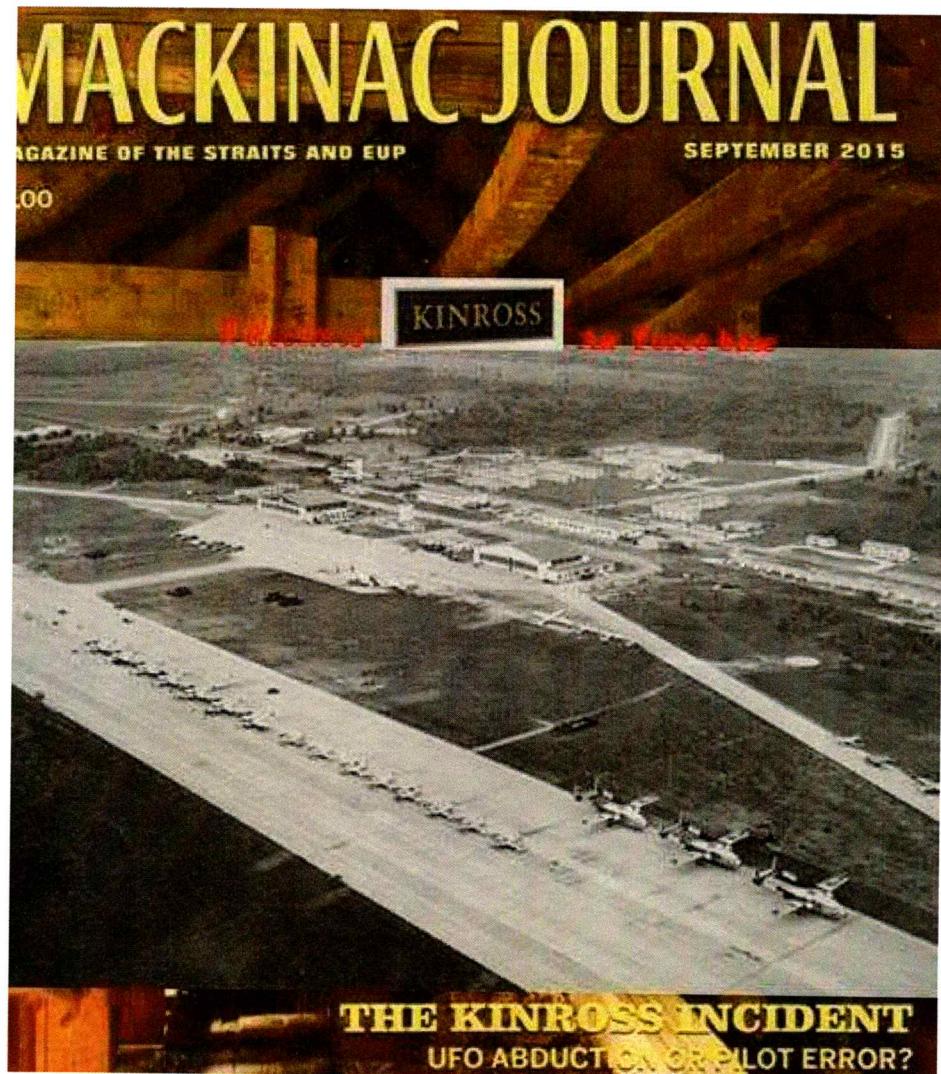


MACKINAC JOURNAL

Magazine of the Straits and EUP

The Kinross Incident

By Rick Wiles



The Kinross Incident

Myth or truth?

The threat of **communism** during early 1950s spread **suspicion** and **nervousness** to such levels that **people** began **reporting** sightings of **unidentified objects flying**

By Rick Wiles

Over 50 years ago, on Nov. 23, 1953, the newly established Kinross Air Force Base, 13 miles south of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, was the subject of a mysterious airplane disappearance. The incident would become known as the "Kinross Case," and it still continues to intrigue many people.

On July 1, 1952, the former Kinross civilian airport, operated by the city of Sault Ste. Marie, became a United States Air Force base under the jurisdiction of the Air Defense Command. It was to become a fighter-interceptor base that could provide air defense for all of the Upper Great Lakes states, and specifically, the international Soo Locks located at Sault Ste. Marie. Those locks were an important passageway for iron ore from Minnesota to the steel mills of Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio, as well as Gary, Indiana.

During World War II the United States Army Air Corps had built the airport for use by the military for

protection of the vital locks. At the end of the war, in 1945, the military leased the airport to the city of Sault Ste. Marie. Then various commercial airlines provided flight service to eastern Upper Peninsula residents. By 1952, the United States Air Force wanted the property back because the Cold War with Russia was heating up.

Events leading up to the "Kinross Incident" of November 1953 included the worsening of relations between the former World War II allies, the United States and the Soviet Union (Russia). Russia, under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, had refused to give up territory seized during the Second World War. That war had ended in August of 1945, and by 1948, Stalin decided to try and obtain more territory by taking total control of the former German capital, Berlin. His actions caused the United States, England, and France to respond, and the Cold War between the two sides began to escalate.

By the early 1950s the United States and Russia were locked in an arms race. Each side was trying to develop their military capabilities faster than the other. This took place at the same time a Hot War was expanding on the Korean peninsula between the United States, South and North Korea, and China. Defeat of world Communism became the 1950s mantra of the United States.

All of this early 1950's militarism in the world brought anxiety and fears to the American public. The threat of communism during early 1950s spread suspicion and nervousness to such levels that people

Roswell Daily Record

RECORD PRIMES
Business Office 2288
News Department
2337

WEDNESDAY JULY 1, 1942

**RAAF Captures Flying Saucer
On Ranch in Roswell Region**

**Claims Army
Is Slackening
Courts Martial**

Indiana Senator
Lays Protest
Before Patterson

House Passes
Tax Slash by
Large Margin

Security Council
Paves Way to Talks
On Arms Reductions

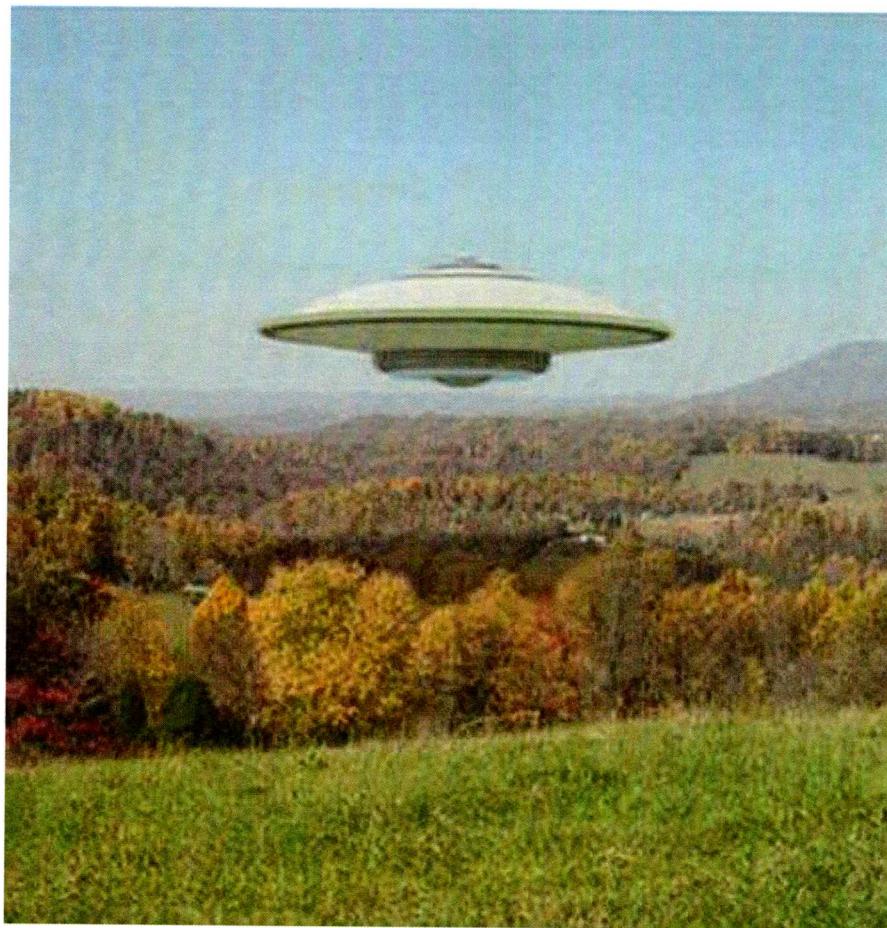
No Details of
Flying Disk
Are Revealed

Ex-King Carol Weds Mine. Lupescu

Roswell Hardware

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began reporting sightings of unidentified objects flying during America's daytime and nighttime skies. Some historians call it a time of "national hysteria."

The first recorded sighting of an UFO was on June 24, 1947, near Mt. Ranier, in the state of Washington. Within a three-week period, after this first sighting, over 850 similar sightings were reported to military authorities. Most of these early sightings were accounted for in terms of astronomical objects, aircraft, or just hoaxes. However, inevitably, a few cases proved more difficult to resolve and these provided fertile ground for wild speculations.

On July 8, 1947, the Roswell, New Mexico Army Air Field reported that a "flying disc" had crashed nearby in the field of a Roswell farmer. Something had actually dropped into the farmer's field. It was a nuclear test monitoring balloon device. Rather than admit to what it really was, the Army Air Corps (soon to become

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F-89C

"Scorpion" Interceptor

the Air Force) issued a statement that the fallen device was a weather balloon. Some people believed the military explanation. Others were more skeptical. There were those who even claimed there was cover-up going on that involved captured aliens at the Roswell crash site. From that point on, sightings of UFO's, in America's skies mostly in the form of flying discs, or saucers, began to increase.

In the midst of all this, on Nov. 23, 1953, an unknown object was sighted on radar, in a "no flight zone" area of the Upper Great Lakes. That area was between Ontario, Canada and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and centered over Lake Superior. According to the official Air Force Accident Report dated January 6, 1954, "*... at approximately 11:22 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, on November 23, 1953, an aircraft was scrambled from Kinross Air Force Base, Michigan, to participate in an Active Air Defense Mission. The aircraft and aircrew had not been located as of January 1, 1954 ... The F-89 C, Serial Number 51-5853A was scrambled to intercept and identify an unknown aircraft flying over Lake Superior. The aircraft became airborne ... and was flying at 30,000 feet ... at the request of "Pillow" (radar control) the aircraft descended to 7,000 feet to begin the interception. Location of the aircraft was then approximately 150 miles northeast of Kinross AFB over northern Lake Superior.*"

Two airmen were aboard the F89C Scorpion Interceptor when it left Kinross at 6:22 p.m. EST on November 23, 1953. They were 27-year-old 1st Lt. Felix "Gene" Moncla of Louisiana, and 22-year-old 2nd Lt. Robert L. Wilson of Oklahoma. Moncla was acting as pilot, and Wilson was the radar operator in the jet's second seat.

According to newspaper accounts, radar controllers at two various Air Force radar sites were watching their screens as the F-89C closed in on the UFO. They sat stunned in amazement as the two blips seem to merge on the screen. And then, the UFO left. The F-89C and its two man crew were never found, even after a thor-

ough search of the area.

One of those Air Defense tracking stations was located at Calumet, Michigan. The point where the radar blips merged and the fighter disappeared was on the Canadian side of Lake Superior. That final sighting was 70 miles off Keweenaw Point at altitude of 8,000 feet. That would be approximately 160 miles northwest of the Soo Locks at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, the location of the second radar tracking station.

The Scorpion, after leaving Kinross, had climbed to 30,000 feet and was cleared to descend to 7,000 feet, coming down at the other radar sighted target from above. The air was reported stable with little or no turbulence and only slight snow flurries reported. Clouds above the 5,000 feet height were fairly scattered. The wind was from the west with heavy clouds below 5,000 feet.

It was a United States Air Force all weather F-89C "Scorpion" jet that was sent to intercept the unknown target. According to the official Air Force Accident Report, the aircraft took off from Kinross air Force at 2322 Zebra (6:22 p.m.) to find the unknown radar object some 160 miles over Lake Superior and flying over 500 m.p.h. to the northwest. The last radio contact with the two man crew took place at 6:52 p.m. The, at approximately 6:55 p.m. radar screens showed the unknown object and the F-89C converge.

Ironically, it was the second F-89C Scorpion jet to be lost that day. Shortly after 12:30 p.m., on that Monday, an Air Force jet from Truax Air Field near Madison, Wisconsin crashed on takeoff. It dove into a marshy area close to the University of Wisconsin's arboretum. The jet exploded on impact killing both on board. That jet was on an engine testing mission when the mishap occurred.

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Built by Northup Aircraft, the F-89 jet was designed in 1945 as a long range defensive jet-interceptor. It was equipped with all weather radar, heavy 20 mm armament and sonic-speed capability. It was nicknamed "Scorpion" because of the plane's upswept tail. It was able to track a target with its onboard radar system sophisticated enough to work in very low visibility. In 1953 the plane was the most powerfully armed fighter of either side in the Cold War.

However, the F-89, because it was designed to reach speeds of Mach 1-650 mph, and still be able to fly long distances, needed a large thin wingspan that had to carry heavy loads of fuel. This proved to be problematic for the plane and from September 1951 through September of 1952 five planes had been lost to accidents. A total of four airmen were lost. The plane was recalled for a wing redesign fix and reintroduced by Northup in June of 1953 as F-89C.

Only 36 out of the original 172 F-89s were back in action by November of 1953. All that were in service were part of the 433d Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Wisconsin Truax Air Field and at the Kinross Air Force

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
BOARD REPORT



Base in Michigan. Both planes lost on Nov. 23, 1953 were F-89Cs and the last two of those type planes to crash.

The Jan. 6, 1954, official Air Force Accident Report concerning aircraft F-89C Serial Number 5853A, assigned to the 433rd Fighter-Interceptor Squadron of Truax Field and Kinross Air Force Base concluded that:

1. *The aircraft probably crashed into the Canadian waters of Lake Superior just prior to or at the time of an intercept.*
2. *The Ground Control Intercept station had been vectoring the aircraft to intercept an unidentified aircraft.*
3. *The Ground Control Intercept station maintained radar contact with both the interceptor and the uniden-*

tified until the time of interception.

4. Instrument only flying conditions prevailed during the time of interception and could be a cause factor in the accident.

In addition, the Accident Report stated that, "radar reception was considered exceptionally good during the entire period of the interceptor's flight ... Both Ground Control Intercept stations reported difficulty in receiving radio transmissions from the pilot of the F-89 ..."

The unidentified aircraft in the Accident Report was said to be a Canadian Air Force Dakota C-47 transport plane flying east from Winnipeg to Sudbury, Ontario some 30 miles off course to the south of its intended flight plan. The pilot of that aircraft stated in the report that he was flying on top of a 5,000 foot overcast of clouds, and at the time of interception, was flying in the clear, his visibility unlimited. The report also stated that he did not know he was being intercepted, and did not see the F-89C plane.

There was a search of the area by both the United States and Royal Canadian Air Force but subsequent heavy snows did not allow for a land search of the northern Lake Superior shoreline. The pilot of the F-89C, Lt. Moncla, had over 1,120 hours of flying time recorded, and over 100 hours of instrument flying time. His night time experience was somewhat limited at approximately two hours. His F-89C plane had flown earlier in the day with no reported mechanical problems.

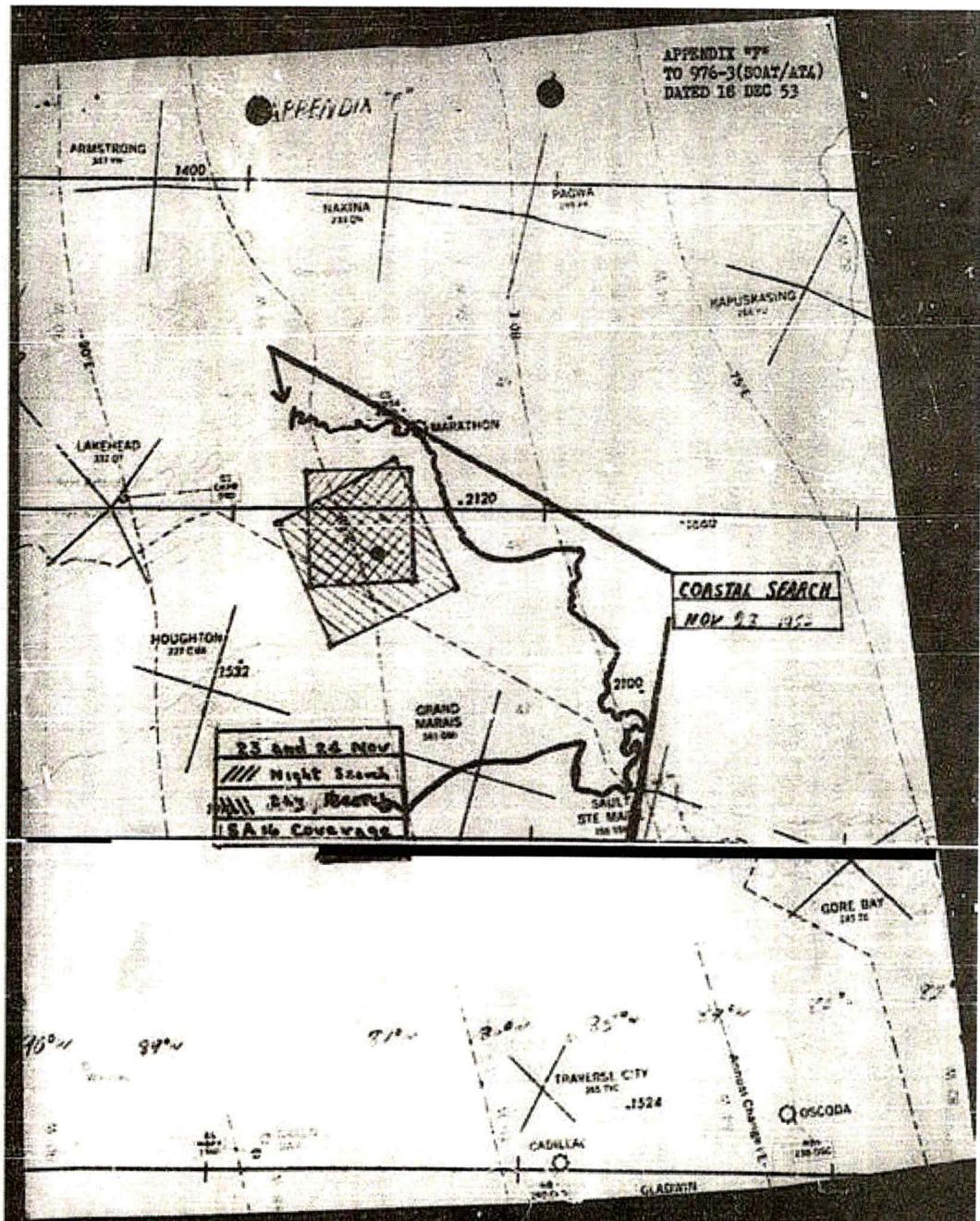
Two F-89s were eventually were dispatched to the area of the last radar sighting of the missing jet, along with Coast Guard cutters from Houghton and Marquette, Michigan. The C-47 Royal Canadian Air Force pilot was in radio contact with the two United States

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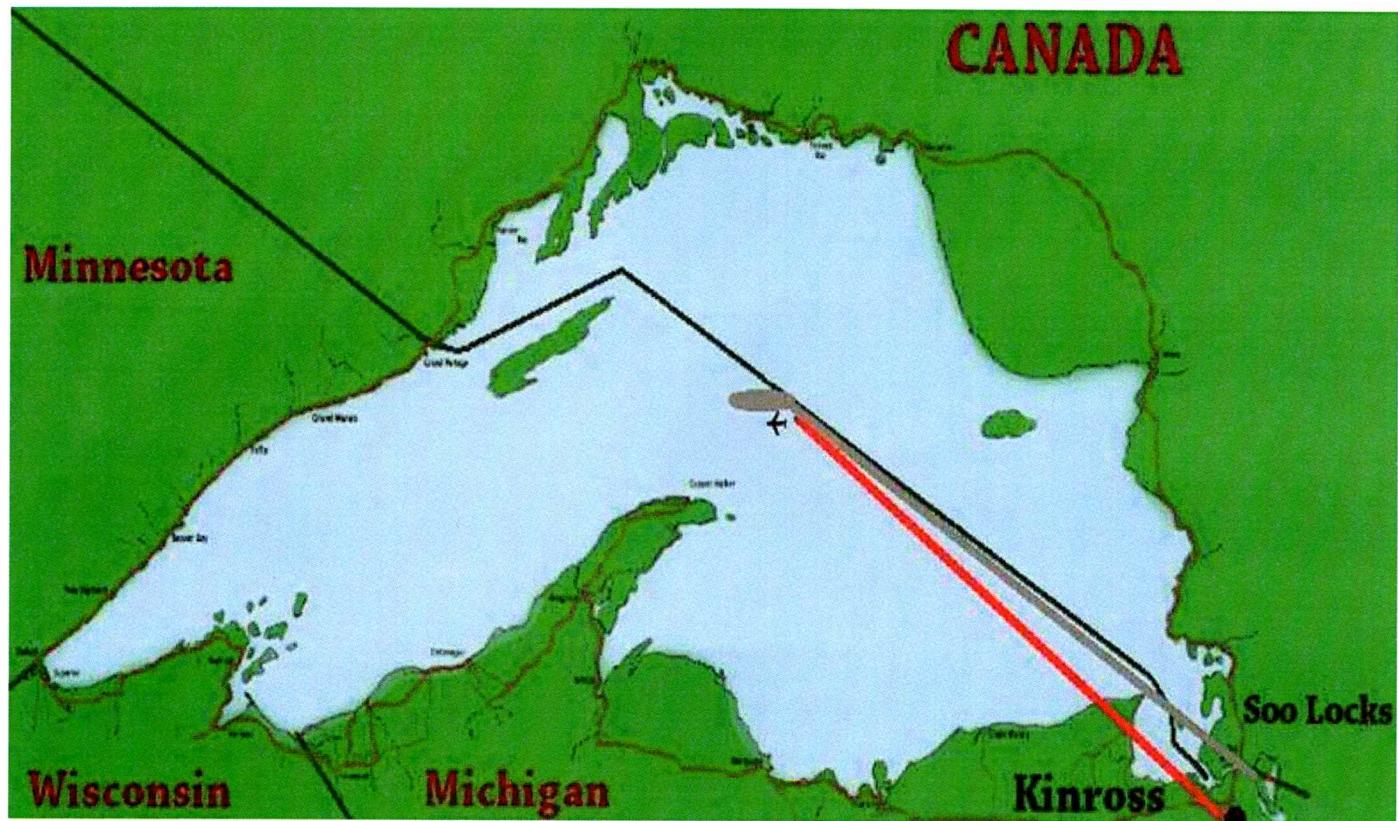


Royal Canadian Air Force C-47 Dakota

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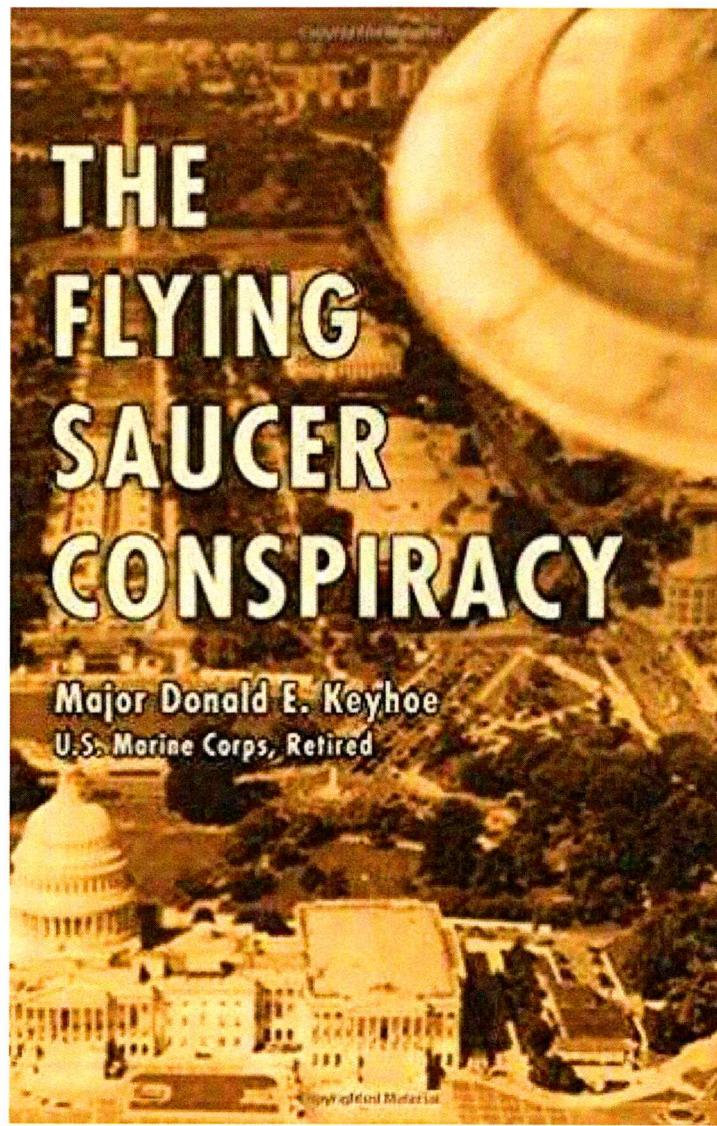
Air Force radar tracking sites. He reported to them at the time of the accident that he had encountered some "rime" icing but that at 7,000 feet the visibility was unlimited. He said he never was in radio or visual contact with another plane.

The search resumed in May of 1954 but the missing F-89C was never found. The Air Force concluded that it was most probable that the pilot, Lt. Moncla suffered from vertigo that night, and most likely, he crashed into Lake Superior. The Air Force also concluded that the radar operators probably just saw a "false or phantom echo" of the F-89C which was being produced by atmospheric conditions and would explain the merging of the jet with the other sighting, and then its vanishing when the Scorpion struck the water.

So, did a UFO abduct an Air Force jet interceptor and its two man crew that night of Nov. 23, 1953? Or, was pilot error and erroneous radar blips the foundation of the "Kinross Incident?" It was not long after the crash that the "Kinross Case" became public.

In his 1955 book, *The Flying Saucer Conspiracy*, former Marine and founder of the organization known as the National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), Donald Keyhoe, wrote about the missing F-89C plane. Keyhoe had earlier authored a magazine article in 1950 titled, "*Flying Saucers Are Real*." That was later expanded into a book selling over 500,000 copies. He argued that the United States Air Force knew UFO's were real and extraterrestrial and they were here to conduct reconnaissance and engage in sampling missions. That is what he felt happened to the Kinross missing plane and its two pilots.

In his 1955 book Kehoe wrote, "... the controller watched the jet's blip on his glowing radarscope. As it

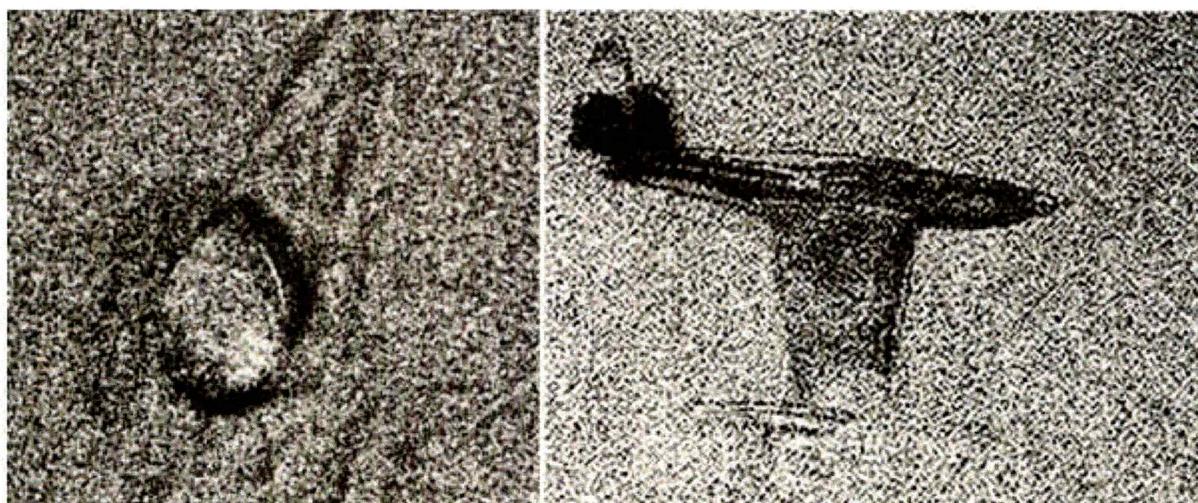


moved toward the UFO's blip, the strange craft changed course. The controller radioed Moncla, gave him the new bearing ... Gradually the F-89 cut down the gap. By now the controller knew that the interceptor should have spotted its quarry. Watching the chase he cut into his microphone and called the flight's code name. Target should be visible ... He broke off, staring at the scope. The two blips had suddenly merged into one ... the two machines were locked together, as if in a smashing collision. For a moment longer the huge, ominous blip remained on the glass. Then it quickly went off the scope ...”

An Aug. 29, 2006, American Chronicle online article stated: “*The mystery surrounding the 1953 "Kinross Case" may well be on its way to being solved. A diving salvage company, the Great Lakes Dive Company, announced they had discovered the wreckage of a F-89, and an unknown object at the bottom of Lake Superior. The objects were located at a depth of at least 250 feet. U-f-o-logists, who have been investigating this case, have been waiting for the results of side scan sonar and remotely operated vehicles (ROV) imaging.*”

A newspaper article in the Louisiana hometown of Lt. Moncla' family reported in 2013 that his cousin Buddy Moncla believed in the UFO theory. He stated that,

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Great Lakes Diving Company—August 2006 released photos of Lake Superior
bottom



Gene Moncla memorial in Sacred Heart Cemetery, Moreauville, LA.

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"All we were told was that their plane went down and they never were found."

It wasn't until many years later that I began to hear more details about the case and the unusual circumstances surrounding his cousin's disappearance ... I am open to the idea that a UFO snatched Gene and his co-pilot.

I was told that the last transmission recorded was (Gene) saying, "I'm going in for a closer look ... That is the last they heard ... that means his cousin saw something high over Lake Superior ... He saw something and the radar saw something. The radar made the story more controversial because the image of Gene's plane and the unknown object converged into one blip and then it disappeared.■

Richard Wiles is a retired history and reading development instructor at Petoskey High School and a retired graduate research instructor for Spring Arbor University. His research papers are filed at the Petoskey Public Library and include: Summerset-The Robison Murder Case, Fireball in the Sky-The B-52 Crash, and The Woodland Indian National Park Wiles holds a Bachelor's degree in history from the University of Toledo, a Master's degree in reading development-psychology from Michigan State University, and an Educational Specialist degree in community leadership from Central Michigan University. He can be reached through the Mackinac Journal.