy radar beams (local or objective operated).
 - (a). The geometric configuration of inflated bags are held to those dimensions that would resonate with the frequencies of exciting radiation.
 - (b) Parabolic umbrellas for maximum energy concentration.
 - (c) Spherical resonate cavities for maximum energy absorption.
 - (3) Gas mixture and/or system may contain, short half-life high energy radioactive materials to initiate ionizations & emit particle radiation signals.
 - (4) Combustible gases at critical mixtures and/or temperatures may be ignited by radio controlled igniters, laser beams, or by spontaneous combustion at predetermined times.

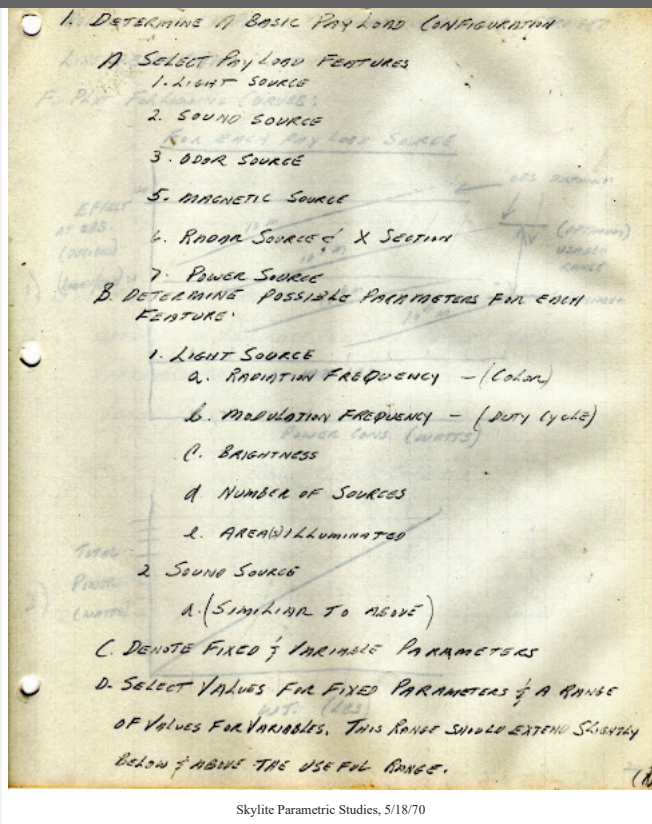
1. ILLUSION OF PHYSICAL OBJECTS WITH THREE DIMENSIONAL
POSITION IN SPACE - LONG SHORT TERM EFFECTS
A) CAUSED BY VISUAL, ACOUSTICAL, PLASMA, SOUND
AND STATIC EM INSTRUMENTATION
B. LARGE, VERY LIGHT, TRANSPARENT BAGS INFLATABLE WITH
IONIZABLE, COMBUSTIBLE GASES. - STRUCTURE AS SMOOTH SHAPED
(1) BAGS SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED OF HIGHLY COMBUSTIBLE
MATERIALS THAT COMPLETELY VAPORIZE OR DISINTEGRATE
WITHOUT RESIDUE WHEN CONTAINED GASES OR PLASMA
(2) IONIZED GASES BY MEANS OF HIGH ENERGY
RADAR BEAMS (LOCAL OR DISTANCE OPERATED)
(a) THE GEOMETRIC CONFIGURATION OF INFLATED BAGS
ARE HELD TO THOSE DIMENSIONS THAT WOULD RESONATE
WITH THE FREQUENCIES OF EXCITING EM RADIATION
(b) PARABOLIC UMBRELLAS FOR MAXIMUM ENERGY CONCENTRATION
(c) SPHERICAL RESONATE CAVITIES FOR MAXIMUM ENERGY RESONANCE
(3) GAS MIXTURE AND/OR SYSTEM MAY CONTAIN, SHORT HALF LIFE
HIGH ENERGY RADIO ACTIVE MATERIALS TO INITIATE
IONIZATIONS & EMIT PARTICLE RADIATION SIGNALS
(4) COMBUSTIBLE GASES AT CRITICAL MIXTURES AND/OR
TEMPERATURES MAY BE IGNITED BY RADIO CONTROLLABLE IGNITERS,
LASER BEAMS, OR BY SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION AT PRE-DETERMINED
TIMES. (1)

Electrical & Mechanical Systems to Produce Simulated UFO Observables

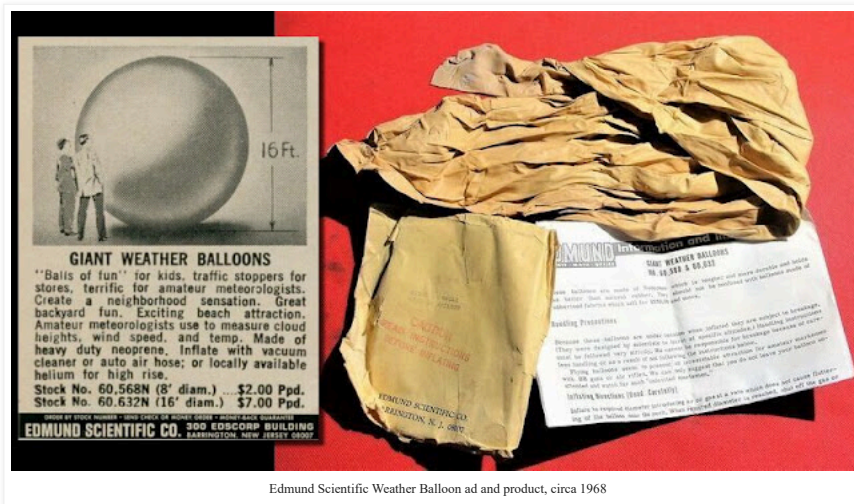


Proposed shape and structure for the Skylite UFO simulators

“UFO simulator” is how the project was referred to in early internal documents. BITBR went well beyond just spoofing the appearance of a UFO in flight, they also wanted to duplicate other “UFO observables” such as the shape, illumination, sounds, that were reported. Apparently for this project duplicating high speed flight was not a goal except perhaps in the “vanishing” of the balloon when it disintegrated. As for the radar cross-section and electromagnetic signature they desired, that would be accomplished with a “metallic coating for maximum reflectivity.”



The aerial platform was intended to be built around Edmund Scientific "Giant Weather Balloons" in the 8 and 16-foot sizes.



Edmund Scientific Weather Balloon ad and product, circa 1968

It was determined that an airborne platform alone was insufficient for generating the spectrum of desired effects and a ground based would be required to generate some of the electromagnetic properties and secondary characteristics.

The timing of shortly the US government's interest in the BITBR project is strange. It came shortly after the Condon Study's conclusion was published in 1969 that there was no scientific benefit to studying UFOs. The closure of Project Blue Book followed, so it would seem the US government's interest here was not scientific. Various notes throughout the Skylite documents give a clue as to the purpose of the project. "Significant information as to an observer's observational capabilities - with decoy & confusion factors." (bottom of page 4 of this document, describing, "Ground Effect UFO Simulator.")



Illustrations from [Using a Giant Weather Balloon to Create Artificial Moonlight](#)

There's no clear documentation that any Project Skylite flight experiments took place, but some of the parametric studies suggest there may have at least been a few balloon tests. Describing the overall BITBR experiments to duplicate UFO characteristics, Dr. Wood said they tried to see "whether the speed of light could be influenced by a large magnetic field," and a later "a second attempt to use magnetic fields... measured whether there was any change in forces... with respect to gravity. Again the result was null."

The lack of results from the UFO study prompted McDonnell Douglas to spend the money elsewhere, and Wood said, "the consensus was that we should cancel the BITBR project." Skylite died with it. If the US government pursued the simulated UFO project, it was without Wood's McDonnell Douglas team. The CIA responded to our FOIA request for records relating to Project Skylite with a form letter about UFO document requests.

Further Sources and Recommended Reading

For other US government attempts to duplicate UFO characteristics and performance, see our article from May 6, 2020, [UFO Study Programs and US Military Technology](#). For more on deception and exploitation of the UFOs by military intelligence, see the 2010 book by Mark Pilkington and John Lundberg, *Mirage Men: A Journey into Disinformation, Paranoia and UFOs*.

The McDonnell Douglas UFO Study

[Douglas Aircraft – UFO Research Documents \(1967 – 1969\)](#)

Keith Basterfield has written extensively on McDonnell Douglas' BITBR project: [The McDonnell Douglas UAP study](#). See also, [Project Skylite papers uploaded](#).

Information Dispersal by Louis Taylor: [Project Skylite Documents](#)

Project Aquiline

CIA Documents: [Project Aquiline](#)

John Meierdierck was in charge of the CIA's Project Aquiline operations at Area 51, and wrote an account of why the project was scrapped in 1971. See [Flying Stories: Project Aquiline](#)

[The CIA's Bird-Shaped Aquiline Drones Could Still Be Caged Up At Area 51](#) by Brett Tingley

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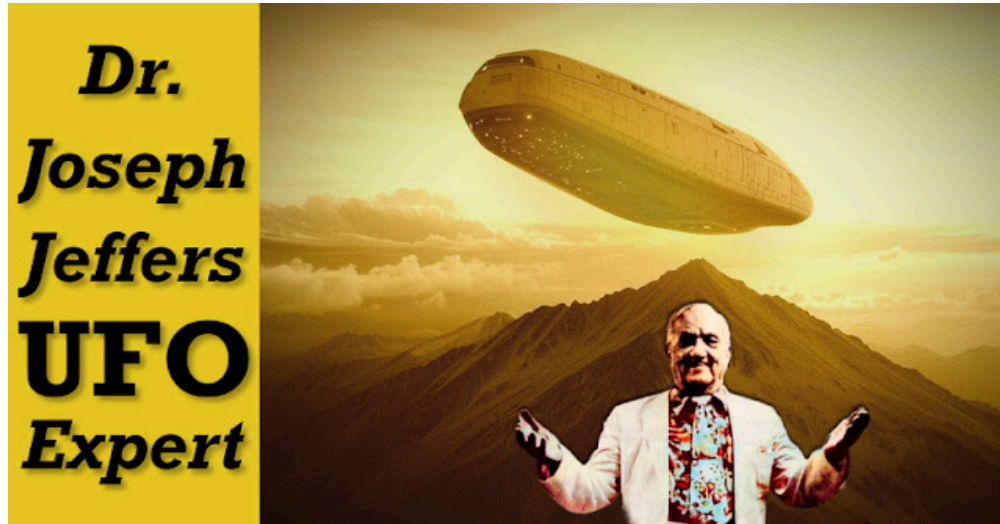
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[Jessie Roestenburg's 1954 UFO Encounter and Beyond](#)

This article was originally intended for STTF, but published instead at Blue Blurry Lines on October 19, 2018. It's an epic examination...



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[1946, Before Saucers, Kareeta: UFO Contact in California](#)

Hannes Bok art for Imagination , Sept. 1951, with bird-like space ships similar to Kareeta. Before Saucers: Kareeta 1947 has gone down ...

CASE #212[Playwright Render](#)

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CONTEXT FROM ORIGINAL DOCUMENT

(PUBLIC DOMAIN) - 5 April 1970 — Internal McDonnell Douglas documents state Project Skylite was a pitched effort to replicate UAP observables that didn't materialize. The term "DFO" or "Douglas Flying Object" is given as a reference to the concept of creating a craft that mimics UAP behavior. Bob Wood, Chan Thomas, Paul Wilson, Joe Brown and Stanton Friedman are all names attached to the proposed project that ultimately received no funding.

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