

YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Surprise Attack: From Pearl Harbor to 9/11 to Benghazi

Larry Hancock

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20 Highlights | 0 Notes

Yellow highlight | Location: 206

> For our focus, certain points need to be noted about these messages. First, in terms of strategic/threat warning, the general threat of surprise attack was seemingly as evident as we will find in virtually any of the instances of the following decades, including that of a terror strike inside the United States in the fall of 2001. Second, while the commanders at Pearl Harbor would receive the most criticism and actual disciplinary action following the initial Japanese attacks, it was the Philippines command, in particular General MacArthur, who had been most specifically warned that the imminent Japanese military action would involve a surprise attack on his forces. Finally, the last sentence of the message sent to Kimmel and Hart, with its order to conduct defensive preparations in secrecy, brings up a subject to devote considerable discussion to as this work proceeds—the concept and effectiveness of "deterrence."

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,651

> Unidentified object sightings over American military bases began in the early summer of 1947 and continued through the end of the decade. They were reported in the immediate vicinity of major military bases and aerospace development centers, not only in the United States but on a global scale—from Newfoundland to Guam, Hawaii to Alaska. Sightings were reported at low to medium altitudes over the White Sands missile/rocket test range and the Muroc high-speed aircraft test center. Other reports

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> came from military observers at the huge San Francisco air bases of Fairfield-Suisun (the military's major Pacific transport hub) and Hamilton Field near San Francisco—a key Air Defense Command base and home to the first postwar American all-weather fighter squadrons.

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The Air Materiel Command was ordered to evaluate the reports as to whether they represented some celestial phenomenon or were actually foreign, controlled mechanical devices. Schulgen personally expressed concern that the sightings might be a Communist-orchestrated effort to create fear of a Russian secret weapon.

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For a period of less than ninety days, the FBI became actively involved with unidentified objects. A policy statement was issued that directed field offices to investigate any sighting that was brought to their attention and to ascertain whether it was a bona fide sighting, a prank, a publicity stunt or possibly a subversive act. While some leads did prove to be hoaxes, the Bureau also received and documented some good-quality sightings. One of the most significant was the observation by a United Airlines crew on July 4. While in the vicinity of Emmett, Idaho, at 6,500 feet the pilot and copilot observed two separate groups of objects—the second remaining in sight for some twelve to fifteen minutes. The objects had a flat base, a slightly rounded contour, with the apparent span of a DC-8 aircraft. The FBI did extensive interviews and background checks on the pilots.19 That sighting, along with a number of pilot observations, would become key material for the initial Air Force intelligence assessment. Unfortunately for the Air

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In-depth research by Joel Carpenter has revealed a much more complex story involved with the Midland fireball. His work is described in an essay titled “The Midland Fireball: Dow Chemical’s Early Involvement with UFOs.”27 Readers are encouraged to study the entire report; a brief summary of key points in the essay includes the fact that the senior Dow analyst, John (Hans) Grebe, performing the initial study, had been one of the key scientists responsible for many of Dow’s own major chemical advances.

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Grebe was considered by colleagues at Dow to be a genius; the early commercial success of his research encouraged Dow to give him broad leeway, and he established the company’s Physical Research Laboratory. Grebe’s labs produced an ongoing stream of valuable inventions including Styrofoam and a type of synthetic rubber highly valuable to the U.S. military during WWII. He also developed a process for extracting magnesium from seawater; it became Dow’s main source for that metal. Grebe’s role in advising the American military was extensive. He served as an observer at the 1946 Operation Crossroads nuclear tests and worked closely with the U.S. Army Chemical Corps on highly classified chemical warfare projects. In 1948 Grebe was named chief

technical advisor for the Army Chemical Corps. In September of that year, while working at Edgewood Arsenal, Grebe requested an update on the fireball investigation from Dow Chemical. After reviewing the material and considering the available data—including the fact that the sand from the "fall" had produced a different chemical spectrum than sand from the surrounding area—Grebe wrote a memorandum to his Army superior. He expressed his belief that the incident should be taken very seriously and that there was every indication that that object might have been a "self-consuming" missile, capable of producing considerable smoke and leaving behind only the minimum residue; that residue might suggest a battery and radio transmitter had been included with the device.

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On March 13, two military police at Sandia Base reported a spherical object with a flaming tail twice its length. The object was estimated at one half the size of the full moon. Within days, on March 21, a number of witnesses at both Sandia Labs and Kirtland AFB observed multiple UFOs between 1:00 and 1:30 in the afternoon—they were described as round, silver colored and silent. And on March 24, three Sandia Labs military police reported a hovering, round, silver-colored object that departed first in level flight but then straight up at high speed. Minutes later yet another MP reported four similar objects flying at high speed several thousand feet over the base.37 These sightings emphasize the point that although the period was famous for its "green fireballs," when a report summarizing some 150 sightings near New Mexico atomic sites was compiled in the summer of 1950, discs and round, flat-shaped objects constituted a significant proportion of the total.38 Beginning in March 1949, Fourth Army's own unidentified object security concerns had begun to focus on the new atomic-weapons storage site.

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Given the early press participation, the whole incident led to widespread reporting, with headlines in papers across the nation. It also led to a specific request from President Truman. On July 29 he asked the National Security Council to address the unidentified objects in terms of a potential threat to United States security. That presidential request led to a number of studies and extensive new dialog within the entire intelligence community. Ultimately a panel was convened by the CIA, assigned the mission of preparing a specific response for the president.

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The panel's findings and recommendations were twofold. First, they reported that no specific conclusion could be made on the nature of the objects being reported; however, it was unanimously agreed that—once again, as in the 1948 Air Force conclusions—they showed no sign of presenting an imminent military threat. The second conclusion was that such incidents did represent a clear and present danger in terms of national security, that danger being related to the public being a target of Soviet psychological warfare. The panel noted that the air defense system was exposed to being "swamped" by false reports during any actual attack and that general public panic could tie up communications and greatly hinder air defense. In order to avoid that the panel suggested several measures, including media and educational efforts—even entertainment industry programs—to desensitize the public in regard to unidentified objects. It also recommended that UFO groups should be placed under surveillance as possible sources of witting ("subversive") or unwitting ("irresponsible") involvement in further panicking the public.37 The panel specifically named the Civilian Flying Saucer Investigators of Los Angeles and the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization in Wisconsin to be watched and commented on their "apparent irresponsibility and the possible use of such groups for subversive purposes."

Note:

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We noted earlier that atomic explosion detectors were installed near most American cities and many military facilities. The failure of a detector to register an atomic explosion in Tampa had helped resolve what appeared to be a missile launch out of Cuba in October 1962. In 1965, a massive power failure in the northeastern United States combined with circuitry errors to produce indications of atomic explosions. The Office of Emergency Planning moved to full alert; as far as can be told there was no NORAD or SAC response. A much more complex event occurred in 1968. A SAC B-52 on airborne overwatch of the Thule base in Greenland caught on fire, the crew was forced to bail out and the pilotless bomber actually flew over Thule base before crashing seven miles offshore. The crash exploded the onboard fuel, and the nuclear weapon explosives (although not the weapon itself) detonated. In a worst-case scenario, if the aircraft had crashed into the base, taking its communications out, SAC would have faced two worst-case indicators that Thule had been attacked as the first step in a surprise strike. It was assumed that Thule would be the first point of attack; that fundamental assumption was the reason for the Thule airborne watch. If the bomber's atomic weapon had fully detonated, the presence of an atomic explosion indicator would have given virtual confirmation. The Thule incident illustrated the complexity that circumstantial events bring to real-world decision-making. An incident in 1979 provides another illustration and shows that under stress, the military could be expected to respond to an emerging threat, whether or not civilian command could keep up. On November 9, 1979, the four key command centers including the National Military Command Center simultaneously observed detection warning displays

indicating a growing number of incoming missiles. Acting against the proscribed timeline, within six minutes a warning was issued, interceptor aircraft were launched off strip alert, SAC command aircraft were flushed into the air and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski was alerted.24

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 7,487

During the first hours of the 9/11 attacks there seems to have been a critical element missing from the air defense—beyond issues of inability to track aircraft without live transponders. It constantly shows up in the dialog at NEADS and in their communications with combat control at CONR. They needed rules of engagement, and they needed instructions on what they could do in using force to engage passenger-carrying hijacked airliners. Either such rules (ROE) did not exist or had not been communicated to the front-line NORAD air defense. In his interview with the 9/11 Commission, NORAD commander Eberhart notes that he spent time after 9/11 developing new, formalized rules of engagement for such circumstances.6

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 7,493

Given all the exercises that NORAD and the FAA conducted over the previous three years, it seems that after-action debriefings should have made it quite clear what would be needed if hijackers did seize an aircraft and move to use it as a weapon—regardless of whether that be as a delivery system for chemicals or explosives or with the fueled aircraft as a single gigantic bomb. With the history of the NORAD preparations, it must have been frustrating for those involved in the exercises to hear a post-attack remark such as that from the deputy chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers: “You hate to admit it, but we hadn’t thought about this.”

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Yet by 2001, as an institution, the FBI had years of experience with terror attacks, domestically including the first bombing of the World Trade Center and internationally with the Bojinka airliner bombing plot and the attack on the USS Cole. Its files covered numbers of al-Qaeda operatives, many of whom would later be associated or participate in the “planes operation” of 9/11. It could have moved on its own initiative to aggressively “watch” for them, as conspiracy suspects—much in the fashion it had “watched” organized crime and drug networks for years. Even without any special “watch” alert, the FBI had begun to receive indications of commercial aircraft-related terror activities as early as November 1999. Its Phoenix field office had reported on an apparent effort by two suspicious foreigners to collect detailed information on aircraft security measures, including flight-deck access security. Further inquiry revealed that

both men were associated with Islamic extremists; one of the two men had received explosives and car bombing training in Afghanistan. One of the men's known associates was interviewed by the FBI and openly stated he felt the United States was a legitimate target; a poster of bin Laden was openly displayed in his room. Based on that incident alone, the Bureau had a solid lead that radical Islamists were inside the United States, very possibly in the early phases of developing an aircraft-related operation. Within months that indication was corroborated by additional reports that terrorists were planning to send men to the United States to study flying, even though the reports noted that the purpose of this training was "unknown." Beyond that the leads should have been given significant priority, since the Bureau sources had specifically described the aircraft training as highly important, supported by unlimited spending—"open-ended funding had been approved to ensure its success."13

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Yet as we know from our exploration of the chronology of 9/11 events, such an outcome would have been literally and factually impossible.19 No "shootdown" authorization had even been issued at the time of the last of the hijacked airliner strikes. Of equal concern is the fact that as late as March 2004, Eberhart told the 9/11 Commission that he had "no knowledge of the circumstances that initiated the scramble" of fighter jets from Langley AFB and had only recently come to know about the launch of the first interceptors that day—a statement that certainly reinforces the impression that he had either been misinformed in regard to his remarks about being able to successfully "shoot down" all four airliners or that NORAD staff had not done a through and accurate after-action study and/or timeline of events.20

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It is difficult to judge Eberhart's firsthand knowledge of the day's events. We know that he did participate in the NMCC military threat conference, but there is no record of his personal, real-time communications with NEADS, CONR, First Air Force or any of the military units involved in front-line response. In his 9/11 Commission interview Eberhart described maintaining contact with the Pentagon during the crisis, in particular with General Richard Myers, Deputy Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. However, as noted in the chronology of events, Myers himself was not at the Pentagon; he had been in a meeting with Senator Max Cleland and appears not to have participated in the NMCC air threat conference until after all the airliner strikes were over.

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Yellow highlight | Location: 7,735

We noted in earlier chapters that the 9/11 Commission became so dissatisfied with the information that it was getting from the Air Force and the FAA—including the withholding of operations center tapes—they began to suspect they were actually being misled about the events of September 11, 2001. The Commission was especially concerned about the information they had received from senior NORAD officers. The head of the Commission, former New Jersey governor Thomas Kern, commented, “We to this day don’t know why NORAD . . . told us what they told us. . . . It was just so far from the truth. . . . It’s one of those loose ends that never got tied.”22 The Commission’s panel

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In summary, lessons were certainly learned from 9/11, and in the aftermath changes were made with regard to the nation’s security as well as continental defense. Only time—and just possibly improved readiness exercises—will tell if those changes will win out over the institutional dangers of inertia and complacency. Yet even with far-ranging changes in the domestic defense, there remained a constant jihadi terror threat to Americans remaining overseas. In the next chapter we will examine one more surprise terror attack on Americans, finding lessons that had once been learned but that appear not to have made it into “institutional memory.”

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The Diplomatic Security group moved to form its own paramilitary security staff, but in terms of daily protection operations in high-risk locations—especially in “combat zones” such as Iraq and Afghanistan—the decision was made to maintain a low profile and use commercial security contractors. In that regard, the State Department was actually following the greater trend toward the use of private security services. Using security companies to protect domestic American installations had already become routine practice. Increasingly government agencies had transferred security duties to private contractors such as Wackenhut Corporation, noted for its early work in protecting nuclear facilities and other national security installations. Wackenhut was founded in 1954 by four former FBI agents, including George Wackenhut. Initially operating under the name Special Agent Investigators Inc., the company renamed itself as simply Wackenhut. In 2002 it was acquired by a Danish security-business-holding company, Group 4 Falck. Wackenhut was to be one of the first security contractors hired by the State Department for overseas facilities security.

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> Prior to Afghanistan and Iraq, the State Department used private contractors in Jerusalem and in Bosnia, contracting with another well-known security company named DynCorp. In Afghanistan, one of the State Department's first challenges was to provide personal protection for the U.S.-backed leader of the post-Taliban government, Hamid Karzai. There was no reliable internal security force to protect him, and initially military personnel from the U.S. Navy's SEAL Team 6 were assigned for his security. However, during one attack on Karzai, the SEAL Team members responded according to their protocols, and in the resulting gunfire three Afghan citizens trying to protect Karzai had been killed. That and other incidents raised worries that even low-profile American military security was giving the appearance that Karzai was simply a figurehead for the United States. The State Department solution was to work Karzai's protection into its existing contracts. It turned to a subcontractor for DynCorp, a relative newcomer to security contracting named Blackwater. That contract evolved into a detail of some forty-six paramilitary personnel, a mix of former military and law enforcement officers. As nation building and security demands in Afghanistan continued, the small initial contract evolved into something over $43 million in work for Blackwater.7 Embassy

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