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PRE—WORLD WAR II “CREATURE” RETRIEVAL?

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Crashed saucer stories have become more and more common in UFO lore, with Roswell still holding preeminence as the granddaddy of all such accounts. Some tales even suggest that there were recoveries of crashed UFOs *before* Roswell. (For example, Walter Webb’s “An Anecdotal Report of a UFO Crash/Retrieval in 1941” appeared in the Winter 1996 and Spring 1997 *IUR*.) These accounts are always difficult to investigate because the primary sources have usually passed away, so only secondhand witnesses, at best, are available to interview. Still, all these potential incidents must be investigated, and an alleged UFO crash/retrieval is too important to simply file away for future reference.

It is in this context that we relate our own experience with an early crash story. In early December 1999, the Center for UFO Studies received the following letter:

November 29, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

Today I want to share some knowledge that has been, by request, kept secret in our family since sometime in World War II. This concerns something my father was shown by Cordell Hull, who was Secretary of State under Franklin Roosevelt. Sumner Wells was his Under-Secretary of State. Hull was a cousin to my father. My father was on some kind of advising committee, and made several trips to Washington, D.C. in that capacity.

My father, who was young, brilliant, and sound of mind, tells [sic] this story to us because he didn’t want the information to be lost. One day when my father was in D.C. with Cordell, Cordell swore him to secrecy and took him to a sub-basement in the U.S. Capitol building, and showed him an amazing sight: (1) Four large glass jars holding 4 creatures unknown to my father or Cordell [and], (2) A wrecked round craft of some kind nearby.

William E. Jones serves on the CUFOS Board of Directors and is MUFON state director for Ohio. Eloise G. Watson is the Holt family genealogist.

My father wanted my sister and I to make this information known long after he and Cordell were dead, because he felt it was a *very important* bit of information. We have researched your group and feel it is the most reliable group in the country. We hope that you will research and search this information.

Please don’t disregard this, because what I have written is true. The jars with creatures in formaldehyde and the wrecked craft are *somewhere!*

Cordell said they were afraid they would start a panic if the public found out about it.

Sincerely,

Lucile Andrew

Mrs. Andrew lives in Ashland, Ohio, which is much closer to Columbus than Chicago, so CUFOS Scientific Director Mark Rodeghier forwarded a copy of the letter to one of us [WEJ] for follow-up. At the time the letter was received, I did not know the name of Mrs. Andrew’s father and his background because, as we were to discover, the family was concerned about its reputation.

After several telephone calls and two visits to Ashland, the family became comfortable with releasing his name—the Reverend Turner Hamilton Holt—and allowing this story to be told.

The story would only be an interesting footnote in a UFO history book if the people involved were more ordinary in background and experience. But here we have a tale that directly involves one of the greatest U.S. statesmen of the 20th century and a conservative man of the cloth, who would have absolutely no apparent reason to tell a story such as this one if it weren’t true, especially at a time when stories of flying saucers and their occupants had not yet become part of our culture. Because, as you will learn, this story was told to the Rev. Holt’s family before the Kenneth Arnold sighting brought UFOs into the national news in 1947.

The personality and life history of the two principals in the story are crucial in deciding whether to put credence in the information. Accordingly, we next present biographical details about each man.

CORDELL HULL

Cordell Hull was born October 2, 1871, in a log cabin in Pickett County, Tennessee, the third of five sons of William Hull, first a farmer and then later, a lumber merchant. Hull grew up wanting to be a lawyer. He went to a one-room elementary school that his father built in Willow Grove, Tennessee. After attending in succession the Montvale Academy in Celina, Tennessee, the Normal School in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and the National Normal University in Lebanon, Ohio, he received a law degree in 1891 after completing a one-year course at Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee.



Cordell Hull

He began practicing law when not yet 20 years old. From 1893 to 1897, he was a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives. He served in the Spanish-American War as a captain, and in 1903 was appointed a judge to the Fifth Judicial District. He held this position until 1907 when he was elected to Congress. He served until 1931, a period interrupted only once for two years when he served as chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

Hull was elected U.S. senator for the 1931–1937 term, but he resigned to become the secretary of state under President Franklin D. Roosevelt on March 4, 1933. He occupied this post until 1944 when he resigned because of ill health. His tenure in this post was the longest in American history. Prior to Hull's resignation, Roosevelt had offered him the vice-presidency, but he declined. Many historians believe that Hull could have been elected president had Roosevelt not run for a third and fourth term.

In 1945, the Norwegian Nobel Committee presented Hull the Nobel Prize for Peace in recognition of his life's work, including his efforts to establish good relationships between the United States and the nations of the Western Hemisphere, international trade agreements, and the United Nations. Too ill to personally receive the award, Hull had his acceptance speech delivered by U.S. Ambassador to Norway Lithgow Osborne. In the acceptance, he wrote: "Under the ominous shadow which the Second World War and its attendant circumstances have cast on the world, peace has become as essential to civilized existence as the air we breathe is to life itself. There is no greater responsibility resting upon peoples and governments everywhere, than to make sure that enduring peace will this time . . . at long last . . . be established and maintained. . . . The searing lesson of this latest war and the promise of the United Nations Organization will be the cornerstones of a new edifice of enduring peace and the guideposts of a new era of human progress." These words still ring true today. Hull died July 23, 1955, and is interred in the National Cathedral (Episcopal) in Washington, D.C.

REV. TURNER HAMILTON HOLT

Turner Hamilton Holt was also born in Pickett County (then Overton County), Tennessee, on March 4, 1894. He attended Livingston (Tenn.) Academy in 1922–1926, Milligan College in 1926–1927, and the National Bible Institute in 1928–1929. In 1929 he studied at Ashland College (now Ashland University) in Ohio and earned his undergraduate degree. From 1929 to 1938 he attended the Ashland Theological Seminary, attaining a doctorate in theology.



Turner Hamilton Holt

In his younger days, Turner Holt worked as a farmer, a lumberjack, a railroad man, and book-seller to libraries and schools. He later held several church positions during the years he was in college. From 1927 through 1945 (an important period of time for this story), he was the minister at the Shenandoah Christian Church in Greenwich, Ohio. He ministered to a number of Church of Christ congregations in Ohio until he left the ministry in 1959. Holt also served on many church boards and was involved in numerous community organizations throughout his life. He was known to be especially good at working with young people and wrote a book entitled *Life's Convictions* (Vantage, 1956) that gave advice on how young people could grow into spiritually fulfilled adults. He was, in the best sense of the term, a community leader.

He married Vina May Clark in 1920. Their union produced three daughters, Ana Lucile (born September 1921), Geneva Mareah (born December 1922) and Margaret Allene (born November 1924).

Reverend Holt passed away on February 5, 1960, in University Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

These two men had much in common. They both worked their way out of the backwoods of Tennessee and were men of learning, very well-educated for their time. They spent their lives in public service. Of crucial importance for this story, Holt was related to Cordell through Cordell's mother, Elizabeth (Riley) Hull. Holt was Hull's third cousin twice removed. Family members alive today remember that they spent time together during their large Tennessee family reunions discussing the issues of the day. Because of their love of learning and public service, they were considered by the family to be especially close.

THE INVESTIGATION

We attempted to interview as many members of the Holt family as possible. The first interview, by Jones and Irena Scott, was naturally with Holt's eldest daughter. It took place at her home in Ashland, Ohio, on February 12, 2000. The home is new and well-kept. It was obvious upon

entering the front door that these people were not only reasonably well-off, but they were accustomed to entertaining and were involved in community affairs. As we got to know Lucile and her husband, who is a retired executive of a large Ashland company, this assessment was proven true.

Lucile's original letter essentially tells the story as her father told it to her when she was a teenager. Since Lucile was born in 1921, this would have been within a year or so of the event, probably in 1940 or 1941. Unfortunately, Lucile said that she was too young to really pay much attention to what her father told her. As it turned out, however, her father also told one of his other daughters, Allene. (Allene is the mother of Eloise, the coauthor of this story.)

At first Allene was reluctant to talk to us, explaining that she wasn't well at the time. Finally, on April 3, 2000, we met both sisters together. Allene told essentially the same story as her sister. Both assured us that they remember the stories independently. Allene was told the story by her father when she was in her early twenties when she already had two young children to care for. This would have been around 1950 when Eloise was three years old. As the family story goes, when Allene's father started to tell the story, Eloise, always the active youngster, jumped up in her mother's lap and distracted her long enough so that she never really asked her father any meaningful follow-up questions. Some time later during a family gathering, she tried to ask her father some of these questions, but he replied with something like, "Not now." They never did get back to talking about the subject. Thus, details of the story that Lucile didn't hear were forever lost to Allene as well, and to history.

Reverend Holt described the entities in the glass jars as "creatures." He never referred to them as "aliens" or "extra-terrestrials" as we would today. He used a term common for his day. In fact, he never said where they came from. Lucile stated that his experience happened in the "late 1930s," probably 1939. The material that was nearby the creatures was described as "silver metallic."

Allene did remember her father saying that the creatures were less than four feet tall. She also remembers him referring to the material as being a "vehicle" that appeared to have been taken apart and was "in pieces." He said the color of this material wasn't a color that he had seen before, but for the lack of a better word, he used "silver."

As far as Lucile and Allene know, their father told no one else this story. When their other sister was old enough to be told the story, she was living out of state and apparently an opportunity never came up. Their mother was mostly concerned about household issues and the rearing of their children, so their father apparently didn't feel it was necessary to tell her. Both were told not to discuss the story with anyone else. As the grandchildren grew up, at least two, including Eloise, were told by their parents. It was always a family secret that never was talked about outside the family. Both daughters believe their father told them so

that the story would be told years later and not lost to history, but the principals would have long since passed away. By telling this story, the sisters feel that they are following their father's wishes.

Lucile told her son, the other of the two grandchildren noted above, when he was mature enough to understand the story. We contacted the son and he confirmed hearing the story from his mother. He holds a doctorate in physics and has a very responsible position in industry. Because of this, he requested that his name not be used.

When we asked his opinion of the story, he replied that he believes his mother and aunt are telling the story as they remember it. He thinks that perhaps the memory of what they heard has changed with time and may not reflect what really happened. Of course, if that is true, their memories have changed in identical ways. We can't discount the possibility that each of the sisters influenced the other so that their memories now coincide. But, the sisters don't think this happened. There is no way to prove this conjecture either way. Lucile's son noted that if the story is not remembered accurately, he has no idea what the original story might have been. Further, he did say that there is a chance that the story is true. He doesn't discount the possibility.

The story doesn't offer much to corroborate, so a large part of the effort was getting to know more about Rev. Turner Hamilton Holt. The essentials of what we learned are noted above. From talking to the sisters and others in the family and from reading what written resource material we could find, Holt was not the sort of person to make up such a wild story to tell to his children. It wasn't in his character and it certainly wasn't something that his conservative religion would have condoned.

THE CAPITOL SUB-BASEMENT

One independent fact that we could check was the part of the story concerning the "sub-basement" of the U.S. Capitol building. When I first read Lucile's letter, this part of the story rang a discordant note. Storing something this important in that building struck me as absurd. But as I thought about it, it seemed more and more plausible. One has to remember the times. Washington was in its pre-World War II state. The Pentagon didn't exist and those military bases and facilities that now can be found all around the area didn't exist or were much less secure than they are today. Perhaps the Capitol would have been a safe and secure place back then. I decided to check this aspect of the story out.

There is an Office of the Architect of the Capitol. I called to determine if there is or ever was a "sub-basement" in the building, at least in the late 1930s. I was able to reach Barbara A. Wolanin, curator of the U.S. Capitol. I told her the story as I knew it from Lucile's letter. She chuckled a bit and said it reminded her of the Capitol ghost stories that are often told. She volunteered that she had never heard about these creatures being stored at the Capitol, but she did

confirm there was a sub-basement back then. She said that the building had been significantly changed over the years and this area is now the basement. Back then it had been divided into rooms that were used for storage. Thus, in a small way, part of Holt's story checked out.

HULL'S MEMOIRS

I decided that the other way to check out this story would be to learn more about Cordell Hull. There is a chance that somewhere in his papers and correspondence he had written something about this obviously important event. It probably wouldn't be a direct reference to what he knew, but there might be something stated indirectly or indicative of an inordinate interest in the possibility of extraterrestrial life or a collection of newspaper articles about flying saucers after 1947.

After Hull left government service, he wrote *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* in a 1,804-page, two-volume book (Macmillan, 1948). No reference, direct or indirect, to this story appears in those pages. His papers are archived at the Library of Congress. The collection is made up of over 70,000 items packed in 265 boxes. John Earl Haynes has custodial responsibility over this collection for the Library. I told Haynes about the story I was researching and related my idea that Hull might have at least indirectly written something about it in his papers. He replied that he had never run across anything like that, but noted, "It is possible that it was there and I missed it because I wasn't looking for something like that."

I did obtain through interlibrary loan from the Library of Congress a copy of microfilm reels numbered 38 and 39 that contained Hull's "desk diary" for the years 1938 through 1942. I wanted to see if there was an entry of an appointment with Holt in the diary. I found none.

I was referred to Jonathan G. Utley who now lives in Chicago. A retired professor from the University of Tennessee who has been working on a book about Cordell Hull for years, Utley was, needless to say, skeptical of the story. He did note that probably the only place I might find reference to such a story would be in the papers or diaries of Hull's friends and colleagues. He told me that Hull was a workaholic. His work was everything to him, and all of his papers concern his various jobs. He did not leave a record about his personal life, which was meager anyway. He married late and had no children. He had few real friends outside of work. If he entertained privately, he usually did so in restaurants, even though he had a cook and a housekeeper. Utley noted that everything he learned about Hull's personal life was from the diaries and letters of Hull's friends and colleagues.

Utley thought that it would be unlikely that Hull would have had such easy access to the Capitol as Secretary of State because he was a member of the executive branch of government. Further, he rarely went there to testify, usually sending subordinates to do so in his place. This sounds like

a reasonable critique, but Hull seems to contradict this in his memoirs. On page 215 of his memoirs he wrote, "I also made it a practice to appear personally before Congressional committees or important group conferences, which I did scores of times during my stay at the State Department." Hull's ability to access the Capitol building is clearly an issue in evaluating the story. However, given Hull's important position within the government and his relationship with Roosevelt, even if knowledge of these creatures and debris was closely held, Hull would clearly have been aware of the secret.

Utley also pointed out that Hull was not particularly close to his extended family. Taking a cousin into his confidence would have been unusual. He was a very cautious man. He was the keeper of the family assets, giving out funds to his brothers when they needed them. That was the role with his immediate family. If a cousin had visited Hull, he would have probably entertained the visitor at a restaurant where most of his limited entertaining was done. However, we have the observations of Holt's daughters who remember Hull and Holt as being particularly close within the family. So it is still probable that for purely intellectual reasons, Hull may have wanted his friend and relative to be aware of something quite extraordinary.

Three other potential sources of information concerning Hull were contacted for assistance with our research.

The Cordell Hull Foundation for International Education in New York City has no information about Hull's life that could help us. The Cordell Hull Birthplace Museum near Byrdstown, Tennessee, has copies of some of his papers. The museum's curator, Norma Kerbaugh, did look through their collection for us, but found nothing of interest.

Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee, has several boxes of papers, letters, photographs, articles, scrapbooks, and speeches from and about Hull. According to Library Archivist Mancil Johnson, nothing was found that would relate to our story. Much of the university's material was obtained from the Cordell Hull Birthplace Museum.

A number of other libraries and archives were contacted to see if they could help, including the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum in Hyde Park, New York; the Roosevelt University Center for New Deal Studies in Chicago; the Center for Archival Collections at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio; the Holy Spirit Library, Cabrini College, Radnor, Pennsylvania; and the Little White House State Historic Site in Warm Springs, Georgia. At least through telephone contacts, no one seemed too excited about getting involved in helping establish the possible authenticity of this story. Perhaps this is understandable.

There is an ironic sidebar to this story that should be told here. Holt attended the Washington Work Shop on World Order held March 13-16, 1950, at the Burlington

(continued on page 12)

