



PRIZE WINNER — Photographer James K. W. Atherton of United Press International won the grand award in the White House News Photographers Association's annual photo contest. This photo showing former President Eisenhower waving a tiny American flag at Chula Vista, Calif., on Oct. 21, 1960, during the eighth congress of the Inter-American Municipal Organization won the award for Atherton. (UPI-Telephoto)

# Life Believed To Have Come From Space Grown on Earth

Washington—(Science Service)—Life believed to have come from outer space is being grown in test tubes here on earth.

Several generations of bacterial-like cells taken from sterilized meteorites falling to earth's surface from an unknown source in space have reproduced themselves.

These bacteria-like cells, found inside stony meteorites, may be proof there is life outside the earth. However, they could also be an earth form of bacteria that has seeped into the meteorite with water after it fell to the earth. Dr. Frederick D. Siler of the U.S. Geological Survey has grown these proto-bacteria in a sterile laboratory at the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Md. Dr. Walter Newton is his collaborator.

He told Science Service that meteorites are easily "contaminated" with organic matter on their surface. It is therefore important to sterilize them before breaking them open to see if the interior contains any life forms that may have originated somewhere outside the earth.

The stony meteorite used by Dr. Siler was the carbonaceous chondrite that fell at Murray, Ky., in 1950. It is very dense and would not be easily contaminated. Some sci-

entists have found organic matter in meteorites more porous and more easily invaded by organisms.

Dr. Siler sterilized the meteorite in a solution and pulverized small amounts of the inside with sterile mortar and pestle. He inoculated this material into rats, chickens and mice and also put it in a salt water solution to see if it would grow as do bacteria from the soil.

He said the particles from the meteorite grew and reproduced themselves in the salt water medium, consisting of seawater, peptones made from proteins and polysaccharides (sugars). However, they did not grow in the animals as earth bacteria normally would.

The particles can therefore not be called bacteria, Dr. Siler said. They are not organisms but behave like organisms and are made of organic matter, Dr. Siler said if they are earth contaminants, they are of a very unusual type.

Dr. Siler has worked with rocks millions of years old and has found that microorganisms can seep into rocks with water and stay there in an inactive stage. When this happens the organisms lose some enzymes and some of their identity.

It could be such organisms that Dr. Siler has found. He said his research with the meteorites is intended to find the origin of the living particles in the meteorites.

To be positive the living particles were in the meteorite be-

fore it hit the earth, satellites might be sent out into space to "catch" them before they became contaminated in the earth's atmosphere or on the ground.

Dr. Siler said the National Aeronautics and Space Agency could help settle this question by developing a satellite that would be able to catch a meteor some 50 miles above the earth. Bacteria that could contaminate the meteor have been found as high as 20 to 30 miles, he said. The satellite would have to be equipped to grab the meteor and bring it back to earth in germ-free condition so it could be examined aseptically.

**Study of Life Forms**

Meteorites could also be gathered in Antarctica for study of life forms, as they would not be contaminated throughout. Bacteria on their surface would be in suspended animation, since they cannot live actively in Antarctic temperatures.

Dr. Siler first examined the Murray meteorite in 1959 with an infrared spectrophotometer. He discovered several organic radicals found in living material such as anime, nitroso, nitrile and some hydrocarbon.

These findings were checked by Dr. Melvin Calvin at the University of California both by infrared spectrophotometer and a gas chromatograph and the same results obtained.

Now Dr. Siler has shown the material reacts like living matter.

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## U.S. Air Fleet Larger Than Any Civilian Line

Washington — (UPI) — Uncle Sam is now operating a civil air fleet bigger than any single airline.

Federal civil agencies are flying 431 aircraft, including the most modern jets. They have requested funds for 52 additional planes. The biggest U.S. airline, American, has a fleet of about 250 planes.

The federal fleet does not include Air Force and Navy planes nor three planes leased by the Weather Bureau for hurricane, tornado and other severe storm research. The taxpayers' bill for operating and maintaining the federal civilian aircraft exceeds \$40 million annually.

What government agency flies the most planes? It is not, as might be supposed, the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA). The largest single federal air fleet belongs to the U.S. Coast Guard which operates 134 aircraft, mostly in providing air search and rescue aid plus air navigation facilities over ocean areas.

**Second Largest Fleet**

FAA has the second largest fleet — 119 planes, including converted jet bombers and specially equipped jetliners. Most of FAA's aircraft are used for checking air navigation and traffic control facilities. A few are employed as personnel transports, and a number are assigned to FAA's experimental center at Atlantic City, N.J., where new ideas in air traffic control are tested.

Third in line is the Department of Agriculture which has 63 aircraft. Of these, 53 are assigned to the Forest Service for fire detection and fighting as well as insect pest control.

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