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Ralph Mueller Planetarium Presents UFO Program

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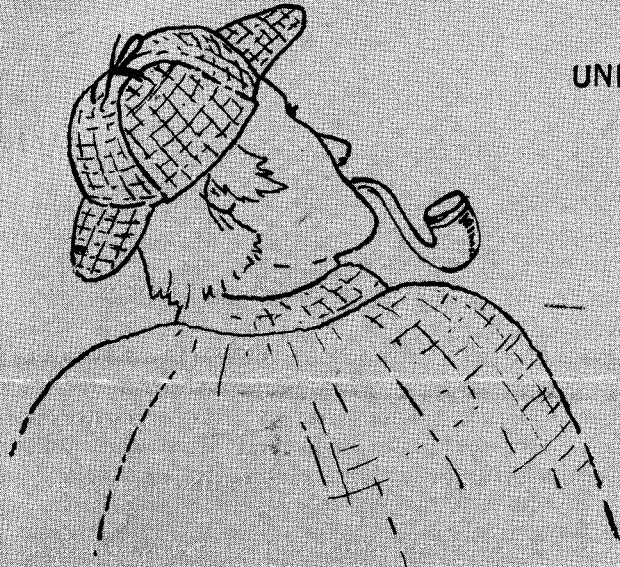
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No. 53



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Ralph Mueller Planetarium Presents UFO Program

In 1974 the Ralph Mueller planetarium presented a program on the subject of UFOs. This program was difficult to produce because of the extremely subjective nature of the topic. It would have been easy to slant such a program in one of two ways. The program might label all persons seeing UFOs as "wild-eyed kooks"; or it could swing to the other extreme, where all testimony and "evidence" are accepted without attempting to subject it to scientific scrutiny. This information, then, is presented in the hope that the reader will realize that the subject can and is being studied in a scientific manner (although not to the extent that might be wished). The difficulty of such study is compounded by the fact that scientific study cannot be restricted to the province of any one science (such as astronomy).

It seems to stretch and confound our imagination, our reason, our whole thought process, to conceive of visitors from outer space hovering in our skies and perhaps even landing on our planet. But the ideas have gained popularity even with some knowledgeable scientists. So we must discuss a very broad field, about which little is known and of which much is speculation. To proceed we must assume the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe.

A run of sightings or "flaps," as they are known to UFO logists, began in October of 1973. One of the most unusual cases recorded involved two men, Charles Hickson and Calvin Parks, fishing on the banks of the Pascagola River in Mississippi one evening. The men told authorities that they were taken aboard a spacecraft piloted by strange beings and were examined. Their story seems incredible, yet examination under hypnosis and other tests show only that the men truly believe what they are saying.

On October 18, 1973, above Mansfield, Ohio, at 11:10 p.m., an Army helicopter pilot, Capt. Lawrence Coyne and his three-man crew observed red and green lights

approaching from the horizon. Within ten seconds, at an estimated speed of 600 miles per hour, they reported sighting a 60-foot-long, gray metallic, fat, cigar-shaped object. The object came to a stop and hovered close enough to their craft to light up the interior of the cabin. Captain Coyne, with more than 10 years of experience as a military and civilian pilot, said he had never experienced anything like this before. He checked with the local radar stations which were unable to help him at the time. On the basis of the stature of the witness, this incident should be worthy of investigation.

These two episodes represent examples of the small number of unexplained UFO mysteries which must be dealt with. It is unfortunate, however, that once these flaps receive publicity, a rash of stories, including anything from the simple misunderstanding of natural phenomena to down-right hoaxes, may follow.

The problem is distinguishing the fakes and mistakes from the true unknowns. There have been over 50,000 UFO reports made to the Air Force and other civil and governmental organizations. To trace and thoroughly investigate each case is a tremendous task, and quite naturally, one that is incomplete. Beyond these reports may be a great number of sightings which may have not been reported. Many people are fearful of bearing the label usually given to those who see "visions" or other mysterious sights.

The problem most people face is in deciding whether or not to believe in the existence of UFOs. Skeptics, such as Donald H. Menzel, former Director of the Harvard College Observatory, see all reports as either hoaxes, hallucinations, or easily explainable by natural phenomena. Of course, this last category accounts for a large number of sightings. The average person is not as accustomed to studying the sky as were his ancestors. In the evening sky, the appearance of a bright planet

may appear as a bobbing distorted shape. It may even change color as the image fights its way through our turbulent atmosphere. This is why the planet Venus often suggests an unidentifiable object. A bright meteorite fall or bolide may suggest the landing of a blazing "star ship." Clouds and other atmospheric phenomena may also play havoc with sunlight in the daytime sky. Such phenomena as sundogs and halos are often reported as UFOs. Photographic evidence is not immune to this kind of problem since there is also a possibility of reflections in the camera itself.

One comes to the conclusion after reading many reports of UFOs that at least 90% can be explained away as Menzel has suggested. They are actually IFOs, Identified Flying Objects. What to do with the remaining 10%, or less, of unknowns, remains one of the great mysteries of science. Menzel would suggest that *all* of the sightings can eventually be explained as natural phenomena and hoaxes. But some of his colleagues do not agree.

The Air Force's Project Blue Book which lasted from 1948 to 1969, and the Condon Report of 1968, both represented government sponsored studies of the UFO phenomena.

A great deal has been written about these two studies. Many groups interested in UFOs have been highly critical of the Air Force who declared that its investigation shows no evidence that UFOs are a threat to our national security. They are found not to "present technological developments" or principles beyond the range of present day scientific knowledge. Blue Book concluded there was also no evidence indicating that the unidentified sightings were extraterrestrial vehicles.

Once the UFOs were designated as not being a military threat, the Air Force publically clamped down on all its files. It seemed to go out of its way to try to explain all reports as human mistakes in seeing or judgment. A great cry for investigation brought the Condon Report.

Dr. Edward Condon headed a group of scientists working at the University of Colorado to assemble a civilian report of UFOs. There was great promise to this study, but again results were controversial. Dr. J. Allan Hynek of Northwestern University was consultant to Blue Book. Dr. Hynek disagreed with the authors of the Blue Book and the Condon Report on a number of their methods and conclusions. Particularly, he disagreed with the conclusion of Dr. Condon that "further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby."

Dr. Hynek said, "There is much in the UFO problem to be astonished about and much to be confused about, too. Such confusion is understandable. Over the past 20 years I have had so many experiences with crackpots, visionaries, and religious fanatics that I hardly need be reminded of people who espouse the idea of UFOs as visitors from outer space for their own peculiar purposes. You will note that I say 'espouse the idea' *not* 'make UFO reports'. Very rarely do members of the lunatic fringe make UFO reports. There are many reasons for this; primarily, it is simply that they are



Natural phenomena such as bright planets are often mistaken for UFOs. This photograph by Earl Moser.

incapable of composing an articulate, factual, and objective report.

"I am also well aware of the widespread ignorance, on the part of many, of astronomical objects, high-altitude balloons, special air missions, mirages, and special meteorological effects, and of people's willingness to ascribe their views of such things to the presence of something mysterious. These people, in contrast to the crackpots, are far more of a problem because they do generate UFO reports which represent a high noise level. . . ."

Hynek thinks many scientists discount UFOs altogether because of the tremendous number of IFOs. He feels it is relatively simple for an experienced investigator to sort out and quickly eliminate virtually all of the misperception cases.

The UFO phenomenon has reached the point of serious debate. Since 1947 when sightings by Kenneth Arnold over Mt. Rainer were highly publicized, the number of sightings has moved in cycles of five or six years. In 1973 the Mutual UFO network received over 1500 reports of sightings in the U.S. during the high point of the cycle. How do we deal with this large volume of reports? As Dr. Hynek has suggested, many of these reports can be easily identified, by an experienced investigator, as either hoaxes or misperceptions.

Hynek assigns each report to one of several categories: Nocturnal Lights, Daylight Discs, Radar-Visual sightings and Close Encounters of three types.

"Nocturnal Lights" are simply what the name implies—lights seen in the night sky which behave in an unusual manner. They are the most frequently reported and easily explained type of UFO. They appear to be of the least value scientifically of all UFO reports. It is difficult to gather any important information about them such as size, speed of travel or shape.

There are more nighttime than daytime cases of UFO sightings. And yet, hundreds of "good" daytime sightings are on record. Hynek refers to these as "Daylight Discs." Most discs appear oval in shape. The descriptions of daylight sightings are remarkably similar. "It was like a silvery hamburger sandwich," reported one witness, a professional sculptor, "and it executed a large square in the sky and then streaked away. . . ." In another case the reporter, a mechanic, used the term "sandwich." They have been described as oval, "a stunted dill pickle," and ellipsoid. "The sad fact is that

even after years of reports of Daylight Discs from various parts of the world, and despite some seemingly genuine photographs, the data we have to deal with are most unsatisfactory from the standpoint of a scientist," Hynek said. He feels the lack of good data comes from the lack of adequate investigation by the Air Force, since this type of case seems to have been dismissed too easily.

"Radar-Visual" UFO reports would seem to offer very hard evidence, but since radar waves may be affected by the atmosphere, it is difficult to confirm reports observed only on radar.

"It is often stated the UFOs are not picked up on radar. It is quite true, that, as far as has been officially disclosed, the highly mission-oriented radar defense coverage of the country does not appear to yield a crop of UFO observations. 'UTC' (Uncorrelated Targets) are observed on the North American Radar Defense (NORAD) radar screens," but because they do not appear to move as a ballistic missile, "they are automatically rejected without further examination." Radar-Visual sightings are usually reported and they may be very valuable. "In addition to the 'human experience' we have added an 'instrumental experience' which gives strong support to the former."



These Barauna photographs were taken near Trinidad Island, courtesy of Walter A. Andrus, Jr., Director of MUFON.

In Radar-Visual cases the credibility of witnesses is important, and those reports by trained, experienced air traffic controllers cannot be easily dismissed. One of the classic cases may be summarized as follows: ". . . of special interest in this case are several instances where the UFO appeared and disappeared at the same time on radar, ECM, and visually."

The final UFO category is called the "Close Encounter." The same objects seen as daylight discs or lights in the night are now seen close at hand. One may have a close encounter with or without any physical effects. Heat may or may not be felt. Sometimes animals are strangely affected by the UFO. Certainly the Mississippi incident, mentioned earlier, could be considered a Close Encounter.

As you can see there are several different types of UFO reports. One of the most difficult types of data to analyze is photographs. They represent a kind of hard evidence, but reliable witnesses are also needed to verify the photography. Of course such pictures can be faked.

One must establish the integrity of the photographer before accepting the authenticity of the photograph. UFO photographs must be analyzed as to camera settings, angles from the camera to the objects, time of day

or night, angle of the sun or moon, and placement of familiar objects in the picture.

A sequence of pictures of UFOs was taken on January 16, 1958 at noon. Professional photographer Almiro Barauna took the pictures from the deck of a Brazilian Navy ship near Trinidad Island. The ship was in the area as part of the exercises for the International Geophysical Year. Nearly 100 people were on board, including Barauna, who had been invited by the Brazilian Navy to photograph some of the exercises. Barauna used a Rolleflex Model g camera at 1/25 second, and aperture f/8.

Dr. Menzel labels the photographs a hoax because he says Barauna is a skilled photographer capable of faking a picture, and that Barauna once did produce a fake flying saucer to illustrate an article.

The Brazilian Navy refuses to release the negatives, but has vouched for the authenticity of the pictures. Experts retained by private UFO investigative groups believe the prints appear authentic. This is one of the typical controversies which plague a study of UFOs.

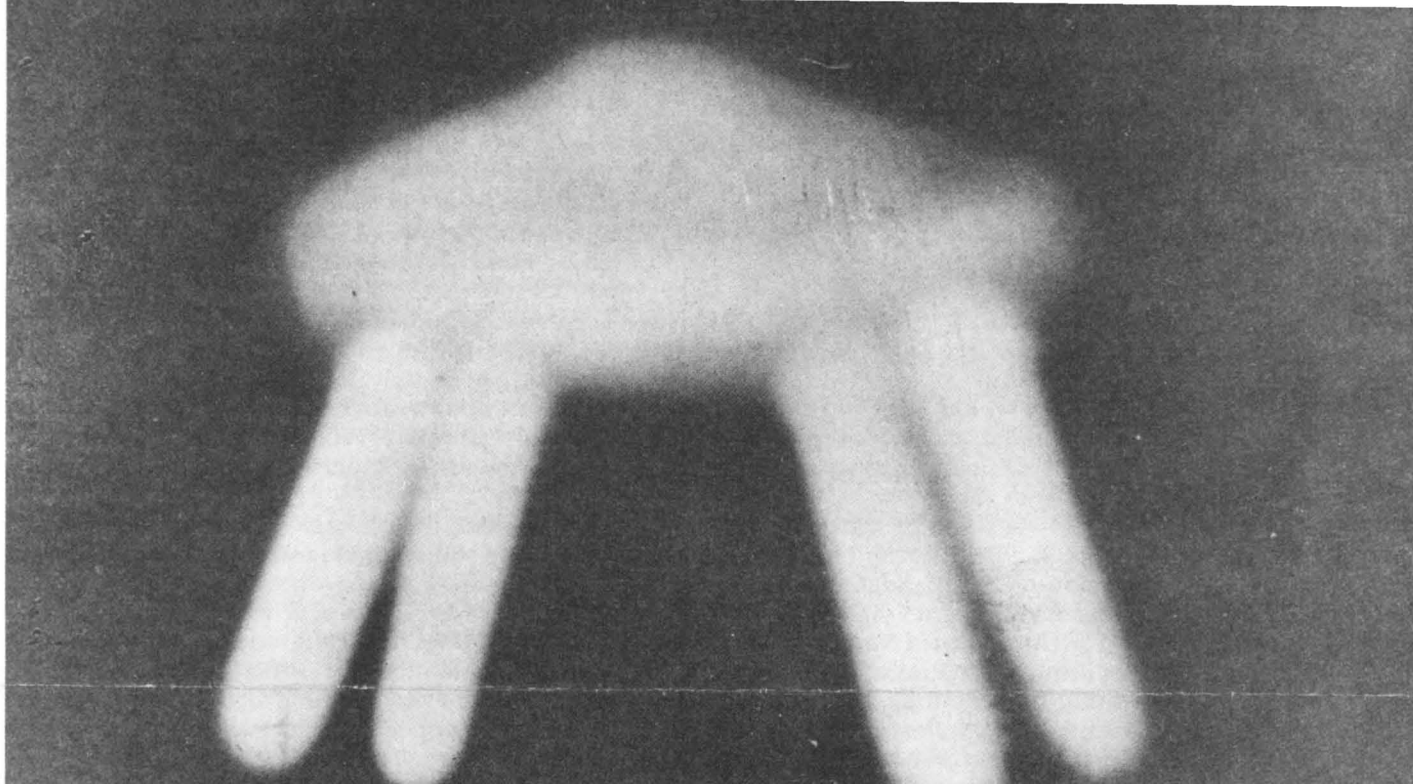
These pictures were supplied to the Planetarium courtesy of the Mutual UFO Network. MUFON is one of the organizations interested in gathering such reports. The others are the National Investigations Com-

mittee on Aerial Phenomenon (NICAP), and the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO). With the closing of Project Blue Book, the Air Force has essentially left the field of most investigation to these organizations. MUFON is the youngest of these organizations, and works mainly through local science teachers and professors.

As a private, non-profit organization, it is comprised of volunteers dedicated to the use of *scientific* procedures in solving the dilemma of unidentified flying objects. A number of individuals have volunteered to act as expert consultants to MUFON in such diverse fields as biology, meteorology, optics, psychology and soil analysis. Its members believe that:

"Over a long period of time, analysis of UFO reports *may* contribute to answers about problems in electronics, light refractions, and group behavior, about unusual meteorological phenomena and other matter, including the possibility that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe."

The sightings of UFOs are now an established occurrence. The latest Gallup poll taken in 1973 shows that 51% of the people in the United States believe UFOs are real and not figments of the imagination or



This photo of a UFO was taken by a doctor in France on March 23, 1974.

cases of hallucination. Eleven percent of those polled said they had seen a UFO.

Most professional astronomers have shunned the subject because they fear association with kooks. Those people who automatically assume that all UFOs are ships controlled by beings from outer-space have made it difficult for scientists to study the phenomenon objectively. Many astronomers are not familiar with the scientific research being done, so they automatically dismiss the idea entirely. To quote Sherlock Holmes, "It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment."

It appears that no single report is strong enough to convince anyone of the existence of UFOs. As more sightings are made, the small percentage of truly unexplained incidents becomes great enough to whet the appetite of the true scientific investigator. If we take these reports as a body, the picture becomes more convincing. All cases must be investigated because they contribute to our meager knowledge that something might be happening. There are many similarities in the unexplained sightings: the ability of these objects to tremendously accelerate and decelerate and their ability to follow planes and perform maneuvers, covering hundreds of miles. They have appeared on radar screens at the same time visual sightings were made.

Even the Gemini and Skylab astronauts, according to *US News and World Report* of Nov. 5, 1973, have reported unusual sightings.

We have outlined a mystery, a mystery with clues which may appear and disappear almost instantaneously. Reliable testimony is inhibited by witnesses reluctant to be labeled as "mad."

If the UFO mystery were only as simple as the Texan's report of seeing one. When asked how she knew it was a UFO she replied: "Why, it had UFO written right on the side of it."

The following books represent relatively recent examinations of the topic. They provide a good background for further reading.

"*The UFO Experience*"—by J. Allen Hynek. Henry Regnery Co. 1972. This is probably the best book on UFOs. Hynek is not extremely easy to read, but he stresses a highly scientific attitude.

"*UFOs: A Scientific Debate*"—by Carl Sagan and Thornton Page. Cornell University Press, 1973. This book resulted from presentations made to the American Astronomical Society.

"*The UFO Controversy in America*"—by David M. Jacobs, Indiana University Press. This is a look at UFOs by an historian. It will be available in late spring 1975.

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA STATE MUSEUM, WITH PLANETARIUM

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