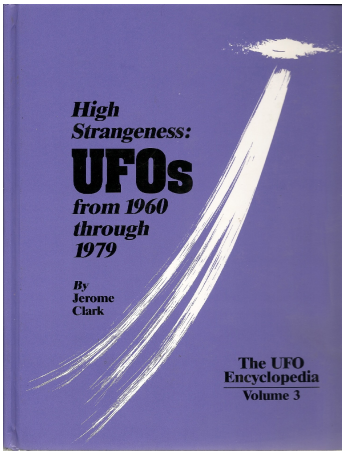
Travis Walton



WALTON ABDUCTION CASE

Few abduction reports have generated so much controversy as an incident that began on Wednesday, November 5, 1975, in a remote area of east-central Arizona. Two decades later the dispute still rages. To all but a very few combatants the stakes seem high. If Travis Walton and other participants are telling the truth, so it is assumed, UFOs exist; UFO abductions are physical, not imaginary, events; and UFOs are piloted by alien, presumably extraterrestrial beings. No wonder, then, that the Walton case has become one debunker's particular obsession. By now, after years of wildly conflicting claims and charges, a mass of confusion surrounds the episode. Thus the sorting of the reasonable conclusion from the unreasonable inference, much less the certifiably true from the undeniably false, is no simple task. It is not, however, entirely impossible. This account draws on many sources, including the two books that have been written on the case.

The disappearance. Travis Walton, 22, worked on a wood-cutting crew in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, set in a high mountainous area 15 miles south of Heber. The crew's foreman, Mike Rogers, had contracted with the U.S. Forest Service to thin out 1277 acres of scrub brush at Turkey Springs. In practice that meant that brush six inches or less in diameter was to be cleared with chainsaws. While half of the crew wielded the saws, the other members dumped the debris into slash piles behind them. Besides Walton and Rogers, the crew consisted of Ken Peterson, John Goulette, Steve Pierce, Allen Dalis, and Dwayne Smith. All were young men, ranging from 17 (Pierce) to 28 (Rogers). All of them lived in Snowflake, a small Mormon town 33 miles east of Huber.

Rogers had been doing contract work for the Forest Service for nine years. The Turkey Springs contract was the most lucrative he had landed so far, but he was late in fulfilling it. He already had secured one extension, and he and his crew were working hard and long to catch up. Thus the men labored until after sunset. When they quit for the day at 6 P.M., darkness had begun to fall.

Ten minutes later the exhausted workers piled into their battered pickup to begin the return trip to Snowflake. Rogers, Walton, and Peterson, the three nonsmokers, sat in the front seat, the others—already puffing away—in the back. As Rogers drove, Walton sat by the right window, bouncing up and down as the vehicle, its shock absorbers long worn out, negotiated what passed for a road. It had gone no more than 200 yards before something unusual came into view.

Either Walton or Dalis (accounts vary) saw it first. It was a glow shining through the trees on the right, about a hundred yards ahead of them. As the truck drove up the hill, the men fell silent. Forty yards away, the light bled over the road, but a dense stand of trees still obscured its source. Then they passed a small clearing to their right, and the source was now clearly in view. It was a luminous, disc-shaped structure, hovering 15 to 20 feet above a slash pile and casting a milky yellow glow through all of the clearing. Approximately 100 feet from them, 20 feet wide and eight feet high, it was divided by dark-silver vertical lines, longer than they were wide, into panel-like geometrical forms on its surface. A thin band with an outer protruding ring encircled the middle. Someone blurted out, unnecessarily at this point, "That's a UFO!"

Rogers was bringing the truck to a stop when Walton jumped out and walked briskly toward the UFO. Later he would explain his action thus: "I was suddenly seized with the urgency to see the craft at close range. I was afraid the thing would fly away and I would miss the chance of a lifetime to satisfy my curiosity about it." When his co-workers, whose reactions to the UFO's presence ranged from intrigued to petrified, saw what he was doing, they shouted at him to get back. Walton paused for a moment, turned to glance over at the truck, and reflected briefly on the wisdom of his course before deciding to proceed.

In short order he was standing on the perimeter of the dim halo of light the object was casting on the ground. He was only six feet away from being directly underneath the object. Mesmerized by the "unbelievably smooth, unblemished surface of the curving hull," he at first did not realize that the UFO was beginning to emit sounds. The men in the truck were hearing low beeps. Then Walton heard them, too, only they were mixed somehow with a distant rumbling, an industrial sound reminiscent of a "multitude of turbine generators starting up." The UFO started to wobble slowly, one side tipped toward him. Then it wobbled faster, and the sounds grew louder.

By now thoroughly shaken, he ducked down behind a log which was jutting from the slash pile. He had to get away. He rose to his feet, and just as he was turning away from the UFO and toward the truck, he felt a "numbing shock . . . like a high voltage electrocution." It hit particularly in his head and chest, but he could feel it all over his body. He heard a cracking or popping sound, and then he heard, saw, and felt no more.

Walton did not know what had hit him. Those looking on, however, saw a bluish-green beam strike him. He rose a foot into the air, his arms and legs outstretched, and shot stiffly back some 10 feet, all the while caught in the glow of the light. His right shoulder hit the earth, and his body sprawled limply over the ground.

Rogers and his crew were beside themselves with fear at this point, and amid much shouting and cursing they fled the scene, leaving their fallen comrade behind. Rogers was driving dangerously fast, though he could barely see the road; he was certain that the object was coming up behind him. A quarter of a mile later, he swerved to avoid hitting a pine tree. The truck slid sideways and stopped, stuck crossways in a bulldozed pile of hard dirt.

As one of his passengers screamed at him to get going, Rogers looked around and saw that the UFO was gone. The sky was quiet and empty of anything but stars. No one spoke for some moments. Then everyone began to talk at once, not necessarily coherently. Peterson and Rogers argued that they should go back to rescue Walton. At first the others rejected the idea, but over the next few minutes, as the discussion continued outside the truck and nerves calmed, they changed their minds. As they piled back into the truck, Rogers thought he saw a flash of white light in the woods, something like a streak ascending into the air. No one else saw it, but then none had been looking in that direction at that moment. Rog-

ers believed he had witnessed the departure of the UFO.

Rogers drove around in the gathering darkness in search of the spot where they had seen the UFO. There were a number of clearings and any number of slash piles in the vicinity, and one looked pretty much like another, so it was not easy. But eventually they found it. Rogers drove into the site. His headlights revealed nothing except the slash pile their companion had been standing beside. He shined a flashlight through the clearing. Then he stepped out of the cab, and his crew reluctantly followed. The panic they had suffered had made them feel almost physically ill.

Twenty minutes of searching failed to uncover any trace of Walton. As the enormity of the evening's strange events began to sink in, some of the men, including Rogers, who considered Walton his best friend, wept. When they pulled themselves together, they headed for Heber and the initiation of the police investigation.

Five days. The authorities first heard of the incident just after 7:30, when Navajo County Deputy Sheriff Chuck Ellison took a call from Ken Peterson, who said only that one of the crew was missing. Ellison met the group at a Heber shopping center. The men were in a highly emotional state. Two were crying. Even as they related the bizarre and unbelievable UFO story, Ellison could not help reflecting that if they were acting, they were awfully good at it.

Ellison quickly notified Sheriff Marlin Gillespie, who ordered him to wait with the crew until he could get to Heber. Gillespie was in Holbrook 40 miles to the north. Within the hour he and Undersheriff Ken Coplan arrived and commenced their own interview of the witnesses. Rogers, who wanted to get back to the site as quickly as possible, urged the sheriff's men to bring bloodhounds to aid in the tracking, but none were available. Pierce, Smith, and Goulette said they had no desire to return, and so they went off in Rogers's truck to Snowflake to notify Rogers's wife of what had happened.

At the site the six men stalked the clearing and surrounding area with flashlights and a searchlight mounted atop a four-wheel jeep. The understandably suspicious law-enforcement officers focused a good part of their attention on the trail that would have led Walton from the pickup to the slash pile. There were no prints in the hard ground. The pine needles that covered the clearing floor looked undisturbed. There were no broken twigs. There were no burn marks or other unusual effects in the slash pile or in the trees. Nothing, in short, to back up the story.

When last seen, Walton had been wearing no more than a light jacket. As the evening progressed, the temperature plummeted. If Walton was somewhere out in the woods, the bitter cold could represent a direct threat to his life. Ellison went back to Heber to collect additional searchers, but even with the further manpower the mystery of Walton's whereabouts remained unresolved.

Finally around midnight Rogers remarked that Travis's mother, Mary Walton Kellett, ought to be notified. She was staying in a remote cabin on a ranch in Bear Springs, about 10 miles in the woods to the east. (Kellett lived there part of the year and spent winters at her home in Snowflake. She was shortly to return to town.) Rogers and Undersheriff Coplan set off to see her. They showed up at her door around 1 A.M. Mrs. Kellett knew Rogers, of course, but had not met Coplan before now.

Still visibly shaken, Rogers related the circumstances of her son's disappearance. Apparently not quite comprehending what he was telling her, Kellett asked him to repeat the story. Then, after some moments' pause, she asked him if he had told anyone else.

Coplan, who had expected Kellett to respond more dramatically, did not like the way she was acting, and he—as well as later critics of the case—would make much of Kellett's apparent composure, interpreting it as evidence that as a party to the hoax she knew her son was all right and hidden away somewhere. In fact, those who knew Kellett far better than Coplan would insist that a hard life—she had raised six children on her own under difficult economic circumstances—had long since taught her not to fly to pieces in the face of crises and tragedies. It was part of her personal code not to display emotion before strangers. Yet in the days ahead, as events overwhelmed her, she would show emotion before friends, acquaintances, and strangers alike—a fact that would go unmentioned in debunking treatments of the Walton episode.

At 3 A.M. Kellett called Duane Walton, the second oldest of the Walton sons and the one who, owing to strength of personality, typically took charge when circumstances called for it. Duane left his home in Glendale, a western suburb of Phoenix, almost immediately.

By morning yet more volunteers, including local Forest Service personnel, had joined the search. The three crew members who had stayed away the night before had not returned in the morning, so again only Rogers, Peterson, and Dalis participated in the renewed effort. Already the sheriff's men and other area police officers were entertaining dark suspicions that the UFO tale was a story concocted to cover something far more sinister, such as murder. But at the same time Mike Rogers, who presumably would have been in on this hypothetical murder plot, was as insistent as Duane Walton, who presumably would not have been, that the search be continued. The two of them showed up together at Sheriff Gillespie's office on Saturday in an explosively angry mood. They had just been to the site, they said, and had detected not a soul. The search resumed that afternoon. This time it included a helicopter, riders on horseback, and four-wheel jeeps.

That day also brought the outside world into this obscure corner of America. Along with hordes of reporters and curiosity-seekers, UFO investigator Fred Sylvanus showed up, sought out Mike Rogers and interviewed him in the late afternoon and early evening. Duane Walton, who sat in on the interview, repeatedly interjected with comments of his own. These comments would come back to haunt him and to take a permanent place in the controversy surrounding the case. Duane claimed to have seen a UFO "almost identical to what they described, for a period of about 30 minutes, in broad daylight, about 12 years ago." He went on to assert, "Travis and I discussed this many, many times at great length. . . . We both said that we would immediately get as directly under the object as was physically possible. . . . The opportunity would be too great to pass up, and at any cost, except death, we were to make contact with them. . . . [Travis] performed just as we said we would . . . and he's received the benefits for it." Not nearly so sure, Rogers said, "You hope he has." Duane said he was sure his brother would be brought back because "they don't kill people." He and Mike denied, however, that they were UFO buffs. "I follow it like I do a lot of other things," Duane said.

Later in the interview Rogers expressed concern about another sort of problem: "This contract that we have is seriously behind schedule. In fact, Monday [November 10] the time is up. We haven't done any work on it since Wednesday because of this thing; therefore, it won't be done. I hope they take that into account, this problem." He then returned to a prominent theme in the interview: his frustration with what he saw as a less than adequate search for his missing friend. "Nobody seemed that interested in searching that extensively. No bloodhounds were brought in. And now it's too late. I've been mentioning it every day." Duane also complained bitterly about the lackadaisical nature of the search.

It certainly seemed, Sylvanus thought, as if the two were genuinely concerned about Travis. Yet at the same time Duane's remarks about UFOs and the intentions of their occupants made him uneasy; so did Mike's expressed concerns about the lateness of his Forest Service contract. As would soon become clear, the foundations for an alternative interpretation of the case had been laid.

Meanwhile Snowflake Town Marshal Sanford (Sank) Flake was telling the press of his certainty that the story was a hoax "staged by Travis and his brother Duane to make some money. I believe the other kids did see something, but they were hoaxed, too." The Walton brothers, he said, had "lit up a balloon and launched it at the appropriate time." Flake's wife dissented. "Your idea is just as farfetched as Duane Walton's." Marshal Flake had a longstanding grievance against the Walton family stemming from a dispute with Travis some years earlier, and he had no specific evidence to support his charge, though he was poking around the Bear Springs ranch where he suspected Travis was hiding. On one occasion he brought a London television crew with him to the site, presumably so that it could film the live capture.

Flake was not the only officer hoping to crack the case by breaking down one of the supposed conspirators, who so far were sticking resolutely to their story. Some officers made repeated visits to Kellett's house to interrogate her at length. Finally one evening

Duane arrived from the sheriff's office at Holbrook, where he had sat in on yet another interview of the six witnesses. His mother was crying as an oblivious deputy kept plying her with questions. Furious, Duane took him to the porch and told him not to return unless or until he really had something to talk about. Then Duane told his mother that from now on she should not allow investigators into the house; she should talk with them on the porch, which would allow her to end the discussion any time she wanted to.

The next morning Marshal Flake showed up to deliver a message. Because Kellett had no phone, all communications between her and the authorities had to be carried out in person. Kellett stepped out to the porch, closed the door behind her, took the message, and went back inside. Flake and other skeptics would later conclude that she was hiding something. Or someone.

On Monday morning Rogers and the crew met in Holbrook to undergo polygraph testing at the sheriff's office. The examiner, Cy Gilson, worked for the Arizona Department of Public Safety and had been brought up from Phoenix for the occasion. While reporters milled around outside, each of the witnesses underwent four 20-minute tests which consisted of variously phrased versions of four basic questions:

> (1) Did you cause Travis Walton any serious physical harm last Wednesday afternoon?
>
> (2) Do you know if Travis Walton was physically injured by some other member of your work crew last Wednesday?
>
> (3) Do you know if Travis Walton's body is buried or hidden somewhere in the Turkey Springs area?
>
> (4) Did you tell the truth about actually seeing a UFO last Wednesday when Travis Walton disappeared?

One of the variants of this last question was, Do you believe that Travis Walton was actually taken aboard a UFO last Wednesday?

In his official report Gilson wrote:

> Each of the six men answered "No" to questions #1, 2 and 3, and they each answered "Yes" to question #4. The test results were conclusive on Goulette, Smith, Peterson, Rogers, and Pierce. The test results on Dalis were inconclusive.
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> Based on the polygraph chart tracing, it is the opinion of this examiner that Goulette, Smith, Peterson, Rogers, and Pierce were being truthful when they answered these relevant questions.
>
> These polygraph examinations prove that these five men did see some object that they believe to be a UFO, and that Travis Walton was not injured or murdered by any of these men on that Wednesday. If an actual UFO did not exist and the UFO is a man-made hoax, five of these men hid no prior knowledge of a hoax. No such determination can be made of the sixth man, whose test results were inconclusive.

Even Flake did not make much of Dalis's test results. Dalis, after all, was a man with much to hide: a criminal past and (as we shall see) a criminal future. He had behaved with hostility all through the polygraph process, as if fearing secrets he had every reason not to wish revealed would accidentally come to light. Flake remarked, "I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him. Since he's the only one who didn't pass the lie test, I'd almost have to believe the opposite with him. Not passing means he's probably telling the truth. He saw it, the UFO." After the test Sheriff Gillespie pronounced himself satisfied. "There's no doubt they're telling the truth—right down the line," he said. "I feel sure that all six of them saw a UFO."

Close to midnight a phone rang in Taylor, a small town two or three miles south of Snowflake and 30 miles east of Heber. When Grant Neff took the call, he heard a faint, confused-sounding voice mutter, "This is Travis. I'm in a phone booth at the Heber gas station, and I need help. Come and get me."

Neff, who was married to Travis's sister Allison, told the caller he had the wrong number. From his point of view, Neff had no reason to take the message seriously. The voice did not sound like Travis's, for one thing. For another, the Waltons and their relatives already had been subjected to too many prank and crank calls. But just as he was preparing to hang up, Neff heard the voice screaming. The hysteria

sounded genuine. "It's me, Grant," the caller said. "I'm hurt, and I need help badly. You come and get me."

It was Travis, all right. Neff promised to get Duane and to be in Heber as soon as possible.

The reappearance. Neff drove to Snowflake and picked up Duane, who had not left the sheriff's office until 10 that evening. From there Duane had gone to Snowflake and to his mother's house. The two were talking when a white-faced Neff walked in and broke the news.

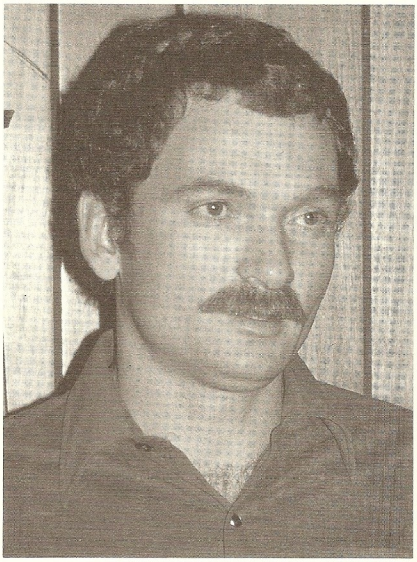
Grant Neff and Duane Walton found Travis hunched over in the second of three phone booths at a service station on Heber's outskirts. Though conscious, he seemed to be in shock. He had five days' worth of beard on his face, and he looked thinner than he had been when last seen. (Later, members of the family would claim that he had weighed 165; weighed not long after his return, he was 154.) Clothed in the levi shirt and jeans and cotton shirt he had been wearing at the time of his disappearance, he was shivering in the 18-degree cold.

On the way back to Snowflake, Travis spoke vaguely of encountering creatures with eyes that had terrified him. He was still frightened. He was startled to hear that five days had passed; he thought it had been only a couple of hours. When he heard that, he shook his head and ceased speaking altogether.

At his mother's house he took a bath and drank quantities of water. When he tried to eat cottage cheese and pecan cookies, he threw up.

Duane decided that someone in his brother's fragile condition needed to be shielded, at least for now, from harassment by police officers, journalists, and busy-bodies. Travis himself was saying over and over again, almost as if reciting something from memory, "Don't let the police know I'm here. . . . I've got to have a doctor. . . . Don't let the police know. . . . Get me some medical help."

But the police already knew, or at least suspected, that something was up. At 2:30 A.M. Gillespie got a tip from a phone company informant that someone had called the Neffs from the Heber gas-station booth. Gillespie alerted Deputy Ellison and Lt. E. M. Romo,



Travis Walton's five-day disappearance and alleged UFO abduction in November 1975 generated two books, a motion picture, and two decades of controversy.

who went to the station and began to dust for prints. There were no prints at all on the phone in the third booth, perhaps because no one had used it since the serviceman had emptied the till and wiped the instrument clean. The other two had prints, but so far as Ellison and Romo could determine in the cold and dark, none was Walton's.

Meanwhile officers on duty in the early-morning hours were looking for cars owned by Walton family members. Deputy Glen Flake (Sanford Flake's brother), who had been positioned in Snowflake at the junction of Highways 77 and 277 so that he could see Walton vehicles heading to or from Taylor (on 77) or Heber (on 277), saw nothing. In due course the sheriff told him to drive over to Mary Kellett's house.

Travis was there, but Deputy Flake would not know that till later. When he pulled up, he observed lights on inside the house. Duane was in the front yard

siphoning gas from a friend's truck. He explained that he had driven from Holbrook too late to refill his tank for the trip back to Glendale. He did not add that Travis would be accompanying him there, and Flake asked no further questions. Not long after he left, Duane left with Travis. By the time they got to Phoenix, the Walton abduction case would be in danger of collapsing into farce.

Travails and tests. Among the ufologists whom Duane Walton met prior to his brother's return was a Phoenix man named William H. Spaulding, head of Ground Saucer Watch (GSW). A frequent lecturer at UFO conventions, Spaulding specialized in photoanalysis; he claimed to have developed a computer-enhancement technique by which he could distinguish phony and authentic UFO photographs with something approaching certainty. In speeches and articles in popular UFO magazines, he spoke and wrote in a sort of pseudotechnical jargon which puzzled (and therefore usually impressed) the technically untrained even as it entertained the technically sophisticated, who found idle amusement in the enumeration of the malapropisms that habitually permeated Spaulding's discourse.

During Travis's absence Spaulding had introduced himself to Duane, and the two had spoken at length. Spaulding boasted that as a scientific organization GSW had access to all kinds of professionals, including physicians. The Waltons, who had the good fortune of being healthy and the bad luck of being poor, had no family doctor. But Duane knew that Travis would require medical attention on his return (assuming he did return). Spaulding assured him that GSW had a local physician who could take care of Travis and perform "all the scientific testing he'll need."

On his arrival in Phoenix, Duane called Spaulding, who directed him to GSW's medical consultant, Dr. Lester Steward. He and Duane would meet him at his office at 9 A.M. Duane and Travis then went to sleep at the former's Glendale residence, awakening just after 9. They hurried to Steward's office, which they were disconcerted to learn was located in a rundown hotel not far from the airport. Nothing about the office itself inspired confidence either. It looked as seedy as its surroundings. The curtains were yellowed; there was no air-conditioning, and the deafening roar of landing and departing jets blew through the open windows. Worse, the room was devoid of medical equipment and textbooks. Even more ominously, the sign on the door identified Steward simply as "Hypnotherapist."

Duane immediately wanted to know if Steward was a medical doctor. At first he insisted he was, then eventually admitted that he was not licensed to practice in Arizona. (A subsequent inquiry determined that Steward's degree was from a California-based correspondence school without academic accreditation.) He said he would call a doctor friend and arrange for a full physical examination, but his "friend"—so Duane and Travis judged from hearing Steward's side of the conversation—did not appear to know who he was.

The Waltons walked out soon afterwards. The amount of time they spent in Steward's office itself became a part of the controversy. Steward and Spaulding would assert that the brothers had been there for two hours, during which Steward questioned them thoroughly. This is certainly false. The Waltons showed up half an hour late for their appointment; afterwards they went out to eat in a nearby restaurant before driving on to Glendale. At 10:45 Duane took a call from another ufologist, Coral Lorenzen of the Tucson-based Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO). Thus the time with Steward probably did not exceed 45 minutes.

By the time they got back to Duane's, the two learned that the world now knew about Travis's return—till then a secret known only to the family, Spaulding, and Steward. In their absence Duane's girl friend Carol had been fielding phone calls from reporters. On their return both Spaulding and Steward called, but Duane bluntly informed them that they should bother them no more. This action, as the Waltons soon found out, made Spaulding—who till now had been telling the press of his confidence in the case—a sworn enemy and the source of a great deal of future trouble. Other inquirers were told that Travis had gone to a private hospital in Tucson and could not be reached.

Nonetheless Mrs. Lorenzen managed to get through when she phoned. She spoke with Duane and man-

aged to persuade him that she could arrange for an examination by local physicians—*real* ones. So at 3:30 that afternoon Duane and Travis met two Phoenix APRO members, Drs. Joseph Saults (a general practitioner) and Howard Kandell (a pediatrician), at Duane's home.

This was well and good—the first step toward a real investigation—but between Lorenzen's call and the physicians' examination another party would enter, and hugely complicate, the story. At noon Lorenzen heard from the *National Enquirer*. In exchange for APRO's cooperation and access to the Waltons, the tabloid offered to pay all expenses. To start with, it would pay for a hotel room in which the brothers could be sequestered; it would also dispatch a team of reporters to the scene. Since APRO could not match the *Enquirer*'s financial resources, Lorenzen agreed.

Travis's examination went well. Saults and Kandell found that he was in good health. There were only two out-of-the-ordinary physiological symptoms. As Kandell, who wrote the medical report, would note:

> There were no bruises or evidence of trauma, except for a two-mm red spot in the crease of his right elbow, which was suggestive of a needle puncture; however, it was not overlying any significant blood vessel. He denied being aware of its presence and did not know what it might be due to. . . .
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> Urinalysis—volume 560 cc; normal, with good concentration [SpG 1.032]; however, there was no acetone present, which is unusual, considering that any person who is without adequate nutrition for twenty-four to forty-eight hours will break down his own body-fat stores, which should result in ketones [acetones] being excreted into the urine. The absence of ketones in his urine, considering a ten-pound weight loss, is difficult to explain.

Duane had given the doctors a bottle of urine—the product of Travis's first post-return micturition; early on Spaulding had urged Duane to make sure such a sample was preserved. Of course there was no way to prove this was Travis's specimen. The physicians had to take the brothers' word for it.

Travis would speculate that the red spot was probably something he had picked up in the course of his work, probably from a thorny bush. On the other hand, as we shall soon see, some critics would charge that the mark was evidence that Travis had injected drugs, probably LSD, into his right elbow. While this latter theory is hardly plausible, Travis's defenders would never be able to offer an explanation for the curious absence of bruises, which one would expect in the wake of Travis's alleged beam-driven collision with the ground.

Meanwhile Duane was maintaining the pretense that his brother was hospitalized in Tucson. He told this untruth—or, as he thought of it, cover story—not only to press inquirers but to Sheriff Gillespie, who had learned of Travis's return only through media accounts. On Tuesday, however, he found out that Travis was staying with Duane near Phoenix. He drove to Glendale and confronted Duane and Travis near midnight.

Gillespie listened as an exhausted Travis related what little he remembered of what happened after he awoke in a hospital-like setting inside what he assumed was an alien spacecraft. After hearing him out, the sheriff wondered aloud if Travis had not been hit with a club or baseball bat, then drugged and taken to an earthly hospital. Travis disagreed, pointing out that the physical tests he had just undergone had detected no trace of drugs or bumps on his head. The incident had occurred just as he said it had, and he would take a lie-detector test to prove it. Duane added that Travis would take any kind of test, not just polygraph but truth serum, voice stress analysis, or hypnosis, to prove that he was telling the truth. Gillespie said a polygraph test would do.

By the next day, Wednesday, November 12, Spaulding was being quoted in the press as saying that he and his group had found unspecified "holes in this story." Spaulding, who had directed the Waltons to "Dr." Steward, also stressed that the investigation required more than anything "competent scientific personnel conducting scientific tests." Later that day he told reporters, "We're going to blow this story out today."

On Thursday, Travis and Duane slipped away to nearby Scottsdale, where the *National Enquirer* had a

room at the Sheraton Hotel waiting for them. There they met APRO scientific consultant James A. Harder, a professor of engineering at the University of California at Berkeley. Harder, who had a particular interest in hypnotizing UFO witnesses, soon regressed Travis, who proceeded to tell for the first time all that had happened, or supposedly happened, aboard the UFO. Heretofore he had been reluctant to discuss it and had given it out piecemeal even to his brother. Unlike many other abductees, however, Walton's conscious recall and unconscious "memory" were the same, and he could account for only a maximum of two hours, and perhaps even less, of his missing five days. (The onboard experience will be discussed later.)

Sheriff Gillespic had arranged for polygraph examinations for Travis and Duane, to be administered by Cy Gilson, the same man who had tested the logging team earlier in the week. All concerned agreed that it must be done in secrecy, to eliminate the media circus that had afflicted the previous polygraph episode. Unfortunately someone leaked news of the intended examination. On Friday morning, as the sheriff left his office, he saw clear signs that reporters were following him. Around that time a reporter phoned Duane's house and wanted to know when Duane and Travis planned to go to Holbrook for the test. When Duane heard about the call, he exploded. He cancelled the test and accused the sheriff—who was in fact as innocent as the Waltons themselves—of bad faith.

At this stage everybody's nerves were on edge. The Waltons also were angry and upset at the many rumors and accusations in circulation. Some of these saw print. The next day, Saturday the fifteenth, the *Phoenix Gazette* ran an uncritical piece on "Dr. Lester H. Steward, director of the Modern Hypnosis Instruction Center." After spending "two hours with Walton and his brother Duane," the article reported, Steward stated, "He [Travis] was out hallucinating on some drug, probably LSD." He further claimed that the Waltons had come on like a couple of freeloaders who wanted a physical examination without having to pay for it; yet when he arranged for just such an exam, the two young men fled his office. The article went on to recite other false and dubious allegations:

> Steward said Duane Walton called him Tuesday about regressive hypnosis [not true]. . . . The hypnosis never came off [it was never asked for], Steward said, and he believes the reason is that the Waltons fear exposure.
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> Steward challenged the alleged infallibility of the lie-detector tests. . . . Five reportedly passed, but Steward said he would be unconvinced that they were telling the truth unless they went through regressive hypnosis [as, in fact, Travis Walton already had].
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> "The polygraph is only a machine, and I think they got together and beat it," he said. "But they can't beat hypnosis. If they did go into hypnosis, they can lie, but I can show they are lying, and they can't control it. [Nothing in the professional literature of hypnosis substantiates these claims. Lies told under hypnosis are indistinguishable from truths.]
>
> "They're afraid of the tests," he added [without evidence].
>
> He said that Travis appeared upset at first, but he was completely calm when the two brothers left, and Steward described that reaction as symptomatic of drug use [Lowe, 1975].

These were extraordinarily irresponsible charges. To start with, no evidence whatever existed to support the allegation that Travis was under the influence of drugs at any time. According to all available testimony, not just Travis's but other people's, Travis so opposed drug use that he did not consume alcohol or even coffee. True, he had taken drugs in the past, in common with many other young people of the period, but he had stopped doing so two years previously. Whatever one makes of the UFO claim, the drug accusation was and remains a canard, though would-be debunkers would keep it alive for years to come.

The *National Enquirer* wanted Travis to take a polygraph examination as soon as possible, while it still had him available and before another publication was able to scoop it. Harder thought Travis was still too nervous and distraught to take a test which, strictly speaking, measured stress, not lies. Travis might or might not be lying (though Harder was convinced of his truthfulness), but there could be no question that

he was exhibiting plenty of stress. Three psychiatrists who had been brought into the case concurred, insisting that any results would have no meaning. One psychiatrist, Jean Rosenbaum, spoke with particular authority here; he was a court-accepted expert on polygraph use.

But the *Enquirer* persisted. A positive polygraph result would bolster the impact of its story; besides, reporter Paul Jenkins argued, the results would not be released without Travis's permission. Travis finally consented, and APRO director Jim Lorenzen (Coral's husband) contacted John J. McCarthy, director of the Phoenix-based Arizona Polygraph Laboratory. McCarthy said he would be willing to administer the test. When Harder expressed concern about Travis's emotional state, McCarthy assured him that he would take it into account.

Unfortunately, when they met in the Waltons's room at the Sheraton, McCarthy did nothing to reassure Travis. Instead, in the pre-trial interview McCarthy got Travis to admit to two episodes about which he was deeply ashamed: his past drug use and a 1971 scrape with the law. In the latter instance he and Charles Rogers (Mike Rogers's younger brother) had pled guilty to the theft of blank payroll checks which they had cashed using a forged signature. Apprehended almost immediately, they were given two years' probation and ordered to repay the stolen money. That was the beginning and end of Travis's criminal history. Not even Sank Flake, who did not like Travis and openly accused him of hoaxing the UFO story, deemed this anything other than a youthful mistake, but it was deeply embarrassing to have to admit to it, and Travis talked about it only on the understanding that the matter would be kept confidential.

Yet McCarthy, whose occasionally sarcastic and sometimes abrasive remarks betrayed his skepticism, went out of his way to remind Travis of the incident a few minutes later. After McCarthy had used the word "collusion" and Travis admitted that he did not know the word, McCarthy snapped, "That means acting in concert with somebody else, one or more people to perpetrate a hoax, acting in collusion with somebody else, you know, to set this thing up. Just like you acted in collusion with this friend of yours to burglarize the office, steal the checks, and forge them, right?"

A few minutes later McCarthy announced, "Travis, your responses are deceptive," and declared that he had failed the polygraph test. Flabbergasted, Travis protested, "There must be some mistake." He asked for another test. McCarthy refused. "There's no need to go any further," he said. "I've got my answers."

He concluded his official report thus:

> His reactions on the control test were normal. He appeared to be lucid, and prior to testing he stated that he understood each of the questions to be asked and that he would answer each with a "Yes" or "No." It was obvious during the examination that he was deliberately attempting to distort his respiration pattern.
>
> Based on his reactions on all charts, it is the opinion of this examiner that Walton, in concert with others, is attempting to perpetrate a UFO hoax, and that he has not been on any spacecraft.

Duane expressed his enormous displeasure with the results to McCarthy. The psychiatrists reiterated their conviction that under the circumstances the results meant nothing. Dr. Rosenbaum spoke for his colleagues in a formal statement:

> [O]ur conclusion, which was absolute, is that this young man is not lying, that there is no collusion involved. The full test results show that he really believes these things, that he is not lying. He really believes that he was abducted by a UFO.

Rosenbaum then went on to offer his own distinctive interpretation of the episode:

> But my evaluation of the boy's story is that, although he believes this is what happened, it was all in his own mind. I feel that he suffered from a combination of imagination and amnesia, a transitory psychosis—that he did not go on a UFO, but simply was wandering around during the period of his disappearance. But I'm unable to account for five witnesses having the same basic story and passing lie-detector tests about it.

Nor would Rosenbaum's hypothesis explain how Travis could have maintained relative good health, or even stayed alive, over five nights of well-below-freezing temperatures—especially considering that the clothes he was wearing were manifestly not suited to such bitter cold. Moreover, formal psychological testing of Travis by APRO-affiliated psychologists Harold Cahn and R. Leo Sprinkle would uncover no evidence of emotional abnormality.

In any event, it was apparent to just about everybody except McCarthy that the polygraph test had been a bad idea. Then the Waltons, *National Enquirer*, McCarthy, and APRO signed on to another bad idea: they agreed to keep the test and its results confidential. Hardly anyone else would hear of the incident until eight months later, when the Walton case's most intense and persistent critic exposed it to the world.

On February 7, 1976, Duane took a polygraph test administered by George Pfeifer of Tom Ezell and Associates. Travis hoped to be there as well, but APRO had not made an appointment for him because he was having car trouble and it was by no means certain that he would be able to negotiate the 160 miles between Snowflake and Phoenix. But as it happened, Travis made it. He asked if he could take the test after Duane was through. Drs. Harold Cahn and R. Leo Sprinkle and APRO director Jim Lorenzen drew up a list of questions, and later Travis added some others. Travis wanted the test to cover other accusations that had been leveled at him.

Pfeifer concluded as follows:

> [I]t is the opinion of this examiner that Duane Walton has answered all questions truthfully according to what he believes to be the truth regarding this incident, and he has not attempted to be deceptive in any area. . . .
>
> After a careful analysis of the polygrams produced, there are no areas left unresolved, and it is the opinion of this examiner that Travis Walton has answered all questions in a manner that he himself is firmly convinced to be truth regarding the incident commencing 11-5-75.

Pfeifer also conducted a polygraph examination on Mary Kellett. Those who thought Travis's disappearance had been staged suspected that his mother would almost certainly know of the hoax; some speculated that he had hidden in her Bear Springs cabin. So Pfeifer asked her if she had participated in a hoax, if she had concealed Travis, and if she knew where Travis was between November 5 and 10. She answered no to these questions. Pfeifer also wanted to know if she believed Travis was telling the truth. She said yes. Pfeifer wrote:

> After a very careful analysis of the polygraphs produced and comparing the polygraph tracings with the Known Lie pattern, it is the opinion of this examiner that Mrs. Mary Kellett has answered all the questions truthfully according to the best of her knowledge and beliefs.

The controversy. Even in the absence of clear evidence of a hoax—as well as in ignorance of the suppressed McCarthy test—Spaulding continued his assault on the case, telling journalists and ufologists that the Waltons were lying. Persons knowledgeable about the case sometimes found his logic hard to follow. He wrote, for example, "Walton never boarded the UFO. This fact is supported by the six witnesses and the [Gilson] polygraph test results." Spaulding did not elaborate on this curious contention.

Nonetheless other UFO groups were willing to take Spaulding at his word. The National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) inaccurately characterized the incident as a "contactee case," complained about the "undue excitement and interest" it had generated, and remarked that "either a hoax has been committed or . . . a psychological phenomena [sic] is involved." It cited as authority its "investigator," an Arizona university professor. Later the "investigator" acknowledged that he had not done any actual investigating ("Alleged Arizona Abduction," 1976). The Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) also treated the case cautiously, citing both sides of the dispute without taking sides ("APRO, NICAP, GSW," 1976). APRO's treatment, the most comprehensive, was the wholly positive one ("The Travis Walton Case," 1975; Lorenzen and Lorenzen, 1975); though it made much of the Pfeifer tests, it failed to mention the failed examination with McCarthy.

So did the *National Enquirer* in its December 16, 1975, issue, even though its reporters had privately voiced their disenchantment with the case to the Lorenzens

a day after the McCarthy examination. One of them, Jeff Wells, prepared a 16-page memorandum urging that the story be killed. Unlike McCarthy, the reporters did not believe Travis had perpetrated a hoax; they were persuaded by Dr. Rosenbaum that he had had a psychological experience. As Wells recalled in 1981, "He had seen something out there in the woods, some kind of an [sic] eerie light that had triggered a powerful hallucination that might recur at any time" (Wells, 1981).

A far more formidable and serious attack on the case was launched by Philip J. Klass in June 1976. Klass, by profession an editor of the Washington weekly *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, issued 17 pages' worth of accusations against virtually everyone—investigator, polygraph examiner, and alleged witness—who in one way or another supported the case. A ferocious UFO debunker who seldom hesitated to hurl hoax charges against witnesses ordinarily deemed reliable (including police officers and members of the clergy), Klass approached the Walton episode less as an investigator than as a prosecutor.

His most damaging revelation concerned the McCarthy examination and APRO's role in covering it up. Jim Lorenzen would subsequently defend his organization's actions, saying that the results were meaningless—probably true, but hardly the point. Klass got the story from McCarthy, who had decided to speak out because of the continuing attention Walton's claims were receiving. (In July Travis and the six witnesses would split a $5000 award from the *National Enquirer* after its Blue Ribbon Panel on Unidentified Flying Objects judged the case the most important UFO event of 1975.) He also learned from McCarthy of Travis's past drug use and run-in with the law. Klass used these, along with the claims of Lester Steward (charitably referred to as a "psychologist and hypnotist whose Ph.D. is from a small private school in Southern California"), to charge that Travis was befuddled with drugs, possibly from "LSD injected into the spot where the puncture mark was found." Readers of Klass's paper could only conclude that Travis was both a substance abuser and a criminal.

Drawing liberally on speculation, the darkest possible interpretation of every remark and action, and regular use of capital letters, bold type, italics, and underlined sentences (and sometimes combinations thereof), Klass told a complex tale of deceit, conspiracy, and incompetence. He portrayed the Waltons as UFO buffs who seemed oddly unconcerned by Travis's disappearance. To get around the positive polygraph results, Klass argued that McCarthy's experience and qualifications were greater than Gilson's and Pfeifer's; moreover, Travis had "dictated" the questions Pfeifer had asked him.

The November 10 Gilson examination of the crew members proved nothing, according to Klass, except that the loggers had not murdered Travis. The one UFO-related question, Klass wrote, went, "Did you tell the truth about actually seeing a UFO last Wednesday when Travis Walton disappeared?" Klass noted, "The question did *not* ask whether they saw Travis being 'zapped' by a UFO, nor whether they really believed that Travis had been abducted by a UFO." He then made this rather strange observation:

> Celestial bodies are sometimes mistaken for UFOs. At the time of the Walton incident, the planet Jupiter was very bright in the early evening sky and would have been visible at 6:15 P.M. This is *not* to suggest that Rogers and his crew honestly imagined that Travis had been "zapped" by Jupiter. But if they were all partners in a prearranged hoax, all might be able to answer "yes" to this one UFO-related question without displaying overt signs of telling a significant falsehood.

Such strained conjecture did little to advance Klass's argument. It was, moreover, unfair to conflate Travis's youthful troubles into evidence of a continuing pattern of criminal behavior, including substance abuse. Of this charge Lorenzen said, "The arresting officer [in the forgery episode] will write Travis a letter of recommendation and the people that he robbed will do the same" (Clark, 1977). No area law-enforcement people, even those who did not especially like him, considered Travis a criminal (Barry, 1978).

It was not true that Travis had "dictated" the polygraph questions to Pfeifer, Lorenzen would argue. Pfeifer himself would characterize the verb as less than accurate; "suggest" would be closer to the truth. In any event, as Klass neglected to mention, the questions Travis wanted asked were potentially dam-

aging ones if he was trying to perpetrate a hoax. In suggesting them, Travis was trying to address the accusations made against him, never imagining that his action would be turned into yet another accusation against him.

No one denied that the Waltons had discussed UFOs in the past. In common with a number of area residents, including Sheriff Gillespie, both Duane and his mother claimed to have seen them in the past (Duane reporting a close encounter, Kellett distant lights). By Duane's own testimony he and his brother had talked about the prospect of entering a UFO. It is not unreasonable to incorporate these elements into a hypothesis which sees the Waltons therefore as logical suspects in a flying-saucer hoax. To call them UFO buffs, however, is to overstate the case. They were not consumers of UFO literature, and Travis had never heard of J. Allen Hynek, Northwestern University astronomer, former **Project Blue Book** consultant, and then the world's most famous UFO investigator. Travis learned of him only when Hynek proposed a meeting. Travis refused, thinking that Hynek was someone associated with Spaulding's group.

Duane maintained that his repeated talk of Travis's return, including his insistence that his brother was safe with the UFO people, was done to reassure his mother and himself. Here, of course, we have to take his word for it, and Klass was not the only critic to wonder.

In Klass's rendering of the incident, the witnesses had a strong financial motive for perpetrating a hoax. Mike Rogers was far behind on the timber-trimming operation for which he had contracted with the Forest Service. The completion date on the original contract, awarded June 26, 1974, was for the summer of 1975. Rogers managed to get an 84-day extension, and the new deadline was November 10, 1975. But as that date neared, he realized that he was still nowhere near completion. The Forest Service withheld 10 percent of its payment on the contract until the job was finished. As Klass had it, Rogers knew that he was risking that penalty, which he could ill afford, and so he decided to make use of the "Act of God" clause in the contract. Thus the "UFO abduction" came at a convenient time for him. On November 18 he wrote the Forest Service to explain that he could not complete his contract because the UFO incident "caused me to lose my crew and [made] it difficult to get any of them back on the job site."

This claim, seemingly plausible, was repeated in subsequent Klass white papers and in two books he would write years later. It would be accepted as a reasonable explanation even by some UFO proponents. It is, however, almost certainly false.

To start with, the seven crew members were unlikely conspirators in a scheme to commit what amounted to fraud against the federal government. Rogers's men were all temporary employees, picked up for the specific job and paid by the hour. Only Travis and Mike Rogers were personally close. Dwayne Smith barely knew the other crew members; the incident took place on his third day on the job. Later, when Allen Dalis, by all accounts the least-liked member of the crew (and thus arguably the one most likely to inform on his fellows), fell afoul of the law, he confessed to crimes with which the authorities had not thought to link him; yet he resolutely insisted that the UFO story was true. One individual, never publicly identified, offered money—$10,000, according to one account—to crew member Steve Pierce if he would admit that the incident was a hoax. He refused. In the early 1990s the Walton story was back in the news because a feature film had been made about it; if any of the presumed conspirators had wanted to sell an exposé to a tabloid newspaper, he certainly could have done so—and no doubt laid claim to a sizeable check. None did so.

Moreover, as the *A.P.R.O. Bulletin* observed:

> The facts are that Rogers was behind on the contract in question since he had been working on three other contracts simultaneously. He had collected on the other contracts and therefore was not in financial trouble.
>
> Also, it was to his advantage and to the advantage of the crew to work as long as possible on the contract. Rogers knew from experience that a small time overrun would be tolerated provided they were making good progress. In addition, a contract could be defaulted without serious penalty or prejudice without going to all

> the trouble of creating an excuse. Rogers knew this because he had defaulted a contract a few years earlier.
>
> Rogers had requested an inspection from the Forest Service to take place on November 7th, which would enable him to collect for the past three weeks' work. The UFO incident prevented the inspection and held up monies already earned ["The Walton-Klass Affair," 1976].

APRO pointed out that Rogers had not mentioned UFOs as the reason for his not being able to complete the contract on time. Rogers's failure to finish the job in the required period caused no serious difficulty with the Forest Service; not long afterwards Rogers was awarded another contract with it. This time, however, he used a two-man machine and no longer needed a six-man crew. After a while Rogers rehired Travis Walton. The other five who had comprised the original crew were left out in the proverbial cold. "Are we to believe," APRO asked, "that [the] men who perpetrated a hoax for Rogers's benefit are now going to remain silent while Rogers collects the best acreage rate he has ever received without them?"

No one connected with the contract took Klass's theory seriously. Maurice Marchbanks and Junior Williams, the Forest Service officers who contracted with Rogers, rejected the idea as absurd. So did Sheriff Gillespie. So did journalist Bill Barry, who extensively investigated all aspects of the Walton story as he gathered material for a popular magazine article and then a book (Barry, 1977, 1978). Yet Klass persisted, and the notion that the Walton case was a hoax cooked up to excuse an overdue contract entered the folklore of ufology.

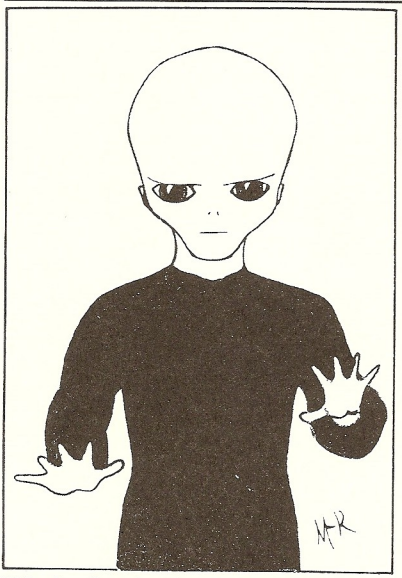
In 1993 Arizona ufologist Jim Speiser, at that point no partisan of either side in the debate, conducted his own inquiries. After examining contract documents, he discovered that Rogers had not drawn on the "Act of God" clause to get out of the contract. "The words 'Act of God' were never mentioned by him, by Marchbanks, or by anyone in connection with the default of his contract," Speiser wrote. He observed:

> Throughout my conversations with Rogers it became clear that an in-depth knowledge of Forest Service contracting practices would be necessary for anyone to evaluate Klass' argumentation[,] and that it would be a simple matter for Klass to exploit this complexity, knowing full well that the casual reader would be hard put to distinguish what passes for in-depth research from what is really half-knowledgeable sophistry. Indeed, Klass' behavior is not unlike [that of] a shrewd prosecutor, familiar with all aspects of the case, but sifting through the clues for the elements that would present the defendant—Rogers—in the worst light [Speiser, 1993].

Aboard. Nearly lost in the complicated human saga that the Walton episode quickly became was Travis's account of what he claimed happened to him during his disappearance. Real or imagined, the story is relatively sedate and simple compared to some other abduction claims of the period (see, for example, the **Andreasson Abduction Case**). If not for the circumstance that initiated the episode, if not for the undeniable fact of Travis's mysterious absence for five days—if, in other words, like most other abduction reports it was simply an anecdote told by one person and unrelated to anything verifiable—it would not be nearly so well known as it is. As folklorist Thomas E. Bullard, a scholar of the abduction phenomenon, puts it, "As abduction stories go, the Walton case was neither lengthy nor complex, but the literature of charges, countercharges and explanations arising out of the investigation has outgrown the literature describing the incident itself" (Bullard, 1987).

Yet Travis's story is interesting in its own right. Part of that interest lies, for all its simplicity, in its eerie and otherworldly quality. More important, it anticipates aspects of the abduction phenomenon, just beginning to come into prominence in the mid-1970s, which were then obscure or unknown altogether.

As the story he would relate consistently over the years went, he returned to consciousness in a hospital-like room. His whole body ached, his vision was blurred, and he felt weak and thirsty. A metallic taste filled his mouth. Above him a luminous rectangle, three feet by one and a half and composed of seamless metal, gave off a soft white glow. A plastic, rocker-shaped device extended from his armpits to his rib



While allegedly on board a UFO, Travis Walton encountered two types of alien beings, including short figures who, Walton said, "looked like fetuses." This sketch was drawn by Mike Rogers based on Walton's description.

cage. The air was wet and heavy, and he had some difficulty breathing it. Still, his first impression was that he was in a conventional earthly hospital, even if he could not understand why the nurses had not removed his clothing.

Travis saw three figures dressed in loose-fitting orange one-piece suits standing near him, one to his right, the other two to his left. As his vision cleared, he recoiled in shock and horror as he realized these were not human beings. He would describe them this way:

> They were short, shorter than five feet, and they had very large, bald heads, no hair. Their heads were domed, very large. They looked like fetuses. They had no eyebrows, no eyelashes. They had very large eyes—enormous eyes—almost all brown, without much white in them. The creepiest thing about them were [sic] those eyes. Oh, man, those eyes, they just stared through me. Their mouths and ears and noses seemed real small, maybe just because their eyes were so huge [Barry, *op. cit.*].

Their hands had five fingers. The beings looked frail, with soft marshmallowy skin.

Travis staggered to his feet and shouted at the beings. He struck out and pushed one of them into another. From the ease with which he was able to knock them back, he deduced that they weighed relatively little. Then he grabbed a cylindrical tube off a shelf which jutted from the wall. Assuming from its appearance that the tube was made of glass, he tried to break the top off so that he could threaten the beings with its jagged edges. But the object proved unbreakable. Nonetheless Travis waved it threateningly in their direction. Keeping their distance, they "just stopped and kind of thrust their hands out, like they meant no, or stop, or I don't know what." After a short, tense standoff, the beings turned around and exited quickly out the door immediately behind them.

Shortly thereafter Travis himself ran out of the room and headed left into a curving corridor three feet wide. In short order he came to an open room on his right. It was round, domed, and apparently empty of anything except a high-backed metal chair in the middle. The chair was supported by a single center leg. Since its back was to him, Travis could not be sure that someone was not sitting in it, but he decided to take a chance. Moving slowly and quietly with his back pressed up against the wall, he positioned himself so that he could glimpse the chair's occupant, if there was one. There wasn't.

When he stepped toward the chair, the light began to fade. He stepped back, and the light returned. He stepped forward again and suddenly was surrounded by stars. He could not tell whether the walls, ceiling, and floor had become transparent, revealing the deep space through which the craft presumably was moving, or starlike points of light had been projected, planetarium-fashion, on all surrounding surfaces. Except for the fact that the walls were still vaguely visible, "the effect was like sitting in a chair in the middle of space," Travis would write (Walton, 1978).

There was a panel of buttons on the right armrest, along with a screen with vertical black lines. The left armrest held a lever. Travis pushed a couple of the buttons, but nothing happened. Then he sat on the chair and pushed the lever forward. The black lines on the screen moved, and the stars started rotating, though keeping their relative positions all the while. Frightened and disoriented, Travis pulled his hand off the lever, which then returned to its original position on its own. The stars stopped rotating and were frozen into their new positions.

Soon he was fooling with the lever again, and now more radically, pushing it in all directions, hoping that he could open one of the doors whose thin rectangular outlines he thought he could see on the wall in front of him. The stars again whirled around. Travis let go once more, fearing that if he kept playing with the instruments, he might cause some real damage.

He got to his feet and walked over to the wall. The stars faded away, and the room lighted up. Travis ran his fingers along the outline of what he thought might be a closed door, then walked back to the chair. As he was standing beside it, he heard sounds and looked to the open doorway behind the chair. There he was startled to see a human figure wearing a transparent bubble helmet over his head. Shock followed relief as Travis reflected that he was among his own kind.

The man looked like a deeply tanned, muscular Caucasian, about six feet two inches tall, perhaps 200 pounds. He had sandy blond hair long enough to cover his ears, and he was dressed in a tight-fitting, bright blue coverall suit with a black band or belt across the middle. He wore black boots. In his excitement Travis failed to appreciate just how odd the man's eyes looked. A "strange bright golden hazel," they were not really the eyes of a human being.

The figure motioned to Travis, who approached with a series of frantic questions to which the only response was a "tolerant grin." Travis thought the man had said nothing because his helmet blocked out his hearing; maybe they were going some place where the man would remove the helmet and then they could talk. Led by the arm, Travis was taken into the curving, narrow hallway, the man in the lead, until they came to a closed door to their right. It opened into a tiny "metal cubicle" of a room which the two entered as the door closed again behind them. Travis asked where they were going, but his companion again ignored the question.

They then entered an enormous room which Travis thought of as an airlock or a hangar. Inside it the air was fresh and cool with gently flowing breezes, almost as if they were outside, and the light was as bright as sunlight. Travis descended a short, steep ramp and looked around him. He would recall:

> The ceiling was sectioned into alternating rectangles of dark metal and those that gave off light like the sun shining through a translucent panel. The alternation of the light and dark panels reminded me of a checkerboard. The ceiling itself curved down to form one of the larger walls in the room. The room was shaped like one quarter of a cylinder laid on its side [*ibid.*].

The craft Travis and the strange man had just left looked like the one he had seen in the woods except that it was considerably larger, perhaps 60 feet in diameter and 16 feet high. To his left were two similar but smaller vehicles (40 to 45 feet in diameter) parked close to the wall. A silver reflection nearby looked as if it could have come from a third craft, but he was not sure because its source was mostly obscured by the large ship.

The two walked across a floor of springy green rubberlike material to a door in the hangar room. It opened from the middle and brought them into a hallway six feet wide and eight feet high. They walked some 80 feet past a number of closed double doors. "When do we get to go home?" Travis wanted to know. "Where are we going now?" As usual his companion acted as if he had not heard him.

They finally came to another pair of doors at the end of the hallway. As they slid silently open, Travis saw two men and a woman sitting in the room. They were dressed like his companion and even bore a family sort of resemblance to him. Like him, they were good-looking and perfectly featured. The woman, who appeared to be wearing no makeup, wore her hair longer than the men did.

The three were not wearing helmets, which gave Travis false encouragement. "Would somebody *please* tell me where I am?" he asked desperately. The beings only looked at him with pleasant expressions on their faces, and the helmeted man sat him down in a chair before leaving through another door, entering a corridor, and departing to the right.

As Travis continued to talk, the woman and one of the men stepped over to him, one on each side, and took him by his arms to a nearby table. Though initially cooperative, Travis grew less so when he realized that they were not going to tell him anything. He shouted at them, but they continued to look on him with the same silent, kindly look, which amounted to a small, toothless grin. Even as he struggled, the beings managed to force him on his back. Once he was down, he noticed that the woman had in her hand something that "looked like one of those clear, soft-plastic oxygen masks, only there were no tubes connected to it. The only thing attached to it was a small, black, golfball-sized sphere." She placed it over his mouth and nose, and as Travis prepared to rip it off his face, he lost consciousness.

The next thing he knew, Travis was lying on his back on the highway just outside Heber, 10 miles from the place where he had seen the light in the woods. In the darkness he saw

> one of those round craft hovering about four feet over the highway. It was hovering there for just a second. I looked up just as a light went out, like a hatch closing, or just a light going out. A white light just went off on the bottom of it. The craft was dark, and it wasn't giving off any light at all [Barry, *op. cit.*].

Travis ran to the gas station and tried the first of three phones. It didn't work, and he panicked. Maybe all of them were out of order. But he got through on the second, and his brother-in-law Grant Neff answered.

Walton and the abduction phenomenon. By 1975 ufologists had collected and investigated a small number of abduction reports. The first case to come to their attention was the **Hill abduction case**, a 1961 close encounter whose abduction aspect, subsequently recovered through hypnosis, first saw print in 1965 and the following year became the subject of a best-selling book. At the time of the Walton disappearance, John G. Fuller's *The Interrupted Journey* was the only full-length treatment of an abduction episode. The next, Coral and Jim Lorenzen's *Abducted!*, would not be published until 1977.

On October 20, 1975, NBC television broadcast a docudrama, *The UFO Incident*, on the Hill case. Klass and other critics would make much of this. Travis insisted neither he nor any other witness had seen the show. In any event, there is not much similarity between the Hills's story and Walton's. There is, moreover, not a great deal of similarity between Walton's and any other abduction narrative that would have been known to him from the UFO literature as of November 1975.

What Jim and Coral Lorenzen found particularly fascinating, however, was the curious fact that at the time the Walton story broke, they were working on an abduction investigation Walton could have known nothing about. The claimant, Air Force Sgt. Charles Moody, reported a close encounter on August 13, 1975, in the New Mexico desert (*see* **Moody Abduction Case**). APRO's investigation began the following month and continued for some months. In a letter Moody wrote the Lorenzens early in November, he described the UFO's occupants in this way:

> The beings were about five feet tall and very much like us except their heads were larger and hairless, their ears very small, eyes a little larger than ours, nose small[,] and the mouth had very thin lips [Lorenzen and Lorenzen, 1977].

Moody's entities were to all intents and purposes identical to the ones Walton allegedly encountered in the period just after he recovered consciousness. Unlike Walton, Moody described communications (via telepathy) between himself and the beings. Moody was told that the ship he had boarded "was not their main craft, but only one used for observing . . . their main craft was about four hundred of our miles above the earth." Furthermore, these beings worked in cooperation with other extraterrestrial races—though Moody, unlike Walton, reported encountering no representatives of these.

Entities like these were unknown to ufologists prior to the Moody and Walton reports, but as abduction

cases proliferated in the years ahead, they would become staples of close-encounter lore. So would reports of onboard encounters with humanlike or near-human beings associated with smaller entities (Bullard, *op. cit.*).

*Continuing controversy.*The Walton case was the subject of two paperback books published in 1978. In *Ultimate Encounter* a journalist's investigation into the tangled affair, author Bill Barry found Klass's and other critics' charges to be without merit, and he concluded that to all appearances Travis and the others were telling the truth as they saw it. Travis's own book, *The Walton Experience*, told the story from his perspective and defended himself against the would-be debunkers. It is worth mentioning that Travis, not a ghostwriter, was indeed the author. Though not college-educated, Travis was and is intelligent and articulate.

The witnesses went their own ways. Travis remained in Snowflake and married Mike Rogers's sister Dana, with whom he had four children. He kept a low profile. His UFO story did not expand in the telling; he claimed no further memories of what happened to him during those five days. He reemerged into public view in March 1993, when *Fire in the Sky*, a feature film based on his book, appeared in the theaters, to modest success, mixed reviews, and ufologists' complaints about its inaccuracies (Drasin, 1993; Johnson, 1993). The film starred D. B. Sweeney as Travis and Robert Patrick as Mike Rogers; Robert Lieberman directed from a script by Tracy Tormé. To promote the film, Walton and Rogers made the rounds of the talk shows. On March 12, the day the movie was released, the two appeared on CNN's *Larry King Show* in a fierce debate with Klass, who at one point lost his temper and called Rogers a "goddamned liar."

Two decades later, what are we to make of the Walton case?

In the end how one views the Walton controversy depends on how one feels about UFOs in general and alien-abduction claims in particular. If one believes it is possible that UFOs exist as piloted extraterrestrial vehicles, one can accept that Travis Walton boarded a spacecraft and interacted with its occupants. If one believes such things are not possible, one has little choice but to insist that a heretofore-undetected hoax scheme underlies the claim.

Nearly all of the available circumstantial evidence would lead one to the conclusion that Walton, his family, and the logging crew are not hoaxers. If there is compelling evidence to the contrary, it has yet to emerge—which is not to say, of course, that it could *never* emerge. In the end Klass's case rests on a single dubious polygraph result and a mass of lurid but apparently baseless speculations. Should the Walton episode turn out to be a hoax, we may be confident that it will not be the kind of hoax Klass says it was. In the end Klass's reckless and emotional attacks have only done damage to the skeptical case. As long as it remains *the* skeptical case, there is no skeptical case.

To be sustained, the critics' argument needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. It would start with three small details, or at least two of them. The least of them is the absence of Travis's fingerprints on any of the phones at the Heber gas station. This absence may be explainable as an oversight by country cops as they fumbled about in the early-morning cold and dark; in any event, nobody disputes that *someone* called the Neffs around midnight on November 10 from a Heber phone booth, and nobody has proposed a candidate other than Travis.

More difficult to rationalize, however, is the absence of any bruises on Travis's body even when the beam slammed his right shoulder into a collision with, as he writes in his book, "the hard, rocky earth of the ridgetop." If there is anything suspicious to be found in the story, one finds it here—as well as in the coincidence of Duane and Travis's having talked about boarding a UFO prior to the latter's "actually" doing so.

Against this anthill of small but disturbing details, of course, stands a mountain of circumstantial evidence which so far even the most committed debunkers have been unable to topple. In its five decades ufology has seen its share of hoaxers, and Travis Walton, to every appearance a modest and decent man, acts like none of them. If his story is a fabrication, it is among the most skillfully and intricately executed in UFO history. If it is not, then its implications—for all of us—are extraordinary indeed.