

# Oppenheimer and UFOs

By Donald R. Burleson, Ph.D.

The key to the refusal of Oppenheimer's security clearance (as discussed in Part One last month), I would suggest, is the fact that Gordon Gray was running the day-to-day operation at the AEC clearance hearings.

There had to be more to the matter than Oppenheimer's long-renounced prewar political leanings or his running argument with Edward Teller about the desirability of building the H-bomb.



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Those things themselves fall flat, without some darker reason in the background—some reason that had not been there in 1942, but was there by 1954.

Here we recall the SSS (Smith-Sarbacher-Steinman) correspondence indicating Oppenheimer's early involvement in UFO crash retrieval operations.

And we must note that as a member of MJ-12, Gordon Gray, officiating over the so-called Gray Board at the AEC hearings, would have *known* that Oppenheimer knew things classified "higher than the H-bomb," things that he had not known in 1942 or even in 1945.

Gray would have known that Oppenheimer was continuing to learn government secrets of unprecedented and unparalleled sensitivity.

And in all likelihood, given the growing independence of spirit Oppenheimer was exhibiting over the Teller controversy, which would look altogether different when seen in the light of what Gordon Gray knew, Gray might well have found it prudent to recommend taking Oppenheimer out of the loop before his newfound waywardness took the form, possibly, of deciding that the public had a right to know about what had occurred at crash sites in New Mexico.

This is not to say that Oppenheimer ever really would have disclosed those things, which I doubt, but a conservative-thinking MJ-12 member might have feared that he would.

It has always been standard procedure, of course, to admonish anyone leaving the privileged ranks of security clearance holders not to talk about anything they know.

Oppenheimer knew—and those officiating over his situation knew—that his becoming an outsider would in no way alter his responsibility to maintain silence about classified information he had already learned.

But those in power would also have wanted to prevent his learning any more than he already knew about so sensitive a matter as UFO crashes and retrievals, given that he was regarded in the end as a distinct security risk, whether justly or not.

It is interesting, too, that when Oppenheimer was finally denied his clearance, and when, leaving government service forever to resume his position as director of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies, AEC chief Lewis Strauss followed him there and attempted (unsuccessfully) to block his reappointment.

This has all the flavor of a personal vendetta, quite possibly colored by whatever exchanges Strauss had with Gray over Oppenheimer's clearance, but one wonders why Strauss considered Oppenheimer so dangerous that he should not be allowed to function even in private life.

When Strauss summed up his decision against Oppenheimer at the end of the AEC hearings, he said, "A Government official having access to the most sensitive areas of restricted data and to the innermost details of national war plans and weapons must measure up to exemplary standards of reliability, self-discipline, and trustworthiness" (Polenberg, 380).

When we read these comments in the light of the Sarbacher correspondence (which no one in 1954 knew would ever come to light), Strauss' choice of

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words—"the most sensitive areas of restricted data"—tends to take on new meaning.

One must assume that Strauss knew perfectly well that the subject of nuclear arms was not the "most sensitive," though he may not have known the specifics that Gray must have known. In any event, Strauss, Gray's boss, would in the end have been following up Gray's recommendations, however much or little Strauss himself knew of the UFO phenomenon.

There are other indications that Oppenheimer's knowledge of highly secret matters ran far beyond those usually cited.

In his own initial response to the charges brought against him, Oppenheimer, referring to the postwar years circa 1947 at the old Manhattan Project facility in New Mexico, said, "Los Alamos also had wide interests in scientific matters only indirectly related to the weapons program" (Polenberg, 25).

Testifying in Oppenheimer's defense