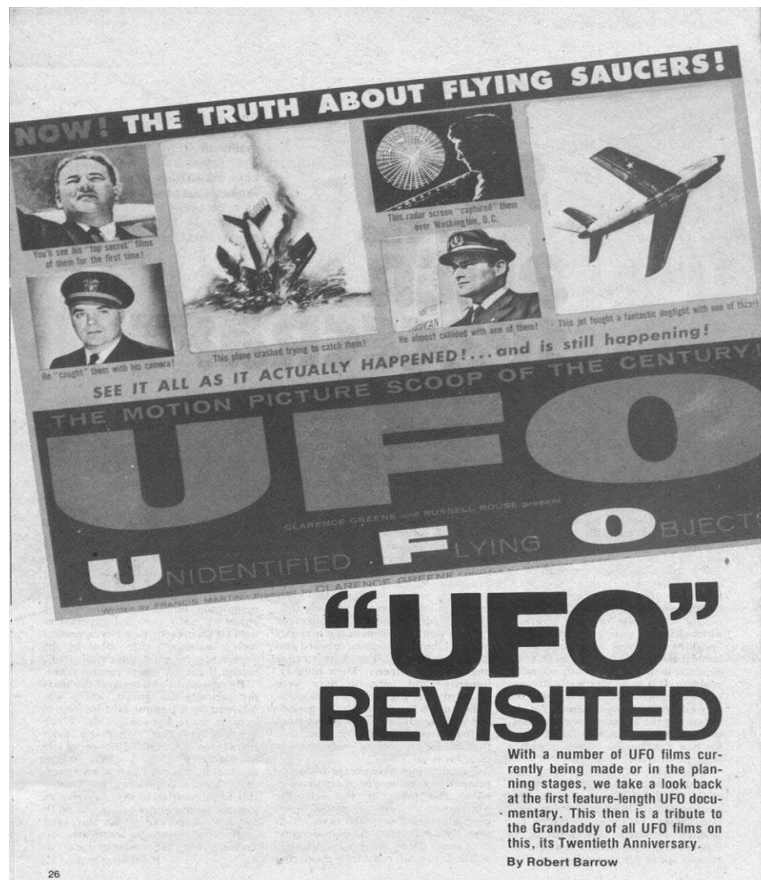


"U.F.O." REVISITED

"Unidentified Flying Objects", 1956 A Greene-Rouse Production.

By Robert Barrow (1976)



Note: This great article concerning the documentary film, appeared in 1976 in OFFICIAL UFO Magazine and was very extensive. The entire article [14 pages of regular type] was retyped into two web pages by Jerry Washington and Francis Ridge. Part one is the Al Chop story, of which the documentary was based. Part two covers the other persons portrayed in the movie.

With a number of UFO films currently being made or in the planning stages, we take a look back at the first feature-length UFO documentary. This, then, is a tribute to the Granddaddy of all UFO films on this, its Twentieth Anniversary.



Al chop

Most of U.F.O. concerned the official activities of Albert M. Chop. In the fifties, he watched the UFO story in the making with government officials. Today, he has dealings with the government's atomic energy project.

Al Chop (Tom Towers) is promoted to Chief of the Press Section at the U.S. Air Force's Air Materiel Command. Soon after, he is transferred to the Pentagon and assigned to Project Blue Book.



Actor Tom Towers as Al Chop

"I saw an unidentified flying object." Clarence Greene, producer of the 1956 United Artists release, *"U.F.O."*, recently gave me this answer when I asked why he decided to make the movie. In 1956, Greene was a partner in Greene-Rouse Productions, Los Angeles. Today, he is President of Tower Productions, located in the same city.

Since *"U.F.O."*, Greene has produced a number of motion picture features: *"The Fastest Gun Alive," "New York Confidential," "The Oscar," "Caper of the Golden Bulls,"* and others. Because of his simply-stated reason, Clarence Greene produced a major motion picture dealing with the UFO subject which surfaced in 1956, 92 minutes in duration, 8,166 feet in length, and shot in black & white - except for two actual films of UFOs which were offered in their original color.

During an August night in 1952, Greene and a friend were standing outside the former's house. The friend called attention to an object in the sky that looked like a "sphere of

light." For five minutes, they watched the UFO maneuver through stops and turns until it finally sped away over the horizon. Later, Greene learned that the UFO had also been seen by members of the Ground Observer Corps.

The producer readily admitted that the sighting made *"an indelible impression"* on him. The next day, he told his partner, Russell Rouse, and the Greene-Rouse staff of the incident. This was a harsh period of time for sighting witnesses who made their reports public, and now Clarence Greene knew how others must have felt in the face of contempt and ridicule.

"I was to learn," he explained, *"that hundreds of other sightings had been made, with the sighters reluctant to mention it for fear of ridicule. I found myself becoming irritated at the scoffers. I was at a complete loss to understand why there seemed to be such a determined effort to suppress all news of UFOs by what seemed to be a planned campaign of skepticism and scoffing."*

Greene decided the public should know the facts about *"flying saucers."* He began to delve into the UFO enigma. He discovered that Albert M. Chop, who had once been the Pentagon's Press Information Specialist and handled UFO news was nearby on the West Coast.

"I had several meetings with him," Greene stated. *"Chop was reluctant to talk at first. But when he realized I was dead serious about the unidentified flying object business, he gave me a breakdown on Project Blue Book, code name for the investigation of UFO."* Chop and certain newsmen subsequently arranged a meeting between Greene and Capt. Edward Ruppelt, USAF Reserve, former Director of Project Bluebook.



When some of Tom Towers' friends in Detroit learned that U.F.O. was coming to town in 1956, they arranged to have his name put up in lights on the marquee of the KRIM Theater. Towers recalls that his friends owned the theater, and sent him this photo *"much to my pleasure and surprise."*

"Together," Greene continued, "we went into a lengthy and exhaustive study of reports, various documents and affidavits of UFO sightings and reports from radar experts which, with some heretofore top secret motion pictures, in color, of flying saucers, form the basis of the film."

Several months ago, Greene assured me that there was no official opposition to his plans to make the movie, nor was there any from his colleagues when they learned of this first-time event. He had no trouble in negotiating for use of the Montana (Mariana) and Utah (Newhouse) UFO films, which had only recently been declassified and made available publicly.

However, according to David Michael Jacobs in his excellent book, *"The UFO Controversy in America"* (1975, Indiana University Press), there was official concern going on in the background over Green's movie. Jacobs stated that Capt. George T. Gregory, who became head of Project Bluebook in April, 1956, was a UFO "debunker." He and the Air Force were obviously very concerned with "U.F.O."

Quoting Jacobs: *"Gregory kept a file of all the movie's reviews, notifications, and advertisements, carefully underlining every statement that might cause problems for the Air Force or generate interest in UFOs. From Richard Dyer McCann's review in the 'Christian Science Monitor,' Gregory singled out the statement, 'It will almost certainly stir up a storm of public controversy,' and added the marginal note, 'This is something that neither PIO (Office of Public Information) or ATIC would like to undergo again!' ATIC asked Dr. J. Allen Hynek (AF Chief UFO Consultant) and Air Force officers to review the film before its release, and asked photo experts to compare copies of the Mariana and Newhouse films with the excerpts shown in the movie. ATIC Chief Scientist A. Francis Arcier met with agency officials to discuss the preparation of a case file giving the official Air Force explanation for every sighting portrayed in the film."*

"When the film was released in May 1956, the 'storm of controversy' turned out to be little more than a light mist. "U.F.O." was successful, but it did not cause flying saucer hysteria, criticism of the Air Force, or more UFO reports."

Air Force concern was probably legitimate at the time, for Greene had gone straight to the source by getting technical assistance from people like Chop, Ruppelt and Dewey J. Fournet Jr. (Fournet, as an AF Major, had been the AF UFO Project Monitor).

Clarence Greene demanded realism in his movie. Several key people played their own roles. Many of the "extras" in *"U.F.O."* were officials or members of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department who had experiences with UFOs and UFO reports. They offered their cooperation by "moonlighting" in the movie. And while it is true that *"U.F.O."* is a film composed of unknown actors, there is a scene during portrayal of the legendary 1952 radar-visual sightings over Washington, DC where a well-known name is involved. The voice of the pilot of *"Red Dog One,"* who is surrounded by UFOs while in flight, is that of veteran actor Harry Morgan who played Col. Sherman Potter on the television series, *"M*A*S*H."*

Despite Greene's painstaking concern for authenticity (even the script went through some severe changes in the interest of accuracy - the final production seems totally unlike many of the original pages of the script). *"U.F.O."* did not "make bricks" at the theaters. This seems to be a real anomaly, considering the period interest and enthusiasm for unusual and science-fiction films. Why didn't *"U.F.O."* captivate everybody with its enticement for real oddities?

At any rate, according to Albert Chop in a letter he wrote me in 1966 (he was then Deputy Public Affairs Officer for NASA in Houston), "The documentary *"U.F.O."* accurately portrays my role in Project Bluebook. We tried, and I think succeeded, in keeping the film honest and accurate.

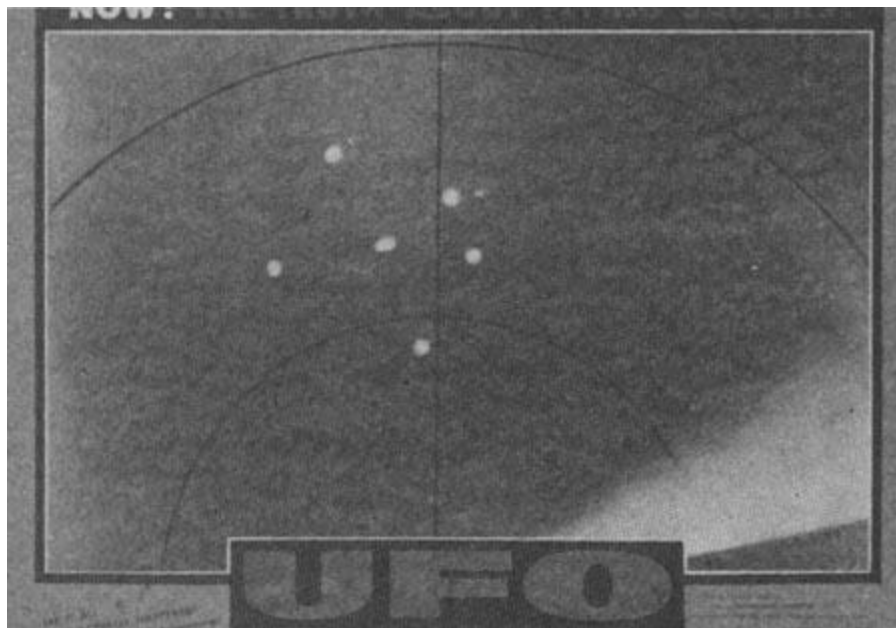
Perhaps that is the main reason why the producer and all participants failed to realize any monetary gains from the effort. According to the books," Chop certified, "the producer lost over a hundred thousand [dollars].

"Maybe a little of the Hollywood touch would have helped."

I asked Greene why the movie lost money at the box office. Was it possible, I queried in a letter, that the country wasn't ready for the documentary-like motion picture in 1956?

"It is possible," he replied, *"but the audience wasn't ready."*

He had *"no way of knowing"* how *"U.F.O."* might have done if it were filmed today instead of in 1956. Further, Greene disclosed that he never considered making a *"U.F.O. Part II."*



Washington, D.C. UFOs show up on radar, surrounding "Red Dog One" jet interceptor.

No matter, though, how the movie fared at the theaters. UFO researchers and *"fans"* can be grateful to Clarence Greene for his concern with honesty in the documentary.

"I made 'U.F.O.' because of a simple, but most urgent belief," Greene stated when the movie opened in 1956, *"that the public should know the true facts about flying saucers."*

Well, what about Al Chop and UFOs? This is the man whose background of UFO knowledge and work for the government in the early fifties precipitated Clarence Greene's efforts in making a movie about his official UFO experiences.

Prior to Chop's assignment to the Pentagon's UFO Press Desk, Chop acted as Chief of the Press Section, Headquarters, Air Materiel Command, USAF, at Wright-Patterson AFB. At that time he wrote press releases, unsigned articles and responses to various inquiries. These duties were routine to the job. Among the unsigned pieces Chop wrote was one on helicopters which were becoming popular for use in the Korean conflict. The article saw print in *"Newsweek"* and assorted newspapers across the country.

Chop's opinion about UFOs at the time was: *"this whole saucer business is pure, unadulterated bunk."* He was as confirmed a skeptic as there could be.

However, after his promotion to Chief of the Press Section at A.M.C., he began to change his mind. Chop talked with top government personnel who were certain UFOs existed. He learned the government was, indeed, vitally concerned about UFOs.

When he was transferred to the Pentagon's Press Section, by request of Colonel Richard Searles, Chop - much to his surprise - was assigned directly to UFO investigation. It was here that he met Maj. Dewey Fournet of the Current Intelligence Branch. Chop worked closely with Fournet (UFO Project Monitor) and Capt. Ruppelt, head of Project Bluebook. Throughout the months he served with the official project, Chop cautiously began to accept the reality of UFOs.

What caliber of UFO sightings did it take to alter his skepticism of *"flying saucers?"* One early report from 1951, mentioned in *"U.F.O.,"* Was sophisticated enough to make a big impression on Al Chop. He recently recalled:

"There was a report from General Mills' scientists who were tracking a large weather balloon with a theodolite," Chop began. *"They saw an object descend on their balloon and make several passes at it. When the balloon was retrieved, it had a ten-foot dent in its side. The report contained figures on elevation, wind direction, and details on the appearance and exit of the UFO."*

Considering the position Al Chop held, enviable from the viewpoint of a UFO researcher, it is easy to realize how the Pentagon's Press Chief became a believer.

"You must remember," he continued, *"that I was privy to the project files. These contained hundreds of official reports of UFO encounters made by military personnel"*

from all branches of the service. They were all classified with a high degree of security classification."

"Almost all of these made pretty scary reading from the verbatim descriptions of the pilots concerned."

By the time Chop viewed the famous Utah and Montana films, two years later, his observation of them *"merely strengthened my personal beliefs and theories on the subject of UFOs. I leaned heavily toward the extraterrestrial theory prior to viewing the Montana and Newhouse films."*

Chop described for me what it was really like to have been on the scene during the incredible incidents depicted in *"U.F.O."* Without a doubt, his most hectic time with the official project came during the classic month of July 1952, when up to 14 UFOs (at one time) appeared several times over Washington, DC on July 20, when the things first flew over the nation's capital, Chop was home sleeping through the chaos. But for the next week, his desk was bombarded with press queries from across the country.

Then, a week later, Al Chop really became firmly involved in UFO history. It was July 26, around midnight, when the phone at his home rang.

"The initial phone call was received from the FAA Public Information Officer at the airport (Washington National)." The officer told Chop the UFOs over DC Were being tracked on radar.



Dewey J. Fournet, Jr., today: In the early fifties, Major Fournet was the Monitor of the UFO Project. He, Chop and Ruppelt worked closely together.

"I told him I would be there as quickly as I could make it. After dressing, I called Major Fournet at his home and gave him what information I had. I asked my wife, Dolores, to come with me." This is one of the few points on which the movie and reality differ. In *"U.F.O."*, Chop (played by Tom Towers) tells his wife *"don't wait up"* and leaves for the airport by himself.

Speeding to Washington National, the Chops' kept looking skyward, hoping to see the objects which some people were seeing visually. There was nothing in sight.

"I was rather apprehensive, but for no particular reason," Chop recalls. "All reports (of previous sightings) failed to mention any hazard to the observers. I did wonder what fate had decreed that I would be a part of the UFO project."

"In my haste I did probably run a few red lights or stop signs. However, there was extremely light traffic at that time of the morning, and I made the trip in a matter of 20 minutes or less."

The movie *"U.F.O."*, like many written accounts of the Washington National Sightings, concerned itself with the prominent details. I thought it would be interesting to ask Chop about the lesser known, obscure factors of this arrival at the airport.

"Well," he went on, "a routine evening in an airport traffic control center can best be described as exceedingly monotonous at least back in 1952 when most airplanes were slow prop jobs and air travel was not at its heyday. The military planes had their own airport facilities and were not using Washington National runways except on special occasions. So, there usually was very little conversation among tower personnel except the routine conversation and the usual low-key conversation between controllers and aircraft pilots flying in their vicinity."

But, true to the setting of the motion picture which dramatized this summer night in 1952, the atmosphere was 'electric.' Everyone was aware that something unusual was going on. There were at least a dozen news media representatives on hand. They were confined to an ante room outside the radar room.



Al Chop (Tom Towers) watches UFOs on radar as the things continue their maneuvers over Washington, D.C. in 1952. The other officials are portrayed by Los Angeles law enforcement officers, who provided their talents to U.F.O.

"They were all clamoring for access to the radar." Chop immediately gave permission for the newsmen to watch the unknowns on the radar scope. "So, we had a mixed bag of reporters, including photographers, government personnel and airport control operators. Major Fournet arrived soon after I let the reporters into the room."

In *"U.F.O."*, Chop is seen to refuse reporters access to the radar, which is inaccurate, though news personnel were asked to leave during intercept attempts, as was Mrs. Chop.

I asked Chop how everyone in the scope room felt when one of the pursuing pilots (Red Dog One) was surrounded by UFOs visually and on radar. Was there a sense of helplessness or disbelief?

"Disbelief, No! Helplessness, Yes!" he insisted. "As we looked up at each other while watching that intercept attempt, you could imagine each of us trying to think of something that would be helpful."

"I might also add there were no disbelievers around that scope. We all knew these objects represented something with which we could not cope."

All of this happened for several hours, while the radar room was in constant contact with the radar personnel at Andrews AFB (where UFOs were simultaneously tracked on radar). *"These people were as apprehensive as we."*

Skipping ahead to the present year, I asked Chop if his views on UFOs had changed since 1956, when the movie portrayed him as accepting the extraterrestrial theory for UFOs.

"I have not changed my theories on this subject as expressed in the film, except to consider the possibility that these objects could originate from another dimension in time and space."

"It does seem improbable that physical objects can travel the vast distances between star systems in a profitable time span as we measure time and longevity here on our planet Earth." Chop has apparently done some thinking in this realm; he has discussed, for example, various theories on what happens to dying stars that eventually become "holes" in space, with top physicists.

Clarence Greene indicated in 1956 that Chop was reluctant to assist with *"U.F.O."* Chop bears this out.

"When first approached about helping with the documentary back in 1954, I was extremely wary about getting involved. However, in subsequent discussions with Greene and Russell Rouse, I became convinced they really wanted to do an unbiased, objective documentary that would shed some light on this subject for the general public."

"A secondary, yet very important objective, was to try to stimulate more interest in UFOs among the scientific personnel in our country."

Did you like the finished product? Any regrets about the movie?

"I continue to have mixed emotions concerning our efforts. I think we did make a contribution but we didn't achieve our goals. I am reminded of this every time I meet up with, or read about, an individual who flatly states there is nothing to the subject."

"One wonders," Chop considers, "what it will take to get people on Earth vitally interested. I wince when I think of the cost of the University of Colorado's 'Condon Study.'"

"It is so damn obvious to anyone involved in the project that the 'findings' are nothing but a calculated farce. But why? Somewhere, there's a reasoned motive I will never understand."

Drawing again on his own experiences with the official UFO investigation, Al Chop commented on a couple of names which are familiar to many UFO researchers.

"It was interesting to observe from the sidelines how Dr. Robert L. Baker changed 180 degrees from a disbeliever to one embracing the extraterrestrial theory as a result of his study of the Montana and Newhouse films. In similar fashion, it was interesting to observe the change in Allen Hynek. I met him many years ago when his primary mission in the project seemed to be that of casting discredit on all those who reported UFO encounters."

Chop finally left the Press Desk at the Pentagon *"because it was apparent the lid was back on the project and I don't believe in working in a vacuum."* Nor did he like working in the Washington, DC area.

His only recent efforts on the UFO subject went into the syndicated TV documentary, *"UFOs: Past, Present and Future,"* presented by Allen Sandler. Chop had not seen the feature, but heard from various people that it was a *"good effort."*

"Clarence Greene and Russell Rouse, as well as Allen Sandler, all lived up to my expectations as well as their own word concerning film documentaries. I have no regrets over being part of their efforts. I am disappointed that we could not achieve more with the material we had to work with, but I think we did make a good start."

In response to a question about UFO investigations of today, Chop believes *"the news media has come a long way in their treatment of UFO reports. Unfortunately, the government policy has not changed noticeably...it still exudes an air of disinterest in the subject...it is downplayed as being of no particular importance. It is regrettable that our government officials cannot be more candid about their activities in this respect."*

Seemingly, Chop doesn't buy the story that the government stopped investigating UFOs when Project Bluebook closed: *"Our military forces and national security agencies have the continuing responsibility of investigating everything and anything that might prove a 'possible' threat to our country."*

"It follows, then, quite naturally, that UFOs must continue to be investigated thoroughly or the agencies concerned are not doing their assigned job."

Chop indicated a preference that might surprise veteran UFO researchers. *"I would welcome an opportunity to be involved in any official government dealing with UFOs."*

It would have to be an objective, unclassified effort, with security classification limited to a genuine need to safeguard our own hardware performance. *"And,"* he reflected, offering a quick qualifying remark, *"since that will never come about in my lifetime, I prefer to sit on the sidelines as an observer."*

"That's my reasoning," Chop said, *"and it goes all the way back through Projects Sign, Grudge, and Bluebook, which should tell you something about the continuing need for study efforts."*

Al Chop. With his background, he could only be an asset to a private UFO investigation. He departed from NICAP many years ago because *"UFO authors"* had distorted his image and tried to tie in his UFO-NICAP affiliation with his NASA employment. There was no such connection, but Chop, tired of the lies and angered by the inaccuracies, left the UFO scene.

Aside for his respect for the movie that portrayed him so well, Chop is a good, longtime friend of Major Donald E. Keyhoe (USMC, ret.) and staunchly lauds Keyhoe's pioneering UFO work.

Al Chop. After these years, he keenly reinforces what many UFO researchers tend to forget: *"Someone, somewhere, has got to have the responsibility in our national security plans to continue the investigation of unknown objects reported in our skies."*

End of Part One.