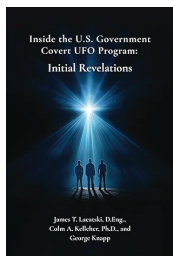


**BOOK AND
MULTIMEDIA
REVIEW**

First Review: Inside the U.S. Government Covert UFO Program: Initial Revelations

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In 2017, *The New York Times* published an article ostensibly covering a Pentagon UFO project. The authors of *Inside the U.S. Government Covert UFO Program: Initial Revelations* purport to tell us about it. They are James T. Lacatski, D.Eng., Colin A. Kelleher, Ph.D., and George Knapp.

In the wake of the 2017 Times article, a number of researchers got busy submitting Freedom of Information Act requests. In 2022, after over four years had passed, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) released an underwhelming group of records in response to the requests (Expanding Frontiers Research, n.d.).

By that time, much of the information originally published by the Times was shown to be incorrect. The authors of the book at hand acknowledge that this is the case (unlike the Times) but fail to provide significantly more key supporting data for their version of events than the Times. Neither do the authors address the discrepancies between their assertions and their lack of confirmation to be found in the records produced by the DIA.

When citations are offered in this book, they include such sources as George Filer (an infamous unreliable narrator with the Mutual UFO Network), UFO reports filed with the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (a mid-20th century civilian UFO organization), and Wikipedia. It is out of such reports and, at times, dubious sources that the authors fill multiple chapters with technical-sounding jargon on flight capabilities and propulsion means of objects otherwise not established to exist, at least not to the extent as speculated. Description after purported description is presented, ranging from lift forces to color changes, halos to invisibility. This leads to sections on power generation and advanced UAP power generation. Three of five citations provided on page 79 from “a relatively hefty body of anomalous craft reports of varying degrees of credibility,” further described as “well documented,” lead to Jacques Vallee’s UFO books.

Often referenced are the physiological effects of UAP (Unidentified Aerial Phenomena) on human beings. This writer personally took a deep dive in 2022 into the allegations of what was being termed UFO injury studies, only to find the evidence lacking to the extreme (Brewer, 2022, April).

This book did nothing to change my mind. I remain unconvinced investigation of alleged UFO-related injuries took any substantial form that could establish reliable causality or would pass peer review. The merit of such reports and subsequent studies is often simply claimed without sufficient justification.

Right from the preface, the authors launch into dramatic descriptions of anecdotal stories relayed by so-called whistleblowers, though the accounts perpetually lack conclusive evidence. The authors never raise the possibility that evidence might be lacking for the simple reason that the stories are inaccurate and incomplete.

Numerous figures are presented as credible and esteemed without offering any



of the many valid criticisms of their work that are easy to locate. Figures like Dr. Garry Nolan are among those provided pedestals without informing readers of any qualified considerations of the Stanford immunologist's questionable UFO-related activities (Travino, 2017). Prof. Avi Loeb is likewise offered as what might be argued as an appeal to authority while neglecting to inform readers of the substantial and qualified criticism leveled about the dubious positions expressed by the Harvard astronomer (Miller, 2023, July 24).

The introduction of the book offers a summary of AAWSAP, which is the Advanced Aerospace Weapon Systems Application Program, a \$22 million project awarded to Bigelow Aerospace Advanced Space Studies, or BAASS. This is explored along with post-2017 events but offers few references or specific citations, just mostly running narratives. We are to primarily rely on the accounts of the authors of what took place in and around Washington, intelligence circles, and UFO research networks, a reliance that becomes increasingly strained as one progresses through the book.

"The purpose of the present book," the introduction concludes, "is to unravel more deeply the AAWSAP focus on the physics and engineering aspects of UFOs." In the forthcoming pages, multiple references are made to extraordinary phenomena. In a page 5 description of Skinwalker Ranch, the authors assert, "Metallic UAP, flying orbs of varying colors, otherworldly creatures, discarnate voices, poltergeists, electromagnetic anomalies, and orange 'portals' have co-located as well as materialized separately on the property."

There is no basis in fact provided for the assertion. It seems to primarily be presented as an established fact simply because people have said so. It would be understandable if one found this rather inexplicable from authors who quite regularly remind readers of their qualifications as project scientists and a journalist.

After proclaiming on page six that this is not a book about flying saucer stories or paranormal tales, the authors proceed on page seven to assert that humanoid-shaped black shadows, loud footsteps, hauntings, and other such phenomena are "frequently" reported among UAP witnesses. This is followed by stating witnesses also regularly report precognitive, clairvoyant, telepathic and similar abilities in the wake of their UAP encounters. The authors go on to argue the circumstances should be accepted as part and parcel of the UFO phenomenon.

There are a number of items to be competently challenged in the above assertions. For one, it's putting the proverbial cart before the horse; it can't be accepted people are experiencing abilities (as the result of UAP encounters) that in at least some instances have not been established

to exist - among UAP witnesses or anyone else. Secondly, because a person reports they experience something, it does not necessarily mean they do. The authors largely fail to acknowledge either point.

Many questions are therefore at issue about the methodology of interacting with and interviewing witnesses, which is not addressed whatsoever. Part of the reason for that omission may be because the cases offered for collective consideration are clearly obtained from a wide variety of sources, covering a date range of several decades, from the mid-20th century to a small percentage of investigations apparently conducted within the AAWSAP. In other words, the authors had little to no control over the integrity of witness interviews in the vast majority of cases they relied on to support their conclusions. Even if we overlook all the challenges, one is hard-pressed to conclusively assign causality for psychic abilities to UFO encounters or anything else, much less convince a peer review panel that would be quite familiar with the scientific process. A reader might suspect that's why they're finding these assertions, notably of such alleged paradigm-shifting significance, in a paperback instead of a published research paper.

Chapter 5 begins an argument for flight characteristics exhibited by "novel aerospace technologies," or UFOs. These flight characteristics asserted to be "beyond the state-of-the-art technologies," are ultimately not presented in any manner other than the words of the authors and indirect reference to reports where "they have been observed." From this, the authors conclude and inform us this novel technology will revolutionize the quality of life in spectacular ways.

Several pages are subsequently dedicated to educating readers about what UAP do. There are no counterarguments presented for how objects in the sky may not always be operating the way witnesses interpret, including when observed on film. Little to no consideration is given to the caution that should be exercised when considering the accuracy of witness testimony.

Significant attention is given to "UAP lift concepts," including those the authors label advanced. Several more pages are dedicated to UAP propulsion. Discussion of such things as plasma and fusion propulsion give way to "UAP spatial/temporal translation," which gets into "temporal anomalies such as invisibility and distorted time."

Readers might feel as if they are viewing the work of people who cannot conclusively establish a single UAP case as necessarily outside reasonable explanation, so they instead opt to continuously suggest an abundance of extraordinary cases as a foregone conclusion. The authors then present what could arguably be dubbed hand-tracing about how these craft supposedly operate. Dozens of

pages of it. I am quite unconvinced of the validity of the arguments presented in this book.

As a specific example, it is asserted that a category of UAP spatial/temporal translation is “Become Fuzzy in Appearance.” Page 55 states, “An otherwise solid-looking object may suddenly start to become fuzzy looking and even become transparent before disappearing. While this may be a defensive maneuver, it could also be the start of a spacetime transition event.” No alternative, infinitely more likely and common explanations are offered for why things in the sky may become less clear as they fade from view.

The research goals are examined of a collection of papers known as the Defense Intelligence Reference Documents, or DIRDs. For this reader, too much emphasis is put on the contents of the papers, and not enough attention is given to their theoretical and often highly speculative nature. For that matter, there is an underlying implication throughout the book of a tightly run project that consisted of qualified experts toiling away at maverick science that leads to the technology of tomorrow. I am quite unconvinced that this is an accurate portrayal of AAWSAP, and the authors actually reinforce my doubts rather than dispel them.

The 2004 “Tic Tac” case is explored. The authors neglect to mention, for whatever reasons, that in 2007, this USS Nimitz-meets-UFO story first sprung on the UFO subculture at the Above Top Secret message board (Above Top Secret, n.d.). People were not particularly interested, and the story didn’t gain traction. That was some two years before 2009, when the authors state, “the investigative wheels of AAWSAP moved into high gear,” and project personnel picked up the trail. If the reader knows no different, they might incorrectly interpret that no one outside of the Navy knew anything about the chain of events until the story was more recently delivered to the public through the actions of self-described UFO Disclosure activists. The authors omit the wider circumstances from their telling of the saga.

I was relatively interested in reading chapters and sections dedicated to addressing Robert Bigelow, his BAASS aerospace corporation, and collaborations with the Mutual UFO Network. Not because I would necessarily accept the narration if adequate citations and applicable documents were absent but because I wondered what the authors would say.

The infrastructure of the MUFON-BAASS collaboration is emphasized, noting the large number of MUFON investigators already in place and subsequently available to BAASS. The formation of special rapid response teams that were created to investigate select UFO sightings is described. However, none of the challenges inherent to MUFON and its questionable scientific competence are

acknowledged, of which there are many (Brewer, 2018, February). As a matter of fact, quite the opposite is heavily implied, potentially leaving readers with the incorrect impression that MUFON runs a well-trained army of scientifically capable volunteers. There is much evidence to the contrary, none of which is mentioned.

The authors similarly fail to point out that neither the MUFON civilian investigators that were leveraged by the AAWSAP nor the witnesses interviewed were made aware the Defense Intelligence Agency was funding the collection of the reports. It is likewise omitted that people who at the time suggested the intelligence community might be involved in MUFON affairs, which even included the organization’s then-director James Carrion, were criticized and often shunned over voicing their concerns. According to Carrion, he and most of the MUFON governing board, other than John Schuessler, were not allowed to know the source of the funds negotiated from BAASS to MUFON, only that BAASS was acting as a conduit for an undisclosed sponsor (Carrion, 2011, January). The authors refer to John Schuessler as a scientific advisor in their version of the story. Rather than address the then-ambiguous money trail and a BAASS-MUFON deal that went south, they focus on descriptions of a rapid response team.

The authors say the team had the ability to collect physical evidence and promptly send it to multiple BAASS laboratories for forensic, biological, isotope and other types of scientific analysis. The next three dozen pages consist of witness narratives and notes compiled from case reports gathered by MUFON and BAASS investigators, though not a single instance of such analysis of physical evidence is presented, much less explored in detail.

In Chapter 15, the authors assert, “A significant achievement of the AAWSAP program was the successful development of the Data Warehouse.” However, I am unaware of any mention of a Data Warehouse in the records released in March 2022 by the Defense Intelligence Agency in response to requests submitted through the Freedom of Information Act. There is certainly no emphasis placed on such a database in the DIA records released. Therefore, much like the majority of material presented in this book, its status is largely unverified, and its practicality is subsequently in doubt. The authors add that a BAASS contract was awarded to Dr. Jacques Vallee of Documatica Research, LLC, to outline and classify anomalous aerial vehicles – basically, categorize and report on UFOs – as they may pose potential threats to the United States.

As the current status of the Data Warehouse is open to question, so is the validity of the records reported to populate it. According to the authors, the records consist of material gathered from such sources as MUFON, the Robert Bigelow-operated yet now disbanded National

Institute for Discovery Science, and Skinwalker Ranch, among others.

A handful of examples are offered of the some 248,000-plus cases reportedly making up the Data Warehouse database. The examples offered primarily involve witness testimony and include no actual raw data, detailed descriptions of tests conducted on physical evidence, results of any such tests, or similar material.

Arguments are presented that UAP activity involves psychic phenomena. This is tied into attempts to persuade readers to adopt the authors' conclusions that psychic phenomena inherent to UAP sightings bear significant responsibility in making the investigation of UAP difficult. Counterpoints are not discussed. Neither is it acknowledged that the types of psychic phenomena described and inferred are largely not accepted to exist within the scientific paradigm in which the authors suggest they and project personnel should be considered respected and active participants.

Skinwalker Ranch's alleged events are presented. The listed events were reported by security personnel and caretakers and include "Sensed or perceived presence," "Perceptions of being watched," and "Perceptions of emotional distress," among other subjective and arguably questionable categories. The reports include alleged orb sightings, hairs rising on the arm of security personnel, and a dog biscuit having to be used to coax a canine out from under a vehicle. These are examples of what is offered in support of the existence of anomalous phenomena out of some quarter of a million reports said to have been collected for a database described as a significant achievement of a \$22 million publicly funded project.

The authors report that at Skinwalker Ranch on January 30, 2008, "Norton finds two doors closed on one of the bedrooms. He previously recalls the doors being open, and there was no one in the trailers to shut the doors. Previous photographs taken by Norton indicate the doors were open."

One might find this book disappointing other than as entertainment or perhaps if interested in monitoring the unverified claims that circulate within the UFO subculture. It is simply another in a long line of UFO paperbacks that

make grand proclamations while failing to deliver data that justifies the contents. What's more, a significant number of those paperbacks are produced by the very circles kept by the authors.

When work is framed as scientific, then, by definition, there are certain standards to be respected and a burden of proof to be met. That is all the more the case when the work purports to address "the biggest secret in human history" (page xv). *Inside the U.S. Government Covert UFO Program* does not rise to that burden of proof.

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