



P H E N O M E N A
**SCIENTISTS
WHO HAVE
SEEN UFOs**

Omega makes no apologies for returning to the vexed subject of UFOs. Here, in answer to the accusation that the subject is not worth serious consideration by orthodox scientists, we examine the evidence of highly credible observers. By Patrick Huyghe.

Strange objects have flitted about the sky throughout history, but since 1947 sightings of unidentified flying objects, or UFOs, have become increasingly numerous in many parts of the world. Sixty thousand reports of sightings (some new, some drawn from ancient records) from 140 countries are now recorded in the computerised catalogue at the Centre for UFO Studies in America and the number grows larger every day. They include more than 2000 cases in which UFOs reportedly left behind physical traces of their appearance; more than 1500 cases in which people said they encountered humanoid entities; 400 cases in which automobiles were said to have been brought to a halt or otherwise affected by nearby UFOs; and dozens of cases in which the visual sightings were confirmed by radar. In the majority of reports, two or more witnesses were involved in the sightings, and many of the



observers were of high calibre— scientists, military personnel, pilots, air-traffic controllers, law-enforcement officers and other responsible people.

The first quarter of 1981 brought more than 300 UFO reports in America. That number is about average, according to astronomer Dr J. Allen Hyneck, director of the Centre for UFO Studies, which receives over 1000 new reports yearly.

Of course, the majority of UFOs turn out to be IFOs — identified flying objects. After rigorous checking by technically trained investigators, about 90 per cent of UFO sightings prove to be misidentifications of natural phenomena or man-made objects — stars, planets, meteors, planes, balloons or satellites. The rest of the reports elude explanation. They differ in many details, but there are also similarities: the shapes, colours, sounds and manoeuvrability of the objects.

The strongest suggestion of the reality of

the phenomena rests in the approximately 10 per cent of sightings that remain unidentified. The late professor Edward U. Condon, a hard-nosed UFO sceptic, conceded that these sightings were “indeed strange and mysterious, impossible by all current knowledge to explain.” But to most who doubt that UFOs are real, the small percentage of unexplained sightings is negligible. The average detective doesn’t have as good a track record in solving murders, says UFO debunker Philip Klass, an editor at *Aviation Week & Space Technology*.

Whether or not the unexplained cases imply a larger mystery hinges on the reliability of eyewitness testimony. In the investigation of a UFO sighting, the observer is usually the only data-gathering instrument. But the reliability of eyewitness testimony is itself a subject of great controversy in both law and science. Sceptics maintain that human observers

are notoriously unreliable and that all UFO cases can be explained in mundane terms. “Details of specific reports are, by the very nature of the processes of human sensation, perception, cognition and reporting, likely to be untrustworthy,” concluded psychology professor Michael Wertheimer in the Condon Report, a 1969 study made for the US Air Force. It dismissed the phenomena as not worthy of scientific attention. “Any reports, even those of observers generally regarded as credible, must be viewed cautiously.”

But other scientists insist that humans possess quite reliable and useful observational powers. Roger Shepard, a perceptual psychologist, argues that human powers of recognition “surpass anything that we have yet been able to accomplish by physical instrument or machine.” He went on to say: “When an event occurs without warning, leaves little time for careful observation and, indeed,



RIGHT: Lenticular cloud formations are often mistaken for UFOs. (Top) The path of an unknown object off New Zealand's coast was filmed for one-twentieth of a second by an Australian television crew. (Above) Thousands saw this flaming object over the northeastern United States.



occasions extreme fear or anxiety, the average witness often retains an accurate, almost photographic record of the event—a record, moreover, that can be largely recovered from him even though he lacks the words to describe it himself.”

The sceptics claim that UFOs are merely carelessly observed objects or sometimes outright hoaxes. What, then, are we to make of the testimony of dozens— even hundreds — of disinterested observers who have reported UFOs over the years? Though many a science professional will shy away from reporting a UFO, fearing damage to reputation and career, a number of UFO reports by scientific observers are on record.

One such sighting was made by Clyde Tombaugh, the American astronomer who in 1930 discovered the planet Pluto. On August 20, 1949, Tombaugh, who was then working at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, observed “two rows of faint rectangular lights, parallel to each other, that maintained their geometric relationship as they passed silently across the sky. The lights were yellow-green in colour.” His wife, who was with him at the time, thought she saw a faint connecting glow between the two rows, “I was so unprepared for such a strange sight that I was really petrified with astonishment,” wrote Tombaugh. “I doubt that the phenomenon was any terrestrial reflection.”

Tombaugh is one of many astronomers

who have reported seeing UFOs. One of the first such reports was made nearly 100 years ago by a Mexican astronomer named Jose Bonilla, who was then the director of the Zacatecas Astronomical Observatory. On August 12 and 13, 1883, he and his assistant observed and photographed more than 400 apparently solid objects of various shapes and sizes as they moved in groups across the face of the sun.

Mysterious “green fireballs” observed over sensitive military installations in Los Alamos, New Mexico, during 1949 and 1950 were a matter of great concern to the

US Air Force and the FBI. The objects resembled meteors, but they were bright green and travelled horizontally at a low speed. Sightings were made by airline and military pilots, by security personnel and by scientists such as Dr Lincoln LaPaz, an astronomer, who was put in charge of the investigations. LaPaz, then director of the Institute of Meteoritics and head of the department of mathematics and astronomy at the University of New Mexico, concluded that the fireballs were not natural phenomena. However, astronomer Donald Menzel of Harvard, who also witnessed the objects, was convinced they were no more than unusual meteors.

The British lunar astronomer Dr H. Percy Wilkins noticed two silver objects “like polished metal plates” moving against the wind and a third grey oval object in the sky over Atlanta, Georgia, on June 11, 1954. Dr Wilkins calculated the UFOs to be nearly 15 metres in diameter.

Astronomer Frank Halstead saw on November 1, 1955, a disc-shaped object trailing a cigar-shaped one over the Mojave Desert. The observation lasted about eight minutes, until the objects rose first slowly, then much faster until they could no longer be seen.

A French astronomer, Jacques Chapuis, observed a yellow star-like object for about five minutes from the observatory at Toulouse on November 10, 1957. The object ascended straight up until it was out of sight.

The astronomer who discovered Pluto observed geometric lights passing silently across the sky. "I was so unprepared for such a sight, I was petrified with astonishment."

BURNED BY A UFO?

John Schuessler of McDonnell Douglas Corporation is project manager of space-shuttle flight operations for NASA and president of VISIT.

On December 29, 1980, Mrs Betty Cash encountered an enormous bright, diamond-shaped UFO that spewed flames from its underside. She was burned and suffered other injuries that still plague her. Mrs Cash's case is one of many now under investigation by an unusual American organisation called Project VISIT (Vehicle Internal Systems Investigative Team), a group of 12 scientists who seek to learn more about UFOs by studying such medical mysteries. VISIT's impressive team of volunteers – about half of whom are associated with NASA – represents a variety of specialties,

A case submitted to Project VISIT is first screened for validity; individuals involved are interviewed and their medical records examined. In Mrs Cash's case, VISIT found that, by the morning after she

had seen the UFO, she had developed large, knotlike boils on her neck, head and face. Soon after, she began to lose her hair. Four days later, unable to eat and suffering from vomiting, diarrhoea and swollen eyes, she entered a hospital where she spent nearly a month undergoing tests. She had other signs of what could have been radiation exposure as well: burns, cramps and loss of energy.

In similar incidents, a Canadian prospector encountered a disc-shaped metallic object on the ground and suffered burns, nausea, vomiting, swelling and an extended illness, and a Missouri truck driver was blinded for days by an extremely bright UFO.

After recommending medical experts to the victims, VISIT members collect all medical and scientific data to piece



together in an attempt to understand how the UFO worked.

In the hope of determining common factors, Project VISIT collects and catalogues data on UFO incidents involving alleged injury from reentry into a UFO.

– John F. Schuessler

The staff of the observatory at Majorca reported seeing a triangular UFO that was spinning on its axis while on a steady course on May 22, 1960. The report was cabled to NASA.

In 1975, when Stanford University astrophysicist Peter Sturrock conducted a UFO survey of the 2611 members of the American Astronomical Society, more than half of them responded, and 62 gave reports of events that they could not identify and that they thought might be related to the UFO phenomenon. More than half of the respondents believed that UFOs, “certainly” or “probably” deserved scientific study.

Scientists from other disciplines have also reported UFOs. John Zimmerman, a geologist, watched as silvery discs looped around an aircraft and disrupted its vapour trail over California on June 12, 1950.

A formation of 15 rocket-like objects leaving odd, unvapour-like trails was seen over Ann Arbor, Michigan, on July 27, 1952 by Dr Charles Otis, then professor of biology at Bowling Green State University. He heard no sound coming from the objects.

During the summer of 1948, Carl A. Mitchell, a physicist, observed three green discs as they passed over Easton, Pennsylvania, one second apart.

A Brazilian meteorologist, Rubens J. Villela, and five other witnesses observed a luminous tear-shaped UFO while aboard an icebreaker in March 1961. At one point,

Villela reports, the multicoloured object divided in two and then disappeared very suddenly. Its appearance, he said, was “out of this world.”

A fairly recent UFO sighting by a reputable scientist and a well-respected journalist first came to public attention in an unlikely source: *The New Yorker*. In the October 27, 1980, issue, writer John McPhee tells of a “white sphere” that suddenly materialised outside the right-hand window of the truck in which he and Princeton geologist Kenneth Deffeyes were riding. “It expanded some, like a cloud,”

A reputable scientist and a well-respected journalist saw “a white sphere” in 1978. People within 160km of the same place reported “that damn strange-looking thing.”

writes McPhee of the incident, which took place north of Winnemucca, Nevada, on November 27, 1978. “Its light became so bright that we stopped finally and got out and looked up in awe. A smaller object, also spherical, moved out from within the large one, possibly from behind it. There was a Saturn-like ring around the smaller sphere. It moved here and there beside the large one for a few minutes and then went back inside ... After the small sphere disappeared, the large one rapidly faded and also disappeared.” People within 160km of Winnemucca also reported seeing “that damn strange-looking thing in the sky,” as McPhee calls it.

Another well-known sighting, by a former nuclear engineer who less than a decade later would become president of the United States, occurred in January 1969, in Leary, Georgia. There were about a dozen witnesses to this UFO, one of whom was Jimmy Carter. Over a 10-minute period, a sharply outlined light in the sky gradually approached the observers, then receded slightly, returned and finally moved away until it disappeared. Carter said the object grew to a size slightly smaller than the moon and changed colour from blue to red. He estimated the light’s distance to be perhaps 300 to 1000 metres away. The computer-systems analyst and author of the sceptical *The UFO Verdict*, Robert Sheaffer, is convinced that Carter’s object was actually the planet Venus, which shone brightly in the western sky that night

at the same angle above the horizon at which Carter thinks he saw a UFO.

The most likely sources of error in UFO observations are probably perception and memory. In perception, the brain analyses the visual stimulus and interprets it on the basis of past experience. As a result, "one's visual perception is highly personal and variable," says Dr Richard Haines, a NASA scientist who specialises in the problems of human perception and studies UFOs as a hobby. It is here, then, during the process of perception, that observers can misjudge sizes, distances, speeds and shapes. Another limitation of normal vision is autokinesis, an illusion in which a bright light in a field of view with no reference points will appear to move when stared at even though it is stationary. Many observers looking at a bright star will mistakenly believe it to be moving rapidly, usually in an erratic way.

Dr J. Allen Hynek has noted a growing interest among scientists in the UFO mystery over the years, largely because, he says, "the phenomenon simply refuses to go away." Perhaps scientists may be tempted as well by the realisation that the data on UFOs do not fall altogether short of yielding solid evidence. "But the data do fall short in one grave respect," says Hynek. "The subject has never been treated professionally. We get people

saying: Well, there's no hard data. My answer to that is that no real attempt has been made to get hard data."

The three investigations that most people point to as legitimate scientific studies were simply not professional, says Hynek. The American Air Force's 17-year UFO investigation, known as Project Blue Book, had a tendency toward ridicule, and ridicule, he insists, is not part of the scientific method. In the Central Intelligence Agency's 1953 Robertson Panel Report, little was said about the scientific investigation of UFOs, insists Hynek, who was a participant. And what about the Condon Report? Well, in a review of it, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics found a "paucity of thorough scientific and technological analysis."

"We always fall short of pushing through to the hard data because it takes funds to do it, and the funds are not available," Hynek says. "And I always like to point out that we would never have gotten to the moon if we had merely given the project to volunteers to work on during weekends."

Hynek is not alone in deploring the sad state of scientific UFO research. In 1979, the American National Security Agency (NSA) released a 1968 draft document entitled "UFO Hypothesis and Survival

Questions," which calls for a rigorous examination of the UFO problem by the scientific community.

In the draft memorandum, the NASA analyst briefly considers some of the "human survival implications" suggested by the major UFO hypotheses. If the global incidence of UFOs is imaginary, he reasons, then a human mental aberration of alarming proportions would appear to be developing. If UFOs are hallucinations, he believes man's ability to distinguish reality from fantasy is brought into question. If UFOs are secret earthly projects, then the ability of our early-warning systems to correctly diagnose an air attack is in doubt. If UFOs are extraterrestrial, the analyst feels their source is probably our technological superior, and our planet is subject to conquest. All these hypotheses, he says, "have serious survival implications."

For the moment, UFOs are poised in a kind of scientific limbo, caught somewhere between the alarmist views of an anonymous intelligence analyst and the pooh-poohing of critics. No one will deny that the greater part of the phenomenon is illusory, ie, UFOs, but this admission is not reason enough to lose track of the phenomenon's essential feature: whatever UFOs turn out to be, something extraordinary is happening.

SEPARATING THE FACT FROM THE FICTION

**UFO studies are most often
doubted because of method.
Australian researcher Bill
Chalker proposes an answer.**

CONTROVERSY and extensive public interest have always been intimate bedfellows when it comes to that perennial phenomenon we call the UFO mystery. At the heart of a massive collection of strange observations, UFO proponents contend that there is intelligence that has all the apparent trappings of an alien technology. Meanwhile establishment science views the whole UFO subject with deep suspicion.

The scientific community argues that there is nothing of any substance to the matter and that if there was, it would have manifested in a manner that would be amenable to scientific inspection. Since, according to the generally perceived position of science, no such manifestations are abroad, then the subject does not deserve the attention of science. To be the stuff of scientific analysis and contemplation certain game rules are required. One of the primary rules is the need for a measure of repeatability or testability in both the apparent manifestations (ie data verification) and any hypothesis or theory offered to account for them (ie falsification).

From the point of view of mainstream science, none of these attributes is satisfied,



(Left) A Coast Guard seaman photographed these brilliant lights in the sky, (Top) A Texas farmer swore this was an alien spacecraft about 30 metres long; polygraph tests said he lied. (Above) Two of three luminous objects reported from all over Kentucky as they flashed east to west.

therefore, to date, the UFO subject has been largely barred membership in the club of science.

My intention here is to argue for the premise that science is being premature and that much of what occurs under the guise of the UFO mystery is not only worthy of the attention of science but also manifests in many instances with parameters that are amenable to scientific method.

There are many who cite the million-dollar scientific study commissioned by the United States Air Force, that in 1968 pronounced, that there was nothing to the matter. Surely science has spoken and there is nothing more to be said.

However detailed consideration of the cases examined by that scientific study of UFOs, or the Condon Report as it is popularly referred to, reveals that more than a quarter of the reports studied were either unexplained or remained inadequately explained. One example was the following conclusion based on a close UFO observation which was supported by photos, in Oregon, during 1950:

"This is one of the few UFO reports in which all factors investigated, geometric, psychological and physical appear to be consistent with the assertion that an

extraordinary flying object, silvery, metallic, disc shaped, tens of metres in diameter, and evidently artificial, flew within sight of two witnesses.

But science had spoken and the subject was given a burial, attended with much pomp and ceremony. However, it seems that someone neglected to inform the

The Condon report found no explanations for more than a quarter of cases. But science had spoken and the subject was given a burial, attended with much pomp and ceremony

corpse for it never attended the funeral. The UFO mystery has endured and today there is more interest than ever. Much of this interest is supported by many individual scientists. Most of these scientists have taken the trouble to review the evidence both through the available data base, largely accumulated through the efforts of civilian research groups, and by first hand investigation.

Some remarkable work is now being done in France by an official research organisation — "Groupe d'Etude des Phenomenes Aérospatiaux Non identifiés" or GEPAN — working under the auspices of the French equivalent of NASA. Dr Esterle, the current head of GEPAN said of the results of a recent study:

'Considering the elements we have collected from the observers at the very place of their observations, we are convinced that a material phenomenon originates the quasi totality of the observations and notice that the description of these phenomena is similar to that of a flying machine whose origin and propulsion and/or sustenance modes are totally out of our knowledge.'

These findings of GEPAN are pivotal in significance, with respect to the standing of

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the UFO phenomenon as a legitimate area of scientific enquiry. Contrary to the hollow findings of the Condon Report, the UFO reports appear to be the stuff of scientific "paydirt".

Scientific interest is growing. What is sustaining this interest?

I will present only a small selection of the type of data that merits the attention of science. Although only single Australian examples are given of each, it should be appreciated that such events are not few in number. There are literally hundreds and in some cases thousands of such events.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND FILMS

A UFO movie footage was taken from Taola Point in Elnboyd National Park, near Eden, in NSW. Three young men had gone there to secure a photographic record of the total eclipse of the sun on October 23, 1976. Just prior to the eclipse, they noticed about five objects in a line out over the sea. To the naked eye they appeared grey in colour, round in shape and clearly outlined against the clear blue sky. One object was larger than the others and appeared to be dome-shaped and rotating. As the eclipse began and darkness enveloped the men, their attention turned to the eclipse. When it was over, the objects were gone.

The film was sent to the Ground Saucer Watch organisation in the US for computer evaluation. Their analyses lead to the following conclusion:

It is the consensus of the GSW technicians that the (UFO) image represents a structured object of unknown origin, without any sign of misinterpretation of a conventional object or phenomenon.

Although some of the GSW methods and assumptions are a matter of some controversy, the technique has afforded many valuable insights into the photographic record of UFOs.

VEHICLE INTERFERENCE CASES

Early in February 1973, at about 12.45am, a couple in a parked car near the Norah Head kiosk, on the central coast of NSW, had their attention drawn to a street light situated near the kiosk. It was dimming on and off erratically. Eventually the light faded out to a faint glow. A huge bright golden ball suddenly rose up from just beyond the trees in about the same direction as the kiosk light. After hovering for a few minutes, the object changed colour through gold, orange to deep red. The couple decided to drive closer for a better view. However their curiosity quickly waned, when the car refused to start. The only response was a very dull



illumination from the headlights. This frightening development made the couple resolve to stay inside the car.

For several seconds, a number of small red glowing balls shot out from the object and travelled obliquely downward, for some distance, before disappearing behind the trees. The object itself then rose slowly and moved away into the night. The kiosk light then returned to normal brilliance. The car started straight away with the first attempt. Subsequently checks on the vehicle failed to explain the incident.

PHYSICAL TRACES

A caretaker on a farm property near Rosedale, Victoria, claims to have had an extraordinary experience during the early hours of September 30th, 1980. Upon investigating disturbances amongst stock and a strange noise, he saw a domed aerial object move across the property and take up a position apparently over a 10,000 gallon water tank for about a minute. Then it alighted on the grass near the tank.

The caretaker rode his motorcycle up close to where the object had landed. An odd sensation overcame him. The object seemed to consist of two sections — a white dome on top and a larger orange section underneath. Around this bottom section there appeared to be circular windows or lights. The object stayed on the ground for about two or three minutes. Suddenly, the noise level increased to "an awful scream". The witness had to place his hands over his ears. Something like a black tube appeared around the base of the object, and this seemed to inflate to a tremendous size, just beyond the diameter of the object. There was a tremendous bang, and the object lifted up and gradually rolled out of the landing site, reaching a height of about three metres. The witness was almost knocked off his bike with a blast of hot air.

As the UFO moved away, the black "tube" seemed to be deflating towards the centre of the base. At about 10 metres out from the landing site, and at an altitude of

According to an official French study, the evidence indicates "a material phenomenon ... whose origin and propulsion are totally out of our knowledge."



Enhancement of photographic images is one technique which promises to bring more objectivity to UFO research. In these pictures (left to right) are various treatments of the same picture: 1. A computerised enhancement; 2. Edge enhancement magnifies fine details in the original print; 3. Colour con touring underlines relative brightness; 4. This is "digitisation". ABOVE: A model of the Rosedale UFO made by the witness.

about three metres, the object fell silent. It was then that the witness saw material falling away from the base of the object. The UFO moved away slowly at low altitude, finally disappearing in the distance. The incident involved a remarkable array of evidence. Where the UFO had landed a nine-metre wide circular site was confirmed in which the grass had been flattened or removed in a 50cm ring. A definite short path of markings on the site led out and away, ostensibly consistent with the material seen falling from the object during its departure. There were effects on the witness (including loss of sleep, headaches, nausea) and his watch, other trace effects, effects on stock, the extraordinary disappearance of about 10,000 gallons of water from the tank, and possible secondary witnesses.

UFO FLAPS

In "ufological" parlance, a "flap" refers to a concentration of sightings, either in time or location or both. A UFO "flap" by its very nature, can, if discovered quickly enough, allow the researcher to examine it in the form of a repeatable experiment — the classic mainstay of scientific method. There are quite a large number of instances where such UFO displays are of prolonged duration and confined locality. So much so, that researchers have been able to witness and record the UFO phenomenon as it occurs.

When the researcher can become the

witness rather than the recipient of sporadic human testimony, the UFO subject enters the valid domain of scientific interest. There are enough situations worldwide that have fallen within this category, to merit thorough research into investigating this propensity of UFOs to seek out particular localities for sustained attention. In Australia there have been many instances. The localities of Kempsey (NSW), Tyringham-Dundurrabin (NSW), Tully (Qld), St George (Qld) and the central highlands of Tasmania, to name but a few,

A "flap" — a concentration of sightings — can possibly allow the researcher to examine it in the form of a repeatable experiment — the classic mainstay of scientific method.

have had enduring traditions of UFO activity.

Some areas seem to offer repeat performances and represent provocative challenges for researchers. If the nature of this repeatability can be accurately predicted, a solution to the UFO mystery could be close at hand.

I have only very briefly touched upon a few examples of the types of evidence that seem to be amenable to legitimate scientific investigation. The information already amassed suggests that there could well be a new empirical phenomenon at the base of it all. In conclusion, I believe it is reasonable to state, that the dismissal by mainstream science, of the UFO mystery, as a subject not worthy of attention, is rather premature.

The phenomenon, based upon my own perceptions of the evidence is either suggestive of an intriguing manifestation of a technology or a phenomenon (or phenomena) of extraordinary psychological and psychic magnitude. Beyond that, I believe is speculation. Here is a mystery baying for attention. I think it is high time science answered the challenge,

Any UFO sightings, information or enquiries should be directed to the Australian Centre for UFO Studies, PO Box 546, Gosford, NSW, 2250.

The author can be contacted at PO Box 6, Lane Cove, NSW, 2006.