

of the 11,000 sightings since 1947, did have some explanations. "The mysterious flaming object in the East was "probably a meteor."

As for Michigan's much-publicized and plentiful unidentified flying objects, they turned out to be monkeyshines instead of moonships: "Unidentified college boys" playing pranks with flares to frighten the girls in the dormitories, came the august report from a distinguished astronomer called in by the Air Force to investigate the Hillsdale affair.

Every report of a "flying saucer" had ostensibly been checked out by the Air Force's special squad known as "Project Blue Book," although the staff was woefully small. Of the 10,147 sightings since 1947, the Air Force insisted that only 646 remain unexplained — and most of these because of insufficient information. The others have been attributed to planes, balloons, astronomical causes, missiles, swamp gas, meteors, fireworks and, in some cases, to hallucinations and psychological reasons.

#### Ball Lightning?

Philip Klass, avionics editor of *Aviation Week & Space Technology* magazine, recently proposed some other

explanations. Klass, an electronics engineer, said a form of "ball lightning," generated by high tension power lines, could explain the phenomena.

Many of the sightings, said Klass, occurred along or very near high-tension lines where luminous balls of ionized air could be generated under certain conditions.

#### 'No Threat'

The main conclusions reached by the Air Force were:

- "No unidentified flying objects reported, investigated and evaluated by the Air Force have ever given any indication of a threat to our national security."

- "There has been no evidence submitted to or discovered by the Air Force that sightings represent technological developments or principles beyond the range of present day scientific knowledge."

- "There has been no evidence that sightings categorized as unidentified are extraterrestrial vehicles."

Major Donald Keyhoe, however, was unconvinced. Major Keyhoe, USMC (retired), director of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), a private space watching organization, accused the Air Force of conducting a long-term whitewash on the UFO question.

It was Keyhoe's theory that the Air Force was withholding information for fear of causing public panic. UFOs, insisted the Major, who had never seen one, were of extraterrestrial origin and the Air Force feared that the



public could not accept this knowledge. "They won't give

you details," he complained. "If they did, many of their explanations would fall flat."

And Keyhoe could also claim a powerful ally in

Michigan's Gerald Ford, the House Republican leader, who suggested it would be "a very wholesome thing" for Congress to look into unidentified flying objects. Such an investigation, Ford suggested, would make the American people "feel better."

#### Study in Depth

Whether or not that was so, the Air Force last week took definite steps to make itself feel better. Fed up with investigating reports of glowing, flying, zooming, winking, awesome, blinking, streaking, hovering things, the Air Force last week decided to bail itself out of all responsibility for future conclusions concerning UFOs.

The Air Force announced

that it had commissioned the University of Colorado to conduct an "in-depth" study of flying saucers for the next 18 months. The director of the study (expected to cost \$300,000) would be Dr. Edward U. Condon, former director of the National Bureau of Standards, and now a physics professor at Colorado.

To satisfy the skeptics, and insure the study's objectivity, Colorado would select several other universities to take part in the independent investigation, with about 100 scientists participating.

And in case that wasn't enough, the National Academy of Sciences also agreed to appoint a panel to review the Colorado report.