

Engineer 'Explains' Our UFOs

Disagrees With UA's McDonald

By JOSEPH L. MYLER

WASHINGTON (UPI) — You don't have to believe Flying Saucers, otherwise known as unidentified flying objects (UFOs), are spacecraft from other worlds under the control of alien intelligence.

Philip J. Klass has an alternative explanation which, if correct, makes many UFO sightings seem scientifically plausible and the UFOs themselves just as native to this world as lightning or, say, air pollution.

Klass, an electrical engineer, is senior avionics (aviation electrical) editor for Aviation Week & Space Technology. More or less by accident he came down in 1965 with a review case of "UFO fever." As he puts it, he entered the "land of UFOs."

Since then he has engaged in a prodigious amount of research. The result is his just published book "UFOs—Identified" (Random House).

A lot of UFOs, of course, have quickly become UFOs (identified flying objects). It is generally agreed that many sightings have been conventional objects—everything from weather balloons to the planet Venus to spacecraft falling out of orbit and burning up.

There also have been hoaxes, pranks, and publicity stunts that went sour.

But a sizeable residue of legitimate UFOs remains, and at least some photographs turned in by the sighters have all the earmarks of authenticity. It is in this category of UFOs that Klass addresses himself.

He discovered early in the days when he was being "hounded" on the subject that genuine UFOs, as described by those who saw them, resembled plasmas—amorphous concentrations of electrified gas molecules of explicable origin.

Some appeared to be associated with nearby high tension electric power lines, others with thunderstorms, still others with clear air turbulence, many of them perhaps influenced by atmospheric pollutants and other special atmospheric conditions.

Plasmas exist in many forms. Scientists trying to harness hydrogen reactions for peaceful power work with plasmas. The sun fills solar space with plasmas of charged particles.

Lightning discharges generate plasmas. One of the more mysterious of all plasmas is ball lightning, long ago labeled "spherulite" by German investigators.

The colors and shapes and pulsations and darting motions described by UFO sighters convinced Klass they were seeing members of what he calls "a family of freak atmospheric phenomena," called plasmas for want of a better name. See n in the context of the space age, it was easy for those involved to construe them as spacehips of some sort.

Klass agrees that many UFO sightings, although some Payton Prof. James E. McDonald of the University of Arizona, reject his hypothesis as not proved. McDonald inclines to the belief that UFOs are extraterrestrial craft bent on reconnaissance of Earth.

In any case, says Klass, "the UFO mystery is more deeply ingrained in the fabric of our mid-twentieth-century life than most people realize."

Man must have his mysteries. Primitive human beings needed supernatural explanations for lightning, for example.

So today there are those who "invoke the Space-Age version of the supernatural—extraterrestrial visitors—to explain a mysterious natural phenomenon."

"During the past 20 years," according to Klass, "there has been a steady average of approximately 800 UFO sightings reported... a total of more than 16,000."

"Yet there is not a single piece of incontrovertible evidence to support the extraterrestrial hypothesis."

"If there were," says Klass, "the mystery would have ended long ago."