UHR
P.O. BOX 176
STONEHAM,
MA
02180 USA

Editor:
Barry
Greenwood

QUARTERLY
$15 per year
$20 foreign

7
September 2000

On the Question of Tampering with the 1950 Great Falls UFO Film

At between 1125 and 1130 AM M.S.T. on August 15, 1950, two witnesses, Nicholas Mariana, the general manager of the Great Falls minor league baseball team, the "Selectrics," and his secretary, Virginia Raunig, observed an unusual sight. While standing in the grandstand of the local ballpark, Mariana saw two peculiar, roundish objects moving swiftly out of the northwest and moving southward. When both objects stopped abruptly, Mariana recalled having a l6mm movie camera in his car. He ran down a stairway in the park to his car about 60

Frame showing the UFOs from the Montana Film

feet away and shouted for his secretary in a nearby office. After she ran out, he asked her if she could see anything in the sky. She said yes, two silvery spheres.

When Mariana retrieved the camera, he immediately turned the telephoto lens into position, set the f-stop at 22 and began filming the objects, which had begun moving again. He described what he saw as two discs spinning like a top, about 50 feet across and 50 yards apart. He could see no appendages, wings, fuselage or exhaust, but he thought he heard a "whooshing" sound when he first noticed the objects.

The UFOs moved southeast behind a General Mills grain building and a water tower south of the ballpark and disappeared into the distance.

Almost immediately after taking the film, Mariana said that two Air Force jets had flown across the sky east of him and headed in a southerly direction. These were later identified as two F-94s arriving at Great Falls Air Force Base from the 449th Fighter Squadron at Ladd Air Force Base, Alaska. The jets, #2502 and #2503, landed at 1130 and 1133 AM respectively (Air Force Case Files).

The objects were estimated to be three-quarters of a mile away. Angle of elevation: 35 degrees at an altitude of 10,000 feet. Duration of sighting: 45-50 seconds.
Mariana showed the film to a number of audiences in the local Great Falls area before allowing the Air Force to take the film for analysis on October 4, 1950. The film was retrieved by Captain John Brynildsen, commander of the Great Falls section of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and sent to the District Commander of the 5th District OSI at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio (October 6, 1950, Air Force memo).
After informing the press that the film was received (Berkshire Eagle, Pittsfield, Ma., 10-6-50), the Air Force issued an inexplicable press release (Berkshire Eagle, 10-12-50), saying that the film was "too dark to distinguish any recognizable objects."

In fact the film was, and is, very clear in showing two bright objects traversing the sky. On October 18th the film was returned to Mariana.

Berkshire Eagle
Pittsfield, MA.
Oct. 12, 1950

Berkshire Eagle
Pittsfield, MA.
Oct. 12, 1950

When he received his film back from the Air Force, Mariana was surprised to find that the earliest, best portion of the film, that showing what he said were the two objects with a notch or band at the outer edge and an obvious spinning movement, was missing. He estimated that about 35 frames were gone.

The film stayed with Mariana until 1952 when the Air Force's new head of Project Blue Book, Captain Edward Ruppelt, decided to reopen the Great Falls file. Mariana was asked to send the film to the Air Force again. The reason being that the Air Force lost their copy of the film! He did on October 29, 1952, with the provision that the film not be tampered with again.

In a letter dated November 14, 1952, Colonel William Adams, chief of the Topical Division, Deputy Director for Estimates, of the Directorate for Intelligence, wrote Mariana, updating the status of the film's analysis. He alluded to the fact that at some point the film had become “torn” and that instead of splicing the footage together, resulting in lost frames, the film was repaired with cellulose tape. Mariana was advised not to run the film with the repair until a more permanent splice could be done.

Later the abbreviated film would be used in a documentary film, "UFO"(1956). Throughout the entire investigation the Air Force denied ever having tampered with the film.

Was the film altered, or was Mariana making an unfounded charge? There are a number of matters to consider.

I have a copy of the l6mm Air Force color print, ordered from the National Archives almost 25 years ago. The print has 243 frames and there is repaired tear damage evident on frames 5, 6, 10, 11, 160 and 161, The film lasts about 15 seconds. It begins abruptly with the objects larger and clearer than in the rest of the sequence. The images under the microscope reveal slightly elliptical objects with no apparent projections. The first frame of the sequence has a linear diagonal cut through it, spoiling part of the frame. There is evidence of

an earlier frame to the first one showing the UFO images. How do we know this? In several of the earliest frames, one can see two dark lines in the upper right of each frame, probably electrical wires. The diagonal cut that runs partly through frame one left a tiny portion of a

previous frame, frame "0", as I will call it. One can see the two wires in this fragment of frame 0, positive proof that at least one earlier image existed.
Why is this diagonal cut there? Normal commercial film doesn't begin with a crudely appearance as this. Someone had to do it after the film was exposed. Who are the likely candidates?

1) Mariana: Let us say that the missing film shows images that are identifiable as jets. There would be every motivation for Mariana to splice away this portion of the film before giving it to the Air Force if he were trying to put one over on them. However, it would be very difficult to explain the crude slice as it appears and it should have raised immediate suspicion on the part of any Air Force investigator that he may have been hiding something. Mariana certainly wouldn't have received the glowing character assessment that he did from the Air Force officer who picked up the film ("He enjoys an excellent reputation in the local community and is regarded as a reliable, trustworthy and honest individual" Air Force memo, l0-6-50). And what would be the point of giving the film to the Air Force in the first place if he knew they were jets? Some might suggest that Mariana intended to capitalize on the footage. But if the film showed jets, and Mariana knew it, the last place to send the footage for analysis would be the Air Force. They would be the one source most likely to identity the true nature of the objects as jets and disrupt any attempt to falsely pass off the film as showing anomalous objects. There is zero evidence, even from the Air Force itself; that Mariana could have been involved in a deception. He showed the film to local audiences for little or nothing. If the images did show an anomalous object, why would Mariana cut it out the alleged best part and debased the value of his own film?

2) The Air Force: Mariana sent his film to the Air Force in October 1950, and upon receiving it later in the month, noticed part of it missing, according to his testimony. If the film showed the images to be identifiable as jets, as was later claimed by the Air Force, it would have been pointless for the Air Force to remove anything. The case would have been closer if the missing film showed anomalous objects, it would be no great stretch to think that, given Air Force policy on UFOs at the time, i.e. that there was nothing to the phenomena. They might have deleted what could have been regarded as sensitive material - unknown, exotic objects overflying U.S. airspace. Could the Air Force have inadvertently lost the footage through incompetence and claim that it didn't exist in the first place? Yes, although it would have been risky had Mariana made a duplicate of the film before handing it over. And it would make no sense for a photo analyst to separate the original film in the midst of a sequence. At the same time though, if the lost footage merely showed jets, then the later attention given to the film in 1952 by the Air Force, and by the CIA's Robertson Panel in 1953 would have been a waste of their time. The Air Force's behavior was such that any missing footage did not contribute to a mundane explanation of the objects. Did Captain Byrnildsen innocently separate the footage from other, unrelated exposed footage from Mariana's camera before sending it to Wright-Patterson AFB? Mariana stated in 1967 that there were family scenes prior to the UFO footage. But there is no testimony to this effect. And it wouldn't have spoken highly of an investigative officer to so crudely edit a film about to

be analyzed by leaving important early footage behind, as evidenced by the hacking of frame 0.

The evidence for missing footage goes even further. During the Condon Committee investigations in 1967, the Great Falls case was re-reopened, despite the Air Force having already listed the film as "Identified" (the two F-94s) in Project Blue Book. Investigator Roy Craig located a number of participants in the case who remembered the film before it was clipped.

First was John Wuertner, Mariana's attorney. In May 1951, Mariana sued "Cosmopolitan" magazine for a story published in the January 1951 issue called "The Disgraceful Flying Saucer Hoax" by Bob Considine. Mariana perceived the negative tone of the article as demeaning his character (the magazine published the opinion that Mariana's UFOs were the two jets). When interviewed about the film and the later lawsuit, Wuertner said that the Air Force kept the film for a long period and with the looming lawsuit, his client wanted the film back to use in the case. "...I know doggone well that that tape when it was returned, was little or nothing to it." Wuertner said that he recalled better views of the film in the original cut."... when I saw it compared to what came back, it wasn't complete." "The main part that I recall that didn't come back was when it was right overhead. Now it started in the east and as it arose on the horizon then there was a part cut out and all we have left was the part disappearing over the west." He added that there was the appearance of spinning."…if it were uniform, you'd get the same reflection on the same spot. But as it turned, you could get the definite reaction of spinning." Moreover, he continued, "If I had to make an estimate of what I thought had been cut off, I would say that it was, oh gosh, maybe one -fourth to one-fifth - it would be hard to say. But it would seem that they cut off the most obvious part. In other words, the part to me that seemed to bare out his contentions more than anything else."

Another testament came from E. P. Furlong, managing editor of the Great Falls Tribune. He saw the film originally, then later on TV, feeling that the TV version was considerably shorter. He was likely referring to a broadcast of the film "UFO" (1956) which included the entire film available after Mariana received his edited copy.

Tony Dalick ran a sporting goods store where the film had been run before being sent to the Air Force. He testified that there was "a lot missing, perhaps 2-3 feet." He remembered two objects, definitely spinning, shaped like a wafer of Peppermint candy. The objects were closer and clearer on the unreturned part of the film.

Great Falls, MT. Tribune Sept. 11, 1950	Craig interviewed Nicholas Mariana 17 years after the event. He clarified some aspect of sighting detail. On the alleged spinning motion: "You could see the spinning action of the center portion in the middle of the film.” On the "notch" allegedly seen as a reference point for the spinning motion: "...there was a little break between the actual rest of the body of the machine and this portion of it. You could see there was action. You couldn't see it with your eye but you could see it after I got the telephoto film back."

On the diagonal cut at the beginning of the film: "The reason I know it was cut, too, was that they came back with the original and they had spliced it diagonally. Well, I never used the diagonal splice. I use horizontal splice..."
Let's look more at the film strip itself. As mentioned earlier, I had obtained a l6mm print of the Air Force's copy years ago

from the National Archives. The Archives no longer makes film prints of UFO footage available, as everything has been place onto videotape for sale.
The length of the actual Great Falls footage is 6 feet, 3/4 inch, with a 42 inch blank lead and a 52 inch blank end. The total length of the filmstrip is about 14 feet. There is no telling when the blanks were added on but they were not part of the original film and they were certainly added by the Air Force.
According to Captain Byrnildsen's transmittal letter of October 6, 1950, approximately 15 feet of film was sent to Wright-Patterson AFB. But in a clipping cited in Jerome Clark's "The UFO Encyclopedia" (2nd Ed. 1998) from the "Great Falls Tribune (October 6, 1950), Byrnildsen is said to have told the reporter that he picked up 8 feet of film from Mariana. Unless someone made errors in quoting the footage, it seems like Byrnildsen picked up eight feet of film from Mariana, added on the blank footage and sent the finished product to Wright-Patterson. My copy of the film, with blank filler, is 14 feet, in close agreement with what was sent to Wright-Patterson.
If you've been reading carefully, you can see a problem. The supposedly complete copy of the edited Air Force print, that which Mariana received after having had his film "reduced," is nearly two feet shorter than the lowest estimate of what the Air Force had said they had received at Wright-Patterson in 1950! Since on a viewing of the existing print there are no major jump cuts in the sequence, which flows rather smoothly, and since the film ends about where the witness has testified (the objects moving into the distance and disappearing), one must conclude that about two feet of film is missing from the beginning of the sequence. This is exactly what Mariana claims. It is also in good agreement with the testimony of Tony Dalick, the sporting goods store owner who had seen the footage before and after the claimed editing by the Air Force, saying that he felt "two to three feet" were missing from the beginning.
In 1956, Dr. Robert M. L. Baker produced an analysis of the Montana film, a treatment that was later updated and printed in "The Journal of the Astronautical Sciences" for January-February 1968, under the title "Observational Evidence of Anomalistic Phenomena." He concluded that nearby jet aircraft should have been resolvable on the film, but at greater distances the brightness and speed of the images were too great to have been aircraft. In other words, the objects were unidentified. Of relevance to this article are remarks in Baker's article about the filmstrip itself. He said that his analysis focused upon just 225 frames of the film because of the presence of foreground objects, by which precise measurements could have been made. 65 frames at the beginning of the film were not used except for brightness measurements. This gives us 290 frames total that Baker had available of the UFOs (290 frames? Ed.). The film was given to Baker for study by Greene-Rouse Productions, the makers of the documentary "UFO" mentioned earlier. The clip was the end product supplied to Mariana after the 1952 Air Force analysis, and supplied to Greene-Rouse Productions when a

deal was struck to use the footage in the documentary. Greene-Rouse arranged an independent analysis, presumably to be sure that the film showed truly anomalous images.

Now the problem with this is that my copy of the Air Force Montana print is only 243 frames long. 47 more frames had disappeared between 1952 and the time I had obtained the film from the National Archives! Could it have been that the Air Force clipped the footage again, knowing that the film was to be released publicly sometime after the mid-1970s upon the transfer of Blue Book records to the National Archives. We might want to title the remaining sequence of the Montana footage "The Incredible Shrinking Film!"

The Air Force had already decided that the film had shown two F-9~ (see Project Blue Book's conclusion). This was in spite of the 1952 reinvestigation by the then head of the Air Force's Project Blue Book, Captain Edward Ruppelt, at the direction of the Pentagon. Ruppelt had said that in 1950 there was no interest on the part of the Air Force in UFOs. Their pre-Blue Book program, Project Grudge, had written off the Montana film as jets after a quick viewing (see "The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects," page 287). Upon examining the data anew, the new study narrowed down the possible explanations to the F-94s in the area. But as Ruppelt explained, "First we studied the flight paths of the two F-94s. We knew the landing pattern being used on the day of the sighting, and we knew when the two F-94s landed. The two jets just weren't anywhere close to where the two UFOs had been. Next we studied each individual light and both appeared to be too steady to be reflections. We drew a blank on the Montana movie - it was an unknown."

If the head of Project Blue Book decided that the UFOs were unexplained after a lengthy investigation in 1952, who decided that the conclusion in the Blue Book files should remain "aircraft?" There were no further investigations of the Montana film. Perhaps it was the same decision making process that performed the film alterations?

Probably the greatest debunking of UFOs came in the form of the Condon Committee, which functioned from 1966 to the publication of its report "The Scientific Study of Unidentified flying Objects" The project was created ostensibly to relieve the Air Force of having anything further to do with UFO investigations. UFOs had become a nuisance problem for the Air Force, stuck in a no-win situation of chasing down mostly ordinary reports, 90% of which were identifiable as mundane stimuli. The Condon Report dismissed any notion that UFOs were worthy of scientific attention, or that they posed a threat to national security.

Yet their discussion of the Montana film is curiously less critical than one had become used to in dealing with the typical Air Force public relations machine at the time.

The Committee's investigator of the Montana film, Dr. William Hartmann, said in the report, "Both individuals (Mariana and Raunig) have recently affirmed the observation, and there is little reason to question its validity. The case remains unexplained. Analysis indicates that the images on the film are difficult to reconcile with aircraft or other known phenomena, although aircraft cannot entirely be ruled out."

After summarizing the case, Hartmann, attempting to explain a discrepancy in the witnesses' estimates of the duration of the sighting, said the discrepancy “probably refers to the fact that Witness 1 (Mariana) made about 20 seconds of film.” That's 5 seconds, or 80 frames of film, more than the current Air Force print; or 2 seconds, or 32 frames, more than the Baker copy obtained from Greene-Rouse Productions. The 2-second difference is in close agreement with Mariana's claim that at least an estimated 35 frames were shaved from the original.

Hartmann concludes by summarizing arguments for and against aircraft reflections being responsible for the images. He states, "While such a hypothesis (the F-94 explanation) is tenable, it conflicts with some of the soft data. It is judged reasonable only to regard this object as unidentified."

CONCLUSIONS - A few more things are now more certain about the Great Falls UFO footage than they were before:

1) In spite of the Air Force's claims to the contrary, there is strong evidence that the film sequence was clipped after it had been sent to the Air Force in 1950. Witness statements
2) and Air Force documents allude to a longer sequence than currently exists.
3) The film was clipped again between 1952 and 1976, based upon measurements made by the author on his own copy from the National Archives and compared to earlier analyses.

The Air Force had behaved poorly in their public handling of the story above the local level. The press release of October 12, 1950 was nothing less than a lie about the film's quality. After an analysis in 1952, the Project Blue Book record was not changed to reflect new conclusions determined by the head of the project.

Back to Top of this Page Return to UHR Index To CUFON Main Page

C U F O NSM
The Computer UFO Network
http://www.cufon.org/
SYSOP - Jim Klotz
Webmaster - Chris Lambright
Information Director - Dale Goudie
UFO Reporting and Information Service
Director - Dale Goudie
P.O. Box 832, Mercer Island, WA 98040, USA
Voice Line - (206) 721-5035