

Sign Oral History Project

Oral History Interview with

Robert Michael O'Connor (USAF, Sgt., ret.)

91st Minuteman Maintenance Squadron (MIMS),

Minot AFB, ND, 24 October 1968

Date: 23 February 2005

Interviewer: Thomas Tulien

TRT: 2:05 hours

Format: M-DV

Copyright: AFS/Dialogue Productions LLC, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

Transcription by Jim Klotz with additional editing by Thomas Tulien.

NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Sign Oral History Project and is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written word.

RESTRICTIONS

This oral history transcript may be read, quoted from, cited, and reproduced for purposes of research. It may not be published in whole or part except by permission of the copyright holder.

Thomas Tulien

Sign Oral History Project

MO Robert "Michael" O'Connor

TT Tom Tulien

TT —with Robert Michael O'Connor but you prefer Mike?

MO Well that's what I go by. My mother called me Mike (laughs).

TT Why'd she name you Robert then?

MO 'Cause it was an Irish name.

TT (laughs heartily) and Michael is not?

MO (laughs) It's Robert Michael O'Connor, she did the same thing to my brother too.

TT Let's start out just doing some background, where you grew up, school—up until the point where you went into the service.

- MO I was born and raised in Altoona, Pennsylvania, went to school there 'til 10th grade, moved to Maryland in 1962 and attended Duvall High School where I graduated. The year after I graduated I enlisted in the Air Force in 1966.
- TT Was the number system in play then?
- MO Yeah, I received my notification that I was going to be drafted so I enlisted in the Air Force for four years and went to basic training in August—
- TT You didn't want to go to the Army?
- MO No, I didn't want to go to the Army (laughs). Ended up taking a test when I went in basic training for bypass tech school, I was in the apprenticeship electrician's union before I went in the service and they needed electricians so they sent me to Minot, North Dakota. My first duties up there were in the PRIDE Building where I took care of all the electrical problems they had.
- TT After the SAGE was out? Originally it was constructed for the SAGE System? [Semi-Automatic Ground Environment]¹.
- MO Right, it was a pretty dingy building; there were no windows in it.
- TT Yeah, there was just a big computer but that wasn't in there at the time?
- MO No, it wasn't.
- TT What were they doing with that building then?
- MO They turned it into an administrative building. That's where all the administrative offices were and everything. I was there for approximately three months and then I was pulled into the shop to go on night duty in which we made repairs at night, emergency repairs around the base, in the housing area—
- TT You were working nights?
- MO Well yeah, it was once every third night, I was on the night shift for I guess going on about 8-10 months and then I got drafted by the 455th Missile Wing.
- TT What do you mean drafted?
- MO Well, they needed electricians who were qualified and I...
- TT And you went in as an Airman Second Class?
- MO Yeah, well no, I was just Airman Basic when I got up to North Dakota. After 8 to 10 months in the Electric Shop then got drafted by the missile wing, then they pulled me in there and started doing tests on the bench, fixing various [things] that they used at the missile sites. Then I started doing standby, which I had to carry tools and clothes and whatnot with me. I had 30 minutes to get to the base ready to go. A lot of the trips out to the missile sites were done by helicopter, which, you know, you just jump on there and you go. After a certain period of time, I forget how long it was, they put me on a Facilities Maintenance Team, which I was still doing standby, a lot of standby seemed like I had every—
- TT So you were always on standby seven days a week?

- MO Well, it seemed that way for a while, they had a schedule but my name was on it all the time. I was one of the more qualified electricians and then I was pretty good at trouble shooting and I guess that had something to do with it. They were struggling at that time just to keep everything going. They couldn't find qualified people—
- TT —with Southeast Asia cooking?
- MO Right, and then in 1970 I finished up my tour of duty and decided I wanted to get out (chuckles).
- TT What did you end up as a Staff Sergeant?
- MO I ended up as a three-striper, Sergeant, yeah.
- TT In '68 did you have three stripes?
- MO I did, yeah.
- TT I just talked with Jablonski, who was the guy that came down and he said when he first got there and saw you guys he saw all the stripes on your arms and he was like "Whoa."
- MO I didn't have that many (laughs). Yeah, the thing that kept me from getting promoted was I rolled a truck down off a bridge and totaled it. It was a totally icy condition that night and it went from like 70 above down to 25 below and it just turned to glass. The little bridge that went into this town, I forget, Max I think it was, it went over the railroad tracks and then down like this and I knew that, so I slowed down when I got there. But there was a tractor-trailer jackknifed across the bottom so when I tapped the brake pedal the truck just went out of control, and I ended up rolling side-over-side down the embankment about 30 feet. Without any scratches, but there was rash of vehicle accidents that had occurred during that period and anybody who was involved in accidents, they did not look kindly upon after that no matter what the cause was. That's what kept me from getting my Sergeant's stripe.
- TT OK so you were working for the 862nd?
- MO 91st Missile Wing. It was the 455th Missile Wing then they changed it over to the 91st Missile Wing
- TT Yeah, right that was [25 June 1968]. OK so you guys reported to the Commander of the 91st? Was your boss B.H. Davidson?
- MO No, the chain of command was my Shop Supervisor at that time. I think it was Sergeant Kenney.
- TT Then he reported to?
- MO I think there was a Chief Master Sergeant there. I don't remember his name
- TT OK, who was running the maintenance operations or in charge?
- MO I don't remember any of those guys' names. I didn't have much contact with them. We had maintenance crews going out every day to various parts of the quadrant doing maintenance on the missile sites. We went out to investigate and to do maintenance if we found problems, then we would document that, bring that back, order the parts, and when the parts came in they'd send somebody like me out to put 'em in, and that's the way that worked.

- TT But I mean, was there a routine maintenance schedule on each of those—?
- MO Oh, absolutely. A checklist, you know, on different pieces of equipment that you went through and you had to take this apart and that apart and check this, make sure this functioned that functioned and that it all worked.
- TT Now, most of your duties were in the Soft Support—you never went into the silo?
- MO Oh yeah, I went into the silo.
- TT What was in there to maintain?
- MO Air conditioning, generators, stuff like that.
- TT OK, the batteries in there too backup batteries?
- MO The backup batteries were down actually in the missile part, where they had the missile next to the—I don't know if I should be telling you all that stuff (laughs)—but they had certain people that were allowed to go this far, and certain people who had this responsibility and there was checks and balances.
- TT Where do you get your keys and codes?
- MO We had to go in and we had to pick all that up. We had what was called a “prebrief” and then they'd tell us what we were going to do, and then we'd get all our stuff, pack it up, go out to the site, fix it and then we'd debrief when we come back.
- TT What was the process by which you accessed the site?
- MO Well I had to go into the support building and get on the phone to the capsule.
- TT So they would give you keys to the front padlock for the gate and a key for the Soft Support Building?
- MO Right. And then if there was anything technical going on they had another team of people that would meet us at the site if you needed to access the silo.
- TT The missile wing would have to send somebody out to open that up, right?
- MO Oh yeah. I couldn't I couldn't get in there without them.
- TT That's what I'm trying to figure out because in the documents they talk about a hatch being opened and the combination lock was turned off of its setting which triggered an inner alarm.
- MO On another missile site?
- TT Yeah, at Oscar-6.
- MO Yeah! 'Cause when I went by there—
- TT But before we talk about that—on top, you open the Navy hatch and then there's two combination dials down there?
- MO That's right and two people had to have the separate combinations.
- TT Was that Navy hatch padlocked?
- MO No, there was a waterproof cover on it.

- TT Ok, so it wasn't really a locked cover, it was just covering and you could just flip up?
- MO Not flip it; you had to take bolts out of it. You actually had to have a wrench and then you had to have two people with different combinations to open that thing.
- TT So they had a separate above ground security guy there anytime that was opened.
- MO They had to, that was procedure.
- TT OK. So you'd go down there in that Bosun's chair and work?
- MO Yeah. The only thing I had to do was to go down and make sure the sump pump pumped.
- TT Oh, to get the water out so it didn't fill with water.
- MO Yeah. I was up there on water watch one time and they had me in a helicopter flying around looking at all the water, where it was, and I was talking to them on the radio and they're out here saying back in this area and the water's coming all the way around and coming in the back door. They had no idea they wondered where it was all coming from (laughing heartily).
- TT But you guys really didn't access any of that, so I wasn't quite sure if that was a lock to open that hatch to get at those combos, but you're saying it was just like a couple of bolts that held it down huh?
- MO Yeah. It was a waterproof seal—a cover you had to take off.
- TT And then once they did those combos then what? Was a plug in there or something, that would raise that big—so that they could hit the hydraulic to open the big hatch—?
- MO No, that wasn't on hydraulics that got blown off.
- TT No, I'm not talking about the blast door. I'm talking about just getting into the access side of the silo; it's called an "A" plug and a "B" plug or something like that? I think it was the "A" plug that's about six foot across, then there's a big concrete plug in there that has to go down to the—
- MO It's not concrete.
- TT Oh, steel?
- MO —probably 12 foot thick.
- TT Yeah, that plug that went down—
- MO Right. I just hope I don't get in trouble (smiling). You aren't going to advertise this I hope.
- TT I think their security systems are completely different from what they were then.
- MO I'm sure they are—they were in the process of changing everything over when I got out.
- TT Let's go back and talk about the sighting. Where were you coming from at the time? Had you come right from base?
- MO Yeah.
- TT Had you stopped in at November-1 to see the FSC?

- MO No, we go right to the missile site. There was a lot of times that we didn't—
- TT So you open the front gate and go inside, the perimeter alarm goes off?
- MO Right, and then you had so many seconds to check in.
- TT You unlock the door to the support building and call them and then you just identify your code?
- MO Right. They had an itinerary that was set; they knew when we were coming.
- TT OK. So this morning you were heading south on, I can't remember what road name but just walk us through it. I'd be interested in knowing how much you can recall.
- MO Well, I know we went down the main road; November wasn't that far from the base, probably the closest one of the sections to the base.
- TT Yeah, did you guys have to out to like Mike, which was 40 miles—
- MO —how about 75 miles from one side to the other [gestures]. They used to send me out there and they'd get me and they'd say "OK, go to this missile site next" and then they'd go way over here [gestures] and then I'd come all the way over here [gestures] and then maybe I'd go all the way back over here [gestures] whatever they had for me to do...then that's what I would do and, of course, we carried some spare parts.
- TT Walk us through this morning.
- MO Well we left the base, we started heading north, I guess, yeah it was north, had to be north on I think that route number was 51, I don't remember all the route numbers.
- TT All the dirt roads?
- MO Well, the dirt roads weren't—you just had a map and you follow the map. That's how you got to the missile site. Anyway, then of course, you might pass a couple of them on the way but these things are miles apart, so we started down that road and we had passed, I guess, Oscar-7 and then made a left turn and then went down the road toward the other one, I guess November-7? So yeah, we were going down the ol' dirt road and then I kinda glanced out [turns head to his left] the truck window and I noticed that some farmer had left his yard light on, I thought.
- TT There were farms along there?
- MO I don't know because at nighttime it's so hard to see. You can't tell if there is a building. It was dark; it gets dark out there when it's cloudy. We started down that road and I noticed that farmer's yard light and then, I don't know what made me glance over at it again, then I saw it raise up and [gestures] start paralleling our truck going down the road.
- TT Did you see farmer lights too?
- MO No. It turned—
- TT You assumed it was—
- MO I assumed it was a yard light.
- TT Because it was what down near—right at the horizon?

- MO No, it was almost on the ground, I mean, it was probably—the light was at normal height [gestures], which would have been 30-40 feet, something like that, it was illuminating the ground [gestures] I couldn't really see—
- TT Oh, it was illuminating the ground?
- MO Yeah, it was illuminating the ground. After it picked up and started following us down the road I noticed that the farmer's light wasn't there no more. That's a clue! [Laughs].
- TT So, you're driving down the road and you see it basically off to your right—
- MO My left.
- TT —and then you watch it for a while and then all of a sudden the thing picks up and moves, or what was the exact—?
- MO Well, we were still moving I was just going by and then it paralleled us, following us down the road and that's when I reached over and picked up the mic and called the Launch Control Facility [Transportation Control?] and asked them, "Hey you know of any aircraft out here?" and he says "No," and I said, "Can you patch me into the tower?" so they did. And I was talking to the air controller "We don't have anything out in that area." I said, "Well, there's something out here moving around," and I said, "You might want to come and check it out." We conversed back and forth and then everybody, we started hearing all the chatter on the radio from everybody else that was seeing this thing—
- TT People started calling in?
- MO Yeah, they started calling in and then they sent the SAT team out with us at the missile site and we observed the thing for a long time.
- TT How long was it—more or less than an hour?
- MO I thought it was over an hour, because, first of all I had to go into the support building and check in that I was authorized to be there. After I did that we had come out and [shakes head, chuckles] we just kind of watched this thing moving around and changing colors and, you know, just doing, it didn't, did not come up close to us—
- TT Did you have it in sight then from the first time you saw it off to the side of your vehicle until—that whole time it was in sight?
- MO Yes.
- TT So it followed you all the way down—
- MO To the missile site. It just kinda hovered out there.
- TT Out in the same area—
- MO Yeah.
- TT —on the side there?
- MO Yeah, like it was observing what we were doing.
- TT And it looked like what? I mean, can you describe it?
- MO I couldn't really see a shape other than the light and that it was glowing and then—

- TT What color?
- MO It started out white like the yard light and then it changed to green, amber, to red.
- TT Let me ask you, when you say green, really green?
- MO Really green.
- TT Like lime green dark green?
- MO A bright green
- TT Then it would go to a red?
- MO Yeah.
- TT Like a blood red?
- MO Yeah
- TT Really.
- MO It was just, you would almost think it was an aircraft but it wasn't [laughs] it was hovering above the ground and it was just, you couldn't hear nothing so I knew it wasn't a helicopter.
- TT Did you have some sense of how far it was away?
- MO I'd say 300-400 yards, it was quite close.
- TT What was its angular size in the sense that, when you looked at how big it was, compared to what?
- MO I couldn't compare it really to anything other than I knew it was bigger than; it was probably as big as a B-52 in that size range from what I could see of it. I couldn't make out the whole object, or really—
- TT So what you are saying is this thing was really big.
- MO Yeah! And hovering and I knew we didn't have anything that would do that so it was really—
- TT Did it look like it had individual lights on it?
- MO No, it didn't have marker lights on it at all. That made me feel like it wasn't an airplane.
- TT Yeah, you see an airplane you see the wings.
- MO You see the wing lights on it and all that stuff and usually they have a strobe flashing, which I did see on the B-52 when it came over, and you could hear the roar of those engines and that is quite distinctive, you could hear that.
- TT You're standing there, how long was it before those guys came down from N-1?
- MO Probably a half hour or something.
- TT Oh, so you and Mike were there for quite a while—and you were driving and you were running the radio the whole time? You had seniority at that time?
- MO Well when we went out to the sites, yeah, I guess I was probably. He may have been a two-striper, I was a three-striper, I don't know. But my responsibility at that time, I was

- the Field Maintenance Team chief, which I went out on a lot of maintenance and I was in charge of that.
- TT You had sort of an elevated position amongst all your colleagues there.
- MO Yeah, I guess you could say that. I think they had a lot of faith in what I did you know, as far as repair work and stuff and I was very capable of doing it.
- TT Can you give us more information about that half hour before those guys arrived, what you were observing, in what direction was it? Where were you seeing it? In what part of the sky?
- MO It wasn't really in the sky, it was in the tree line.
- TT Oh, it was real low?
- MO **Yeah, it was real low, 50-60 feet up in the air maybe. You know, it's eye level and yeah, we kinda watched this thing out here like this [gestures back-and-forth motion near eye level] then it would just hover like this [gestures small circular path] and it would make circles going out and then come back [gestures circular away-and-back motion] and then it would sit there and hover for a while and [gesturing] just kinda watch us.**
- TT The lights would stay consistent or?
- MO No, they would change color.
- TT Did they change brightness?
- MO Some, yeah, some depending on, you know, [shakes head] I guess if it was moving around or not.
- TT Did they go out completely at any time?
- MO No, I don't, I didn't ever see—
- TT So those lights were pretty consistent over the whole time.
- MO Right.
- TT Until the B-52 came and then it disappeared.
- MO Yeah.
- TT I got the impression that they were sort of coming off and on, that you weren't seeing it consistently over that whole time.
- MO No, it would stay on but it would change colors.
- TT Now, Jablonski mentioned that, he said his impression was you could see the light, it would be moving around or whatever at times it would go dark, and then all of a sudden it would appear over here, bright again. His impression was that when that thing wanted to move it went dark. Does that make any sense?
- MO Well, I guess it probably could have appeared that way depending on if it was moving, maybe it tilted a little bit or something like that, I don't know, but I know it was moving around.

TT Well driving down they saw it in a different way. Now, at any time was there more than one object?

MO No just one.

TT OK, you were on a phone patch. Was that a phone that was in your vehicle?

MO No.

TT In the Soft Support Building.

MO Yeah.

TT Oh, so you were standing over there watching this thing?

MO No, I checked in then I came back out.

TT But you were on a radio all the time in the truck?

MO In the truck.

TT OK, on a speaker.

MO Right.

TT So they patched you through do you recall who you were listening to and what you were hearing?

MO No, I didn't ask anybody's names.

TT But, you got the impression there were a lot of people on that phone patch.

MO Yeah, 'cause I could hear them, you know, talking back and forth over the radio channel "yeah, we see it," or "yeah we got it," those kind of things and they had binoculars at the LF [LCF] that they could see quite a ways with those.

TT The LCF?

MO Yeah

TT Were you hearing the B-52 too?

MO No, I couldn't hear what the B-52 guys were saying. I seem to remember that the pilot said the next day in the room that they had lost radio contact with the base and their engines had shut down for a few seconds.

TT Oh, you saw the pilot the next day?

MO Yeah we were in the Base Commander's office the next morning.

TT OK, so you're there a half hour and you're watching this thing, what are you thinking about at this time?

MO I'm not knowing what to think at the time, whether it was an aircraft, or whether it wasn't, it didn't appear to be an aircraft that I had ever seen and I was very concerned, you know, about this thing being out there. That's why I called, got patched into the tower and then talked to the guy in the tower for a little bit. And then he asked me some questions that I don't recall exactly what it was and then the next thing I know, here comes that B-52 flying over the area.

TT Do you recall the security team coming on the site?

MO Yeah.

TT But you didn't know those guys.

MO No, I didn't.

TT What was their reaction or what were they doing?

MO I really don't recall what exactly they said.

TT Did they stand next to you?

MO Well, we were all around in the front of the site—we weren't actually in the site, we were outside the site.

TT Oh, you were out on the front drive. Why is that?

MO We were just watching this thing moving around and we—

TT But when you arrived there didn't you enter the site?

MO Well, I had to go, I walked in. Opened the gate, went in and—

TT —but you left the vehicle out in the front.

MO Right.

TT Is that where you'd normally park the vehicle anyway?

MO We'd bring it in.

TT Why didn't you do that?

MO We were watching that thing!

TT You guys didn't have guns did you?

MO No, and a matter of fact, I remember Isley getting in the back of the truck and grabbing an axe. He grabbed it out of the back just in case there was some little green men or something—(laughs). I didn't know what was going on but I was totally concerned.

TT You don't recall these guys—you don't recall their reactions?

MO No, I can't remember all that stuff that went on.

TT Yeah, your focus is probably the radio—

MO Right and watching this thing doing, trying to talk to the tower—

TT How long did they stay there?

MO As I recall, until the B-52 left or came through the area and then the thing left.

TT OK, so you watched it about a half hour before you saw the B-52?

MO Yeah, it was at least that long.

TT How did you see the B-52?

MO I heard it come.

TT Oh you did.

MO Yeah, I heard it and I saw it come in and kinda circle around and come over the area that we were talking about. They didn't come right over the top of us but they came in back like this [gestures circling movement] and came over the area.

TT Were you notified that they were coming?

MO No, we just saw it coming.

TT Were you watching this object when the B-52 appeared?

MO No, I was watching the B-52. I said "Man he's awful low if he's making a landing" (laughs). But he wasn't making a landing. Now that I know that, I didn't know that he was that low, or he was sent—I didn't know he was sent over until all this stuff came out. Personally, when that 52 went over I thought he was just coming in for a landing. I didn't realize that he was sent over there.

TT To see what was going on.

MO To see what was happening. Yeah.

TT How did you see him, what did it look like—the B-52?

MO I saw all the marker lights and everything, I could hear the engines, I could see the body of the plane at that point.

TT All right. You guys didn't realize this but a UFO paced them during that time—

MO Now, I knew about that.

TT How did you know about that?

MO When we were in front of the Base Commander, we were all sitting in the same room and they just asked us to describe what we saw and it came out that the B-52 had—the guy, I thought the pilot said that he kinda lost contact with the base, radio contact, and that he lost engine power for a brief period, and then they came back on, everything came back on and the thing was kinda off his wing and was following him.

TT Yeah, it paced them for—he said 20 miles.

MO But it's really strange because I thought that the B-52, when it was over in another quadrant someplace, and that could have been...

TT They were over Mike [Flight].

MO Yeah

TT In fact the way it worked is that since you guys were talking to the Base Ops, or Base Dispatcher—do you remember his name—?

MO No.

TT —but then the control tower, so the B-52, it was down around Minot and they were on their way back out, they wanted to go out to the fix, turn around and come back 'cause they were checking a pilot at the time and so the control tower says, "Well yeah..." you know, gives them a heading out, you know, says, "Go to 5000, we'll give you the 200 in a

- minute.” They come back again “OK, go ahead to 200,” and they said, ‘and on your way out keep an eye out at your one o’clock position for the next 15 or 16 miles.’
- MO They didn’t tell them what was going on?
- TT No, he said “somebody’s seeing orange glows.” And then the pilot comes back on and he goes, ‘glows?’ And they go ‘someone’s seeing flying saucers again.’
- MO (Laughing) someone.
- TT So he flies all the way out, when he gets out about 35-39 miles out, and they’re just coming to the point where they’re going to do this turnaround at 20,000, the control tower comes back and says, ‘weathers radar has the UFO and it’s 3 miles off your right hand side at your 1 o’clock position,’ so they knew exactly where that thing was out there, it was at 20,000 feet hovering. Well, the [B-52] radar operator picked it up right then on his radar and he got nervous because he thought, “We’re going to turn into this thing.”
- MO You don’t turn into another aircraft.
- TT —he was nervous, but he said during their turnaround this thing maintained a relative distance, as they turned around it maintained 3 miles until they came all the way around.
- MO Yeah, that’s what I kind of remember them saying. Did he actually see it on the ground?
- TT Yeah, later—
- MO Yeah, ‘cause I do remember it kinda [gestures] going out and coming back.
- TT How long did you watch the B-52?
- MO Oh, it wasn’t long because he didn’t stick around. I just briefly remember hearing the engines, watched him come in at a low descent and then probably not more than ten minutes, 15 minutes at most. Probably less than that ‘cause, I just remember it happening and then all of a sudden [gestures, imitates jet sound] heard the noise from the engine and you could hear him winding the engines down like he was going to land.
- TT So you were watching the UFO and then your attention was drawn over to the B-52?
- MO Right.
- TT And at that point—
- MO Yeah, we didn’t see it anymore after that.
- TT The impression in the documents is when the B-52 came in the area the object left.
- MO Right.
- TT It didn’t like go down to the horizon or you don’t know where it went.
- MO No.
- TT So then that was it—then what happened?
- MO Well, we kinda, I guess we talked back and forth a little bit, I don’t remember, discussing what we saw and then went in and did my repair job and then left.
- TT So at that point, you went into the Soft Support and did whatever you had to do...

- MO Well, I didn't have to do much it was just a small repair.
- TT At that point, the SAT team, you remember them leaving?
- MO Yeah, they all left and then I remember getting in the truck and we were going out the gate, the site was all secured again, we were going back out the road and we came up the road by Oscar-7, I saw the light on the missile site, which they can turn that on from the capsule—
- TT You're on your way back to base?
- MO Yeah we're on our way back and the light was on the site.
- TT So the one they can turn from the capsule.
- MO They can turn it on from the capsule, they'll do that for you, OK? Actually you know what I think we had to pass code to the Launch Control Facility before we could go in the building to let them know we were there. As I recall, yeah that's the proper way.
- TT What do you mean, at N-7?
- MO Yeah, the SAT team had to know we were there, but anyway then at that point we were going down the road back toward the main road and saw Oscar-7 on the corner of the road or intersected the road we were on and the light was on, the support building cover was open.
- TT Explain what you just said—there's a cover or?
- MO There's a hatch to enter, you know, you have to unlock and it's just a simple little padlock that you could cut with a hack saw or bolt cutters if you really wanted to get in there, but then the alarms would go off. But anyway it, I mean, there was nothing in there that wasn't probably common knowledge. A/C, power, support, all standard stuff.
- TT Why did they have A/C out there?
- MO You had to keep that thing cool, you had to keep the batteries cool. I mean that whole thing down there was just—a lot of heat generated from the equipment that was running down there and you had to keep it cool, computers too, you had to keep that temperature sensitive too. But anyway, then the support building cover was open the hatch that opened over the top of the combinations for the access—
- TT Silo access?
- MO Yeah, for access, that was open...
- TT A-Plug, B-Plug?
- MO Yeah, for the B, B-Plug that was open and I thought it very strange and—
- TT Oh, the big one?
- MO No, the small one. That was open and the SAT team was just arriving at the site, coming up the road as we were going by, so that looked very out of place to me and I didn't stop or anything because we had already been through a lot of stuff, but I don't know why that had happened and I kind of assumed that somebody went in there that wasn't authorized and that's why they were coming to check it. I don't know how much of that stuff ever went on as far as people going in there to see what was happening or anything.

- TT But there was no reason for you to stop.
- MO No, no reason to stop. The SAT team was there, they were unlocking the gate getting ready to go in.
- TT Ah, so the gate was locked but all that stuff was open inside?
- MO Yeah, that's what caught my eye, and if I hadn't seen the SAT team rolling up the road I would have stopped and checked it out.
- TT Well, you guys don't carry guns.
- MO No, we don't (laughs), we weren't authorized to do that.
- TT Yeah, so then you made your way back to the base. What happened then?
- MO I went through Maintenance Debrief. I went back to the barracks and went to sleep. But anyway, then the next morning we got the call to come over to the Base Commander's office.
- TT Do you remember was that early?
- MO It was fairly early because I think they woke me up.
- TT Yeah, so you'd only gotten a couple hours sleep
- MO Yeah, if that.
- TT And so what was involved with that?
- MO They have someone on the desk at the barracks all the time. Anyway he came up and said, "Hey, you're wanted down at headquarters right now." So we jumped in our fatigues and went down there.
- TT And who did you meet?
- MO Well, there was a pilot from the B-52.
- TT Do you remember which pilot it was?
- MO No, I didn't ask names. I was just a little Sergeant and you know, didn't know what was, what kind of stuff was going to go on there and what they were going to ask or anything.
- TT So who was in the meeting?
- MO Just the Base Commander and everybody who, well not everybody, but a number of us who were involved in the sighting. I don't remember how many people exactly but I know it was, there were a few of us in there.
- TT You mean like security people or maintenance people?
- MO We were all asked, I don't know how many people or what their positions were in that room, OK, or who they were associated with, other than we were all asked to write down, and they gave us paper and write down what, how the events went that night. And that's what's in that report. Then we never heard anything back after that.
- TT How did they do that?
- MO They just put us in a room and they just said "Read form, fill it out."

TT Yeah. So in your mind, there's no question you filled that out on the 24th

MO Yeah.

TT Yeah. They're dated the 28th, both yours and Mike Isley's.

MO Oh, they are?

TT Yeah. Maybe they were post dated?

MO No, they weren't post dated, I—

TT Here's Isley's and he's saying he reported it to the FSC at N-1 and to Base Operations, and the day was the 24th, and the day he completed this questionnaire was 28th October. [Flipping pages] yours is the same. Is that your handwriting down there? [Slides binder to MO].

MO [Looking closely at date page of Form 117] no doesn't look like mine. Maybe they reviewed and signed—

[Break in recording]

TT We were talking about this briefing. I'm just trying to see how much you can recall from that. So you did fill out your sighting report form that morning?

MO Oh, yeah [emphatically].

TT Do you remember a Lieutenant Colonel there?

MO Yeah, I do.

TT Colonel Werlich?

MO Yeah, that's his name.

TT Was he in this meeting though?

MO The Base Commander?

TT Yeah.

MO No, I don't think he was I think it was that colonel.

TT OK, all right, so he was kinda running the show.

MO Yeah.

TT Did he actually interview you too?

MO Set around in kind of a horseshoe shape around his desk and we discussed things.

TT How many people were sitting in there, more than five?

MO Somewhere between 5 and 7 probably.

TT OK, you remember a pilot being there.

MO I remember a pilot being in there.

TT Only one of the crew from the B-52?

MO Nah, it could've been two of them.

- TT OK, could the Navigator have been there?
- MO Could have been, I—Like I say, I didn't know these guys and I didn't ask any questions, I mean, the meeting started, and everything went real quick and then we separated and went out and filled out our papers.
- TT Yeah, OK, so that's four, can you... any chance at any...?
- MO Maybe, maybe a couple of the Air Police guys, the SAT teams
- TT Yeah, I'm trying to think who it could have been, you know. You might have had some guys from Juliet or Mike—
- MO Yeah, I think I remember Juliet getting involved in some of the conversations with us over the radio.
- TT Do you remember Mike being involved at all?
- MO Nah.
- TT Yeah, the B-52 flew over Mike Flight the whole time. I would have thought they would be involved. The meeting lasted how long?
- MO Not very long. Half hour maybe, if that.
- TT And the purpose of the meeting was what?
- MO To just get us together and get our statements on paper.
- TT OK, so he didn't seem that interested in interviewing you personally.
- MO No.
- TT He didn't sit there and ask you questions and have you respond?
- MO He may have asked a few questions.
- TT So basically he got you there and he said "Here's what you're going to do, fill out this—"
- MO Right, "Fill out these papers," and that's the last I heard of it 'til—I guess we got that statement from Blue Book about, it was in that report that you had that talked about Sirius lights and the investigation—
- TT Oh, you saw that?
- MO Yeah. I think that was sent to me, I thought it was a letter, and I had looked through all the papers I had from the Air Force and I couldn't find anything on that UFO sighting, I don't know what happened to those papers. But I remembered, after I read the paperwork that you guys sent us and I went through that and I said, "Oh, that's the form I was looking for."
- TT [Turning pages in binder] Oh, this form you're talking about? If you look here there's a copy sent to the 862nd—this is a letter, this is his final report, that's Blue Book's final report. There's a resume or sequence of events—
- MO Yeah.
- TT Is that what you saw there?

- MO [Reading] Yeah, this is it “temporary loss of transmission” yeah, that’s how I remember that “attributable to plasma” (laughs) “ball of light” Yeah, the ‘ball of light,’ yeah, I remember that.
- TT Had you ever heard of ball lightning before?
- MO No (laughs).
- TT Most people hadn’t back then. This was sent there [862nd CSG] so the Base Commander, at some point, he showed it to you.
- MO Right.
- TT And you all had a good laugh.
- MO I just said, “This is BS and they’re just blowing us off.”
- TT Had you ever seen anything like that before or since?
- MO Never or since. I’ve seen streaks go across the sky and wondered what they were but you know—It didn’t appear to be any type of aircraft that I had ever seen or anything that I knew about.
- TT Let me see here, what have I got that we could go over. I just want to review this and see what your comments are. [Reading] Here’s how you described the initial sighting, [reading] “when the object was first sighted, it appeared to be between two farmer yard lights which were a little smaller, the object grew brighter, moving southeast.” That sound right?
- MO Yeah, yeah.
- TT [Reading] In response to the question of whether or not they stopped at any time while observing the phenomenon, he stated, “Yes, object seemed to be hovering, seemed to be observing us. When we stopped the object seemed to hover or stop when we turned out our headlights.” Isley confirms that by saying, “We first saw the object to the east of us while we were traveling towards the site. It started moving south. We arrived at the site, then started observing the object from outside the truck—”
- MO Right.
- TT “—it was moving in a large circular area to the south of us.” You mean it kept going south and—
- MO Well, it just moved around [gestures] it was just goin’ you know and it would come back and then it—at one point it appeared to leave and then came back and then we were, you know, wondering what was going on.
- TT Yeah, it was in the same area for two or three hours it said.
- MO Right.
- TT [Reading] “About this time a missile maintenance man called in and reported sighting a bright orangish-red object. The object was hovering at about 1,000 feet or so, and had a sound similar to a jet engine. That observer had stopped his car, but then he started it up again. As he started to move, the object followed him, then accelerated and appeared to stop at about 6 to 8 miles away. The observer shortly afterwards lost sight of it.”

- MO Who said that?
- TT Werlich, that Lieutenant Colonel.
- MO Yeah, I don't recall that. That's what he said I said to him?
- TT That's what he told Blue Book.
- MO Well, maybe it was at 1,000 feet when it was around the B-52, I don't know, but it seemed an awful lot lower to me. Like I say, 37 years ago it's hard to remember everything.
- TT Why do you say no?
- MO We never stopped.
- TT Oh yeah.
- MO [Reading]. I don't [shaking head] recall losing sight of it other than when it left the area for a brief period and then came back. I do remember that.
- TT Here's what the Base Operations Dispatcher said. He's the guy who patched all you guys together on the phone and then he kept a coincident log of your sightings. Have you ever seen that?
- MO [Shakes head no].
- TT [Reading] "At 3:08 hours the initial report was received from a maintenance team enroute from N-8 to N-7."
- MO OK. Maybe we were, yeah, could have been.
- TT At 3:08, the thing is that you started reporting it at 2:30 but he probably didn't set up his phone patch until about a half hour later or something, right?
- MO Probably, yeah.
- TT Yeah, 'cause 3:08 is when the guys up at N-1 see it because you tell them where to look.
- MO Yeah
- TT [Reading] "A1C O'Connor was the Maintenance Team Chief and he stated that all members of the team observed the lighted object. They further stated that it was reddish-orange in color and a very large object with flashing green and white lights. After they entered N-7 LF the object came directly overhead with the sound of jet engines."
- MO I don't remember actually hearing a sound. There could have been a low-pitched [shaking head] I don't know.
- TT Here's how you describe the object [reading] "Self-luminous like a big ball of white light that seemed to change to a dim green light then later to a dim amber light, color, the object seemed to take on the appearance of a Sting Ray fish."
- MO Is that what I said?
- TT I think at one point where it was somewhere overhead, maybe about 50 degrees or something up? You don't recall that?
- MO No I don't exactly recall that, but if I said that in the report that's probably what I saw.

- TT Yeah and here's what the base dispatcher's saying [reading] "After they entered the N-7 Launch Facility, the object came directly overhead with the sound of jet engines" and Isley recounts, "it came within hearing distance twice, the sound was that of jet engines," and O'Connor described the sound as, "similar to that of a jet engine, but more steady and a lower pitch."
- MO Right.
- TT [Reading] "Colonel Werlich reports O'Connor's description of the object as seen from the ground as similar in general outline to a Sting Ray fish." Regarding the size of the object, Isley compared it to a KC-135 Stratotanker by the lights on the object. The Base Operations..." OK, let's do this, here, I'll show you all your sightings as listed by the Base Operations Dispatcher [TT points to location on page] starting at 0800 (3:00) o'clock.
- MO 0800?
- TT Yeah, that's three in the morning.
- MO Oh five hour difference. Where did this report come from?
- TT This is the base dispatcher. He did this; he wrote this summary he kept this sequence.
- MO Um hum.
- TT and ...
- MO [reading] see, 50 foot of the ground...
- TT But this is basically, he's listening on the radio, he's writing this stuff down. But these are a lot of your descriptions in here. I mean, you're saying [reading] "object southeast of N-7 moving toward site with brilliant light like the sun."
- MO Yeah.
- TT "Lights flashing on and off. It's too big and brilliant for an aircraft. Now moving south hovering over N-7, turned green, amber off and on." Does that sound like what you were telling him?
- MO Yeah, it probably, yeah as I'm recalling it.
- TT I mean the thing is with those descriptions they're so confusing. One minute it's here, the next minute it's there but it's second hand information to him, right?
- MO Yeah... [reading] "...one to two thousand feet, very dim..." huh... [long pause] huh... oh, OK, this was his computation as to what he thought was going on?
- TT Making notations as he was hearing this stuff.
- MO OK.
- TT Does that sound like—how does that feel to you?
- MO There was so much going on that night—
- TT Yeah. Here's Werlich's response to the regulation, he said, "First sighting of the object (a bright light) was made by Airman O'Connor and Isley while driving down to November-

- 7 missile site. They reported this sighting to The Wing Security Controller over the vehicle radio.”
- MO Right.
- TT That’s true?
- MO That’s correct.
- TT Now at one point you mentioned that an F-106 was sent out? At what point in your sighting did that occur?
- MO I’m not sure. I thought it was before the B-52 came over the area.
- TT So shortly after you got to the site?
- MO Yeah. After I had talked to the guy then, you know. I’m damn sure they scrambled two 106’s after this thing and it came out there and it disappeared and I think that’s when the B-52 got involved, but—
- TT So just prior to the B-52?
- MO Just prior to the B-52 these things come screaming over the site where we were and I’m almost 100% sure that that was the way it happened.
- TT OK. I can’t imagine that they wouldn’t send the 106’s out.
- MO I know!
- TT They don’t scramble those things for no reason, but Isley doesn’t recall that.
- MO He doesn’t recall the 106’s?
- TT I would assume you’d have a better a recall because you were team chief, you were running the radio, you were driving the truck, basically, you were in control of that site. So it would make sense that you would have a better memory. And it was two 106’s?
- MO I’m almost sure two of ‘em came screaming over our site. I wanna say that, why would I say that if I didn’t feel it was true?
- TT Yeah, maybe that occurred at some other time, you know what I mean?
- MO No, they wouldn’t, I never saw planes flying over, jets they were always...
- TT Especially 106s, interceptors. That must be a sight at low level.
- MO That’s a sight when they take off that runway you know, they come blasting down that runway and [snaps fingers] straight up like a rocket and then a big sonic boom. You want to get a thrill, get in one of those helicopters with one of those Viet Nam pilots and chase a herd of Antelope across the plains, prairie—
- TT So you’re gonna stick to that 106 story, I’m not saying you’re wrong but I can’t find any support for it.
- MO I wanna say yes, but, then it’s been so long ago. See that’s the thing, I think I remember that the 106’s came screaming over the site, the thing disappeared then the B-52, or then it seemed to come back, and then the B-52 came over and like it was approaching for a landing and I didn’t know that.

- TT If those 106's came over before the SAT team came down 'cause those guys didn't see it.
- MO They didn't see it either?
- TT They didn't, they would've been on the road at least.
- MO Right, they would have had some visual on the 106's. I want to say yes... you know, I'm going back 37 years with all that stuff going on trying to figure it out. I know that we called in, we patched into the tower, and I know that we talked to them.
- TT [Referring to Werlich's map indicating the location that O'Connor first saw the object] that would have been Werlich who prepared this. But that must have been where he thought you first saw it, right at that intersection?
- MO Yeah, there was a, it looked like there was a farm over here, a light for a farm over here. Now I don't think that light existed when we came back out.
- TT You didn't go to N-1?
- MO No
- TT —so you were either at [N-] 8 or coming from the base which—
- MO We could've been coming from [N-] 8.
- TT If you came from the base, would you go up here and come around?
- MO No, we had to follow what they call TE [Transporter-Erector] routes you do not deviate off TE routes and they did that because they started having a lot of accidents and they put out a thing said, "You will stay on TE because they'd get out here and get off these roads and they'd get into accidents or they'd get lost or something.
- TT To get here, you probably had to go all the way up?
- MO We went all the way up here all the way over down, like this, we probably went November-8, did something there and then come down this road to [N-] 7.
- TT So, and where do you think you were when you first saw the object?
- MO Right up here.
- TT And you were seeing it right over here?
- MO It would have been off to this side here and then it followed us down.
- TT So it followed you down all the way—
- MO All the way and then it was out in here.
- TT Did you ever see... oh, I got another question for you, I'm glad I thought of this...
- MO Um hum.
- TT Just tell me what you think that he's saying here. He's identifying where the aircraft overflowed the object OK? "This is where the aircraft saw the object. There's farm fields there, there's nothing there that would produce this type of light, the same for O'Connor and Isley from November-7 which is near Grano. I have gone over that area with a chopper. This weekend, I would like to go down with a Geiger counter and go down to Oscar-7 break-in. I (Col. Werlich) think you will find that the most information comes

from Airman O’Connor and Isley and an Aircraft Instructor. Much of their discussion and description incorporates the activity of the B-52. It was only at the end that I was able to pinpoint the fact that they did observe a light source and the B-52. You can see the lights of the base for at least 50 miles away.”

MO From a helicopter!

TT “I (Col Werlich) asked if they saw the B-52 come towards the object.” You remember him asking you that?

MO No.

TT “We know the 52 got real close to it. Did they see the object on the ground?” [Lt Marano asked]. Colonel Werlich says, “They were able to see a light source while the 52 got in real close then it disappeared.”

MO From probably when the B-52 was coming over and the thing shot out. I mean it took off. It disappeared.

TT It almost sounds like Werlich is saying that at the point the B-52 overflew the object, you were seeing the object from over here on the ground.

MO Right. The B-52 was right toward the end of everything, from what I remember.

TT Yeah because after that you guys went about your business.

MO Right. But I heard Oscar and Juliet and Mike on the radio. We were all on the same channel and I could hear, ‘yeah, we, we spotted the object,’ whatever, you know and all the stuff was going on for so long, and just going back and forth and it was just so intense.

TT I think we asked all the questions and I think we’ve gotten to the bottom of what your recall is, right?

MO It was pretty intense night and, or morning—

TT Were you worked up about the whole thing?

MO No, actually I remained fairly calm throughout.

TT Were you excited at all during—?

MO Apprehensive, I wanted to know what it was I was seeing—didn’t understand what was going on and just knew that it wasn’t normal. I just wanted to report to the base that something was happening that I didn’t know what it was.

TT Yeah. I mean you guys stopped your work, didn’t you?

MO Well we were outside for quite a while.

TT I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us.

MO Yeah, not a problem

[Transcript end]

¹ (Source: <http://www.answers.com/topic/sage-1>) Semi-Automatic Ground Environment was an air defense system developed in the 1950s for the Cold War. SAGE combined computer systems and a sophisticated radar and communications system to track U.S. air space and send the data to 23 installations around the country. Each installation had its own computer and backup system. SAGE used CRTs, and a light pen was used to hone in on a suspicious blip on the screen. SAGE never intercepted enemy aircraft, because there were none, but the companies that built the machines, such as IBM, gained extraordinary experience that was brought to bear in future developments. The SAGE computers evolved from the Whirlwind computer at MIT.

Minot AFB Pride Building "Professional Results In Daily Endeavors":



SAGE building at Minot Air Force Base -- headquarters of the Minot Air Defense Sector. From Sept 62 C&E Digest