
BOOK REVIEWS

UFOs: Generals, Pilots, and Government Officials Go on the Record, by Leslie Kean. New York: Harmony Books, 2010. ISBN 978-0-307-71684-2. 315p.

Even in the deeply unlikely event that you may have thought otherwise, it bears mentioning that UFOs haven't gone away. It's worth noting because as early as July 1947 UFOs—flying saucers then, of course—were already being written of (and off) in the past tense. One imagines that those who held that sentiment even then were consumed with the will to believe that it be so.

Those in the business of constructing falsifiable hypotheses would have predicted that flying saucers would collapse of their own absence of weight. They would never show up on radar except in erroneous readings; there would be no physical evidence; witnesses would overwhelmingly be fringe characters; the sightings would be mostly of distant, nebulous light sources; hoaxes would play a major role in the most interesting cases; few if any reports could stand up to intensive investigation. So thin a wisp would blow away as soon as the winds of popular culture brought the next fad along.

So here we are, more than six decades into the UFO controversy, with uncountable sightings, well-documented and impenetrably puzzling encounters, instrumented observations, landing traces, any number of observations of structured craft seen under excellent viewing conditions by multiple and independent witnesses—just about everything short of wreckage and bodies (these alleged but never proved) to establish that an extraordinary anomaly, to every appearance and none (notwithstanding gale-force winds of rhetoric) to the contrary, is the product of an advanced technology not known currently on this planet.

One may as well toss in the surely not-irrelevant consideration that in recent years, fulfilling a key prediction of ufology's extraterrestrial hypothesis, steadily growing numbers of extrasolar planets—their existence suspected but not established in the early decades of the UFO era—have been detected, giving astronomers reason to extrapolate that as many as 100 billion stars in the Milky Way alone harbor earthlike planets, a staggering number of which may house intelligent civilizations. If that is the case, then a visible presence of visiting alien races is not just more likely than not but actually *to be expected*. (A non-ET presence, one might further argue, suggests that intelligence is rare, maybe even nonexistent, outside earth.) As SETI pioneer Frank Drake has said, if UFOs are real, they are extraterrestrial. No heretic, he quickly adds that since ETs can't get here, UFOs can't be. He doesn't actually *know* that under no circumstances

could anybody ever cross interstellar space, naturally, but to those receptive to such pseudo-arguments, the blanket dismissal is so anxiety-alleviating as to put receptive brains to sleep. "In normal scientific research," astrophysicist Peter Sturrock rejoins, "observational evidence takes precedence over theory. If it does happen, it can happen."

It can and does happen all the time, and all over the world, and by now nothing except some people's wishful thinking, buttressed by withering ridicule of witnesses and advocates, seems likely to stop it any time in any foreseeable future. Either human beings can continue to pretend that nothing is going on—surely a form of social pathology—or we can do something about it. Which brings us to the book under review.

Journalist Leslie Kean's *UFOs: Generals, Pilots, and Government Officials Go on the Record* is not exactly an updating of J. Allen Hynek's *The UFO Evidence: A Scientific Inquiry* (1972). Hynek's enduring classic surveyed the phenomenon in all its aspects, including what up to then had been called merely "occupant reports" but ever after have been known as close encounters of the third kind. In Kean's book CE3s and other high-strangeness phenomena are absent, and properly so. However intriguing, they comprise soft evidence. Moreover, it is even arguable that some of these alleged experiences, especially on the most extreme end, are only dubiously linked to the harder-evidence cases and may be related to the larger phenomenon by no more than superficial appearance, though at this point that can be no more than speculative reading. Roswell is mentioned only in a passing paragraph in Chapter 23 ("The Government Cover-up: Policy or Myth?"), about which more presently.

Kean's book is a direct outgrowth of a November 2007 news conference she and filmmaker James Fox organized in Washington, D.C. The two assembled an international group of retired military officers, government officials, and aviation experts to attest to their sightings or investigations. Some chapters are written by these individuals, including several who actually headed their governments' official UFO projects and who cautiously have concluded that the ETH best provides a framework in which their strongest data make sense. The judgment of Jean-Jacques Velasco, longtime head of France's government-sponsored GEIPAN (formerly GEPAN), is typical:

[UFOs] seem to be artificial and controlled objects whose physical characteristics can be measured by our detection systems, radar in particular. They fall under a physics which is by far superior and more evolved than the one



we have in our most technologically advanced countries. . . . When military aircrafts are directly involved, these objects are able to anticipate and neutralize the maneuvers of the pilots assigned to security and defense missions, and some remarkable cases show the capacity of the UFOs to seemingly understand a particular situation or to anticipate intentions of escape or military neutralization. . . . If they are artificial probes they cannot be of terrestrial origin and consequently they must come from somewhere else.”

The cases highlighted here are nearly all from the mid-1970s to the present. Some are well-known to ufologists: the Iranian dogfight, the Rendlesham CE2, the JAL radar/visual, the Tucson lights, and others. Many are related in accounts written by witnesses or other participants—united, by the way, in acerbic dismissal of efforts to “explain” their experiences in what purport to be prosaic terms. Being novices to these sorts of things prior to their own unanticipated observations, the witnesses express shock at the arrogance and outright bone-headedness of debunkers. Though not himself a witness, Federal Aviation Administration official John J. Callahan (who contributes Chapter 22, recalling his inquiry into the January 1987 JAL case soon after its occurrence) manages to tell an appalling story with a great deal of wit. Callahan learned that where sightings are concerned, his superiors at the FAA “will not investigate [a UFO report that presumably would be under their jurisdiction] unless the object can be identified by an airborne pilot, and instead the FAA will offer a host of weak explanations. If the FAA cannot identify the object within FAA terminology, then it doesn’t exist. [A] cliché we sometimes used: For every problem there is a solution. The FAA seems to believe that the converse is also true: If there is no solution, there is no problem.”

Some of the most fascinating—alarming isn’t far off the mark either—encounters involve failed efforts to shoot down UFOs, as in a particularly gripping account provided here by Commandante (Ret.) Óscar Santa María Huertas (Chapter 10) of his interaction with a fast-moving domed disc on April 11, 1980, confirmed by ground witnesses at the Peruvian Air Force base from which he was ordered to intercept the UFO. On initial approach the pilot “shot a burst of sixty-four 30-mm shells, which created a cone-shaped ‘wall of fire’ that would normally obliterate anything in its path. Some of the projectiles deviated from the target, falling to the ground, and others hit it with precision. . . . But nothing happened. It seemed as if the huge bullets were absorbed by the [UFO], and it wasn’t damaged. Then suddenly the object began to ascend very rapidly and head away from the base.” And that’s only the *beginning* of the incident.

Besides its compelling retelling of extraordinary (and extraordinarily evidential) UFO events, Kean and her collaborators examine related issues that are only rarely, or anyway not very capably, treated in the literature. These include what some photographs may tell us about UFO pro-

pulsion and why UFOs sometimes *aren’t* detected on radar (usually because of the nature of observation; if operators aren’t looking for them, they have to go out of their way to extract them from the background noise).

Toward the end of the book is a remarkably astute essay which anybody interested in the UFO controversy ought to read. Two well-credentialed political scientists, Alexander Wendt (Ohio State University) and Raymond Duvall (head of his department at the University of Minnesota), expose the sources of resistance to UFO evidence, from which a more objective view would discern ET visitation as an entirely reasonable—if so far unproven—reading; yet a rigidly enforced social taboo gives “the UFO this special status . . . that it is considered to be outside the boundaries of rational discourse.” After examining and eviscerating popular skeptical claims, Wendt and Duvall argue, “The inability to see clearly and talk rationally about UFOs seems to be a symptom of authoritative anxiety, a socially subconscious fear of what the reality of the UFO might mean for modern government.” They’re not arguing for a massive cover-up, but addressing a deep, internalized psychological anxiety which requires that officialdom reject the possibility of UFOs and all they appear to imply.

Kean and other contributors repeatedly raise the issue of the U.S. government’s curious indifference to even the most compelling reports, an apathy (as the book richly attests) not shared by officials of other advanced nations, some of which have all but endorsed the existence of the UFO anomaly and found a way to live with it. Always intelligent and perceptive, Kean, not taken with the usual conspiratorial ruminations, deduces from her own interviews and inquiries that an Unacknowledged Special Access Program (USAP) group, used within the Department of Defense to control sensitive information without acknowledging its existence, quietly collects data while keeping even high officials in the dark. One item of evidence she provides is an official document of unquestioned provenance essentially stating as much, and I am not referring to the Bollender memo.

Finally and not least, *UFOs* arrives with quotes from a startling assortment of authority figures who decided this time not to keep their thoughts to themselves, among them world-famous physicist Michio Kaku (on the front cover yet), Rudy Schild (Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics), and Neal Lane (Rice University, former director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy). Former White House chief of staff and current president of the Center for American Progress John Podesta has publicly expressed interest in the UFO question before, but it’s still good to see his foreword.

For reasons this book details, resistance to the UFO phenomenon, especially in the United States, remains more entrenched than ever, so much so that sober consideration may not be possible for another generation or two. Meantime, we may predict that hostile reviewers who will not bother to address its evidence and arguments will savage *UFOs* in

order to keep the taboo well in place. We may be confident, too, that Kaku, Schild, and the rest will be nowhere mentioned as poison pens fly across pages. The book is sure to influence, however, the thinking of educated persons who are genuinely curious and open-minded. *UFOs* rises above the usual morass of muddled thinking on both sides and ascends to clear skies, where puzzling anomalies persist and await their time.—*Jerome Clark*.

Crash: When UFOs Fall From the Sky, by Kevin D. Randle.

Franklin Lakes, N.J.: New Page Books, 2010. ISBN 978-1-60163-100-8. 320p.

Over the decades since the epochal Kenneth Arnold sighting, ufology has collected a vast amount of data that eventually grew in complexity sufficient to demand parsing into subsets. During an internet search, I found the following list of subcategories of ufology, each with at least one principal coordinator and an associated archive:

- Electromagnetic effects
- Vehicle interference cases
- Physical trace cases
- Physiological effects
- Radar cases
- Pilot sightings
- Astronaut sightings
- UFO landings
- Human-initiated contact
- Humanoid sightings
- Black triangles
- Water-related sightings

For example, one researcher, Ted Phillips, took up what he calls physical trace cases and has published a catalog of over 4,000 instances. Extensive vehicle interference case studies have been published by Mark Rodeghier and Keith Basterfield, among others. Carl Feindt has collected 1,165 water-related sightings ranging from 1067 A.D. to 2009.

A relatively recent subcategory of ufology is abductions, which originated with a handful of researchers, some of whom questioned whether the topic properly belonged to ufology. (Budd Hopkins's *Missing Time*, the seminal abduction book, was published in 1982.) It has blossomed into a publishing industry, and if you own a television set or visit the movie theaters, you have been inundated with the dramatic details of alien abductions. Today when members of the lay public mention UFOs, they often mean abductions.

Oddly, UFO crashes appear very far down the comprehensive list of ufological subcategories. Even then, one can find lists of crashes, but apparently there exists no organized study of the topic. The late Leonard Stringfield (1920–1994) compiled a series of crash/retrieval reports, though in the main he simply collected these stories, not having the wherewithal to investigate them.

A French website, www.ufologie.net, lists 145 alleged crashes. Another site, www.ufoevidence.org/documents/doc1683.htm, shows only 34 cases and adds the caveat, “The

following is a preliminary list of UFO crashes throughout the world. Currently, little is known about most of these crashes.” Steven Greer’s Center for the Study of Extraterrestrial Intelligence (CSETI) has a list of no less than 272 purported UFO crashes, also with little supporting data.

Why have alleged UFO crashes, as a genre, suffered this relative neglect? It may be that lurking in the unconscious of ufology is the traumatic memory of the 1950 Frank Scully book *Behind the Flying Saucers*, the fiasco that introduced us to crash hoaxes and which still resonates. Or, as in the instance of Roswell, those few cases with much evidence and opportunity for investigation have formed their own fiefdoms, shoving aside all potential competitors.

Kevin Randle has resurrected the issue and essayed an overview in *Crash: When UFOs Fall From the Sky*, an update to his *History of UFO Crashes*, published 15 years ago.

This is much more than a seed catalog of anecdotes drawn from tongue-in-cheek newspaper stories. He analyzes those accounts that contain enough data for the task, drawing on his very considerable experience as a ufologist and military intelligence officer. In most of those instances, Randle adds his opinion, often reaching a skeptical conclusion, but always treating the material with care. The result is that he has raised the topic of UFO crashes in general to one deserving the interest of the serious ufologist, and he has presented it in one efficient book.

Randle does occasionally disappoint, such as these two extremely bare entries which add nothing to the discussion:

February 18, 1950. Birmingham, Alabama. The military cordoned an area around a crashed flying saucer. A helicopter transported the alien bodies of the flight crew to Maxwell Air Force Base.

Mid-1950s. Copenhagen, Denmark. Farmer Christian Sanderson and his wife claimed to have seen two flying saucers over their farmhouse. One of them stayed airborne, and the other landed nearby. It then disintegrated into thousands of brightly glowing sparks. No evidence was recovered, no more information can be found, and there were no additional witnesses.

Shag Harbour, Kecksburg, and Roswell are treated at length, as one would expect. He concludes in each instance that there is probable cause to believe that these were UFOs that really crashed. I also found that Randle’s summaries of important cases contained facts and angles new to me.

Selecting cases for the book wasn’t easy. Here is what Randle has to say about the process:

... the reports included on my listing are the ones that I find the most interesting or the ones that have the greatest potential for additional information, or the ones that I’m sure have a valid solution to them. It is clear to me, if not to others, what fell. That ranges from an alien ship to

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