

UFO INVESTIGATOR

NATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE ON
AERIAL PHENOMENA
NICAP

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Radar Returns Still Unexplained

Florida Sighting Stirs Debate

Was it a solid object violating U.S. air space or was it simply a distant planet? This is only one of several unanswered questions remaining in the wake of one of the most interesting UFO cases on record for 1972.

The dramatic case (*UFO Investigator*, Oct. 1972) occurred during the pre-dawn hours of Sept. 14 when tower operators at West Palm Beach International Airport reported sighting a "glowing circular object" northeast of the airport.

During the next two hours, an unknown object was spotted on three radar screens, sought by Air Force jets, ob-

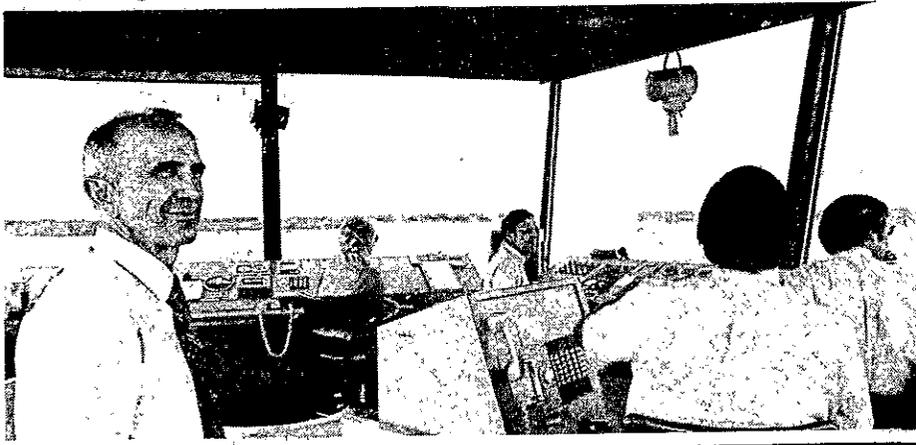
served by an in-bound airlines pilot and hunted by a county sheriff in a police department helicopter.

Interpretations of the Palm Beach episode appear to be as numerous as there were witnesses. The Air Force, which scrambled its jets two hours after receiving the initial sighting report, found nothing in its search and concluded that the object observed by many was Venus, which is exceptionally bright at this time of year in the northeastern sky.

Others, however, have argued with this conclusion, noting that it fails to
(See Florida, page 4)



Flight Controller Bill Brown (*above*), a principal witness who claims to have seen the object visually and recorded it on his radar screen, stands beneath the West Palm Beach control tower. The tower (*left*) offered, according to many, an ideal platform from which to observe the reported UFO. Weather conditions Sept. 14 were almost "perfect," according to Weather Bureau officials, thus seeming to eliminate the "weather phenomenon" solution frequently offered for concurrent radar and visual sightings. (Photos courtesy *National Enquirer*)



NICAP Photo Exhibit Returns From Tour

NICAP's popular exhibit, "Getting It All Together," continues to draw interested spectators everywhere it travels.

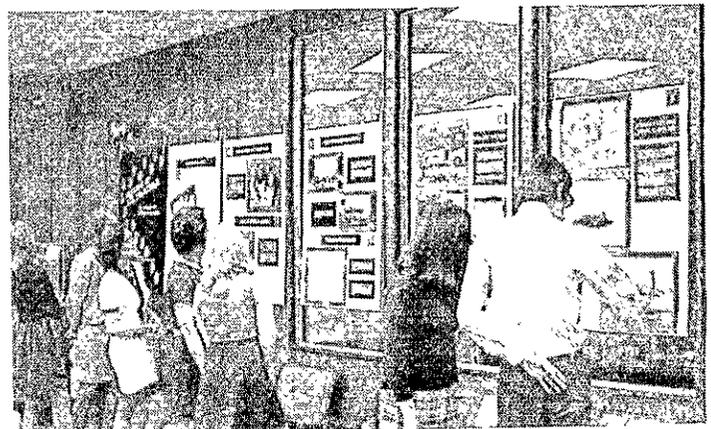
The exhibit, consisting of seven large panels, demonstrates the relentless efforts of NICAP investigators in tracking down and offering a solution to a specific UFO photo case.

"Getting It All Together" demonstrates in a concise and fascinating manner, that a photograph can indeed be worth "a thousand words" if it is analyzed by experts armed with the necessary support data.

In its revealing fashion, the exhibit describes the painstaking efforts taken by investigators called in to study the famous 1966 Roseville, Ohio photographs.

"Getting It All Together" is available on a rental basis to schools, libraries, colleges and universities and other interested groups. The exhibit may be rented for \$5 per day, plus shipping.

To arrange for rental, contact the NICAP office at the address listed above or by phoning 301-949-1267. Arrangements should be made at least two months in advance of the showing.



Intently studying photographs and reading accompanying descriptions, spectators gather around NICAP exhibit during a recent Washington, D.C. showing.

NICAP Subcom Spots "UFO"

The mystery of the bright lights that appeared unexpectedly over Gainesville, Ga. last month has been solved by two members of NICAP's Chattanooga, Tenn., Subcommittee.

On Saturday, Nov. 4, in the late afternoon, a young college professor and his wife were driving their car through the southwestern section of Gainesville when their attention was drawn to a "bright light in the northwestern sky."

The light, according to the couple, was an intense blue-white. It was in the shape of a figure-eight tilted slightly to one side. "Two evidently globular masses had been joined together," noted the husband.

A few minutes later, the light source appeared to suddenly split into two parts, with the lower portion of the figure-eight seemingly ejected from the upper portion, according to the husband.

Other witnesses also noted this phenomenon and reported it to the Gainesville *Daily Times*. The *Times*, in its Nov. 5 edition, said, "The Gainesville Airport, the Times and law enforcement agencies received several phone calls about the light. But as yet, no one knows exactly what it was."

Residents of Chattanooga, like those of Gainesville, also noted the light and many of them reported the phenomenon to local officials.

Coincidentally, a member of the Chattanooga Area Subcommittee was fortunate enough to have been outside at the time, and was able to observe the light long enough to identify it as a balloon.

Chairman David Kammer reported, "I received a number of calls about the object and was fortunate enough to have it come within 10 degrees of passing directly over my house at approximately 6 p.m. on a heading of 65 degrees, traveling at perhaps 25 mph.

"I watched it for 2-3 minutes at 60X magnification to determine its nature. There was a large instrument package suspended from the balloon, which could account for the 'second object.'"

According to Kammer, James A. Smith, the Subcommittee's astronomy advisor, was in the Smokey Mountains at the time and also had the opportunity to watch the light.

While the accounts of both men differed in minor details, both agreed on certain basic elements — time, location, heading, and the fact that one object or light dropped away from the one above.

The Subcommittee's analysis was later confirmed by a small news item in the Nov. 6 edition of the Chattanooga *Times*.

The *Times*, in a story headlined "U.S. Weather Data Balloon Creates Stir," dis-

(See "UFO," page 4)

SIGHTING ADVISORY

Preliminary information on new reports. Details and evaluations will be published when available.

October 30, 1972 — Bethesda, Md. Two women playing tennis early in the afternoon claimed they spotted a group of white or bluish UFOs moving slowly south at a high altitude. While observing the objects, they noticed that a plane flew beneath them. The objects were in sight for approximately five minutes and traveled from east to west.

October 19, 1972 — Toledo, Ohio. Two men returning home from a hunting trip along the Ohio Turnpike said they stopped their car twice to observe a series of strange flashing red and white lights which moved about in the sky between 8 and 9 p.m. "They moved very fast and then very slow and at one point were directly over the car," said one witness.

October 9, 1972 — Coram, N.Y. A Long Island couple, while driving towards Coram, spotted an "elongated triangle with a curved front" pass above their car at approximately 200 to 300 feet. The UFO appeared to have two tall poles or "antennas" going straight up from the top, according to the wife.

September 29, 1972 — Freedom, Wisc. A husband and wife claim they watched a strange light "about the size of a basketball" hover over the high school and then move up into the sky.

Sept. 22, 1972 — Kaukauna, Wisc. Several local residents, including police officers, observed "flickering green and white lights" hovering over the town. One witness said he thought he heard a "whirring" sound coming from the direction of the lights.

September 17, 1972 — Richardson, Tex. At least six residents of Richardson claim they have spotted a red-glowing object about the size of a basketball hovering above their community. Three of the witnesses said their car was followed by the object as they were driving home, and then appeared to hover approximately 50 feet off the ground near their house.

September 1, 1972 — Niagara Falls, N.Y. A 13-year-old witness said he spotted a large cigar-shaped UFO flash across the sky above Niagara around 5:15 p.m. It was total gray in color and emitted no sound, according to the youth. Information received from a NICAP member who heard about the case indicated the object was chased by Air Force jets. The sighting received no press coverage.

Aug. 29, 1972 — Croydon Flat, N.H. Several residents of Croydon Flat, observing independently, said they observed a bright white light that appeared to be rotating in the sky above their town. The object, according to newspaper accounts, was observed by the witnesses between 2 and 4 a.m.

Aug. 21, 1972 — Haverhill, Mass. A triangular-shaped object with red and green blinking lights was reportedly spotted between 10 and 11 p.m. over Merimack Valley by several witnesses. The witnesses, including local police and fire officials, claimed that one of the objects appeared to drift across the sky towards Lawrence, while another moved toward the Salem, N.H., area before disappearing.

Aug. 2, 1972 — Novi, Mich. Four adults told local police they had seen unusual flying objects in the sky that had to be "something more" than just shooting stars. One witness was in her back yard around 9 p.m. when she said she heard a "peculiar noise up in the air. When I looked up to see what it was I saw an oval-shaped object with white lights all around it." According to the witness, the object emitted a strange humming sound. The other witnesses gave similar descriptions, said the police.

July 27, 1972 — Galt, Ontario. Two young boys said they observed a UFO that "glowed and was about the size of the moon" around 10 p.m. The boys' description appeared to coincide with those of other witnesses in nearby communities who claimed to have spotted something "unusual" during the preceding few weeks.

July 27, 1972 — Woodstock, Ontario. Two occupants of a car claim they spotted a light just above the tree-tops while driving home around 10 p.m. The light, according to the witnesses, appeared to be heading straight for the car. "We watched for a few seconds," they said; "The closer it came, the larger it got . . . then it disappeared, just as quickly as it appeared."

July 27, 1972 — Waterdown, Ontario. A 19-year-old amateur astronomer and his friend, while making time exposures through a telescope, said they spotted a "spherical ball of pale white light which slowly traveled across the sky. . . It lasted for about 15 or 20 seconds." The light, according to the witnesses, appeared to have a solid center and "fuzzy" edges and was about 55 degrees above the horizon.

(See Sighting Advisory, page 4)

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

By Stuart Nixon

Part one of a two-part series; Part two will appear in the January issue.

As the 25th year of the modern UFO period draws to a close, it might be worthwhile to look at a problem in UFO research that has not received much attention in the popular literature, despite far-reaching implications for future investigation.

The problem is human memory.

As Dr. Hynek suggests in the title of his new book, regardless of whatever else they may be, UFOs are a human experience. The preponderance of evidence is eyewitness testimony, with all the foibles and failings that implies. Whatever the merits of radar reports, photographs, physical traces and other types of "hard evidence," the subjective recollections of fortuitous observers are the basic interface between science and the UFO phenomenon.

Many scientists are put off by this fact, arguing that the biggest link in the chain of evidence is also the weakest—the human mind. Physical scientists in particular are prone to reject "hearsay" evidence, much preferring to examine the phenomenon directly, under controlled conditions. They argue that even if the initial perception is accurately recorded by the brain — a complex process at best—it is almost immediately altered by other incoming information, such as stories from other people who have made sightings, books about UFOs, radio or newspaper reports, and reactions from friends and neighbors.

Repetition Distorts Memory

Worst yet, argue these scientists, the original memory is distorted by constant retelling, which almost invariably introduces greater and greater dramatic content. Very few human beings can describe a personal experience without adding a few exaggerations or extraneous details to make the story more interesting.

More to the point, even if the memory somehow survives the gamut of these influences, how long can it remain a coherent whole, subject to successful recall? Some scientists would favor the optimistic view that an extraordinary personal experience will tend to remain vivid in a witness's memory, even over an extended period of time. They point out that the singular quality of the experience—the trauma—helps imprint it on the mind and give it a longer life than other kinds of memories.

The exact extent to which the mind retains information and associates it with other memories is not fully understood. Actual field experience, in any event,

suffices to bear out the problem of memory distortion, and to illustrate how it can adversely affect the investigative process. Any researcher worthy of the name recognizes it as one of the most fundamental constraints he faces in trying to sort out "what actually happened," no matter how good an interviewer he thinks he is or how thorough and probing his questions.

Washington: A Case In Point

An interesting example of some of these problems is the recent effort by NICAP to reinvestigate the famous Washington National sightings (*UFO Investigator*, July 1972). Except for two interviews conducted by the Colorado Project in December 1966 and subsequent interviews by the late Dr. James McDonald, most of the witnesses in the case had not been contacted for well over ten years. In fact, NICAP found one key witness who had never been approached by anyone in the entire 20 years since the event.

The episode began on a Saturday night—July 19, 1952—in the CAA (now FAA) radar room in Hanger 6. The two main radars—one for arrivals, one for departures—were being manned by four controllers (two on each scope) plus a supervisor. In addition, two more men were on duty at the airport's control tower, a completely separate facility with its own radar, which was used for short-range local traffic.

At the time of the interviews, all four of the CAA controllers were still living and still working for the FAA. Two—James Ritchy and James Copeland—had received considerable publicity at the time of the sightings, and been talked to more than the others. Another, Edward Nugent, had been mentioned in news stories but never interviewed at any length in later years. The fourth, Jerome Biron, somehow had been almost entirely overlooked by news reporters and never interviewed until NICAP met with him in April of this year. The fifth participant, senior controller and supervisor Harry Barnes, suffered a fatal heart attack in August 1969, after 28 years with the FAA.

Attitude Affects Memory

When NICAP talked with them, the four controllers remembered the incident reasonably well. What varied was their recall of specific details and the sequence in which events occurred. This was complicated by the fact that the initial sightings had been followed one week later by a two-day rash of almost identical reports, making recall of particular details difficult to assign to a particular

Human Memory: Is It The Weakest Link?

night. It was not even clear whether the same five men were on duty both week-ends.

What varied the most was the attitude of each man toward his experience. One controller declined to meet with NICAP representatives, saying he preferred not to rehash the entire matter again. The other three consented to interviews, but only one said he regarded his experience as truly extraordinary. The other two were inclined to accept Air Force claims that weather phenomena could account for the anomalous radar returns, which never precisely correlated with visual observations, according to the three men.

NICAP also contacted one of the two tower operators (both are still living), who had recently retired from the National Transportation Safety Board and lives near Washington, D.C. He refused to be interviewed.

The Condon Report, which does not name the two men questioned by Colorado, notes the witnesses gave "thoroughly consistent" accounts of the original incident. The Report attributes this to "their strong emotional involvement" in the sightings and the number of times they have recounted the experience. The Report added that nothing new was learned from the interviews.

New Data Emerge

NICAP's investigation also failed to unturn any dramatic new information but did disclose some important details not previously known. None of the three controllers, for example, remembered tracking targets in restricted air space over the U.S. Capitol and White House. This contradicts news accounts contemporary with the sightings.

Another new detail, even more interesting, is that a certain amount of personal friction existed between the controllers and supervisor Barnes. From the interviews, it was apparent the controllers often disagreed with Barnes on the most appropriate measures to take in various situations.

This is information that has never been reported. It may offer a new perspective on certain aspects of the Washington National drama. It means, for example, that the decision to notify the military may not represent a consensus of the controllers. "We never agreed with Harry about anything," said one controller. It also means that individual interpretations of what occurred must be weighed against possible personality differences among some of the witnesses.

(Next month, Part II: Some Recommendations to Combat Memory Distortion)

newsnotes

CAVETT AIRS UFO ISSUE

UFOs recently received a serious airing on big-time television when NICAP Subcommittee Chairman Raymond Fowler discussed the subject on the *Dick Cavett Show*. Fowler appeared October 26 with guest host Buddy Rich, who has a personal interest in UFOs. Fowler was given 25 minutes and an enthusiastic reception by Rich and his other guests, who included Buddy Greco and Helen Gurley Brown. During the discussion, Greco described a sighting he had made a number of years ago near Las Vegas. Fowler heads the NICAP investigating group in Massachusetts.

CEDAR RAPIDS WELCOMES NICAP REP

On October 16, NICAP Executive Director Stuart Nixon was guest speaker at a special dinner meeting of the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Board of Realtors. The Board asked NICAP to address the meeting as part of its annual Fall program for Board members and their families. The Board gave Nixon a warm welcome, with coverage in local newspapers and on Cedar Rapids television.

VOA COVERS UFOs

In response to a listener query from India, the Voice of America invited NICAP's John Acuff to answer questions on UFOs in a special interview taped at VOA headquarters last month. Acuff described the work NICAP is doing to investigate current reports and keep the public

"UFO"

(Continued from page 3)

cussed the confusion and speculation created by the UFO and attributed it to a balloon launched a few days earlier in Texas.

The balloon, according to the *Times*, had been sent aloft to measure such things as atmospheric pressure. A payload carrying the measuring instruments was scheduled for release in the vicinity of Chattanooga where it was to be picked up by a chase plane.

The altitude at which the balloon was traveling, according to the newspaper story, would have accounted for the reports of strange lights at dusk.

"After the drop, the balloon was expected to slowly collapse, accompanying the instruments to the ground. Due to the altitude, light reflected from the setting sun gave the balloon and the dangling payload the appearance of two stars as dusk descended on the Chattanooga scene," noted the *Times*.

informed on sightings around the world. VOA, part of the U.S. Information Agency, worked with NICAP last year (*UFO Investigator*, March 1971) in a series of interviews on the UFO problem.

VALLEE VISITS NICAP

Author-scientist Dr. Jacques Vallee recently visited NICAP's new suburban offices to discuss NICAP's Project ACCESS and other areas of UFO research. During his two-day stay in the Washington area, he also talked with ACCESS chairman David Groo, a computer specialist, about technical characteristics of the ACCESS system and some of the design concepts presently being developed. He also described his own efforts to apply computer techniques to study of UFO material. Vallee has written three books on UFOs: *Anatomy of a Phenomenon*, *Challenge to Science*, and *Passport to Magonia*.

COMING SOON

NICAP MEMBERSHIP GUIDE
AND QUESTIONNAIRE!

Florida

(Continued from page 1)

account for the "bogies" spotted by radar personnel at Palm Beach, Miami Control Center and at Homestead Air Force Base.

These people have offered the compromise that there were actually two "hard" objects in the northeastern sky—the planet Venus and a yet unidentified UFO.

James Moon, Jr., the senior Federal Aviation Administration official for air traffic control at West Palm Beach, appeared to be a spokesman for the

LAST CALL FOR BACK ISSUES

After December 31, NICAP will no longer sell back issues of the newsletter. See the October issue for full details and send in your order right away.



SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM NICAP

"compromise group" when he told reporters:

"... I have no doubt that the duty controller saw some phenomena he just could not explain. Taking into account the radar contacts, I think there were two objects in the sky. Venus was one of them.

"The other object was seen to move on the radar screen and it could have moved to another location by the time the interceptors arrived.

"I am not saying that it was anything from space, just that it was a definite radar contact that no one seems to have any explanation for. I have no idea what it might have been."

SIGHTING ADVISORY

(Continued from page 3)

April 14, 1972 — Waterbury, Conn. At least four adults, located in various sections of Waterbury, reported spotting a triangular-shaped UFO moving silently above the town. All of the witnesses said the object emitted no sound as it maneuvered about the evening sky. Two witnesses claimed the object appeared to be about the size of a 707, while another witness said he thought it was even larger—"bigger than a 747."

May 9, 1972 — Arvin, Calif. A police officer from Arvin, while patrolling his community early in the morning, claims he observed a "flying saucer." According to the witness, the UFO was round in shape, bright yellow in color, and traveled across the eastern sky for five minutes before disappearing in the east. A county communications center, when told of the incident by the witness, noted that a UFO had reportedly been spotted over the Mojave desert the same evening. No other details were available.

May 9, 1972 — Ashland, Oregon. A local resident informed police that she saw a "bright light, with forks of light" coming from it, in the northwest sky, around 9:30 p.m. According to local newspaper accounts, other unexplained lights have been spotted previously by several Ashland residents.

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