

The pulsating white light (in box) that Bob Giglio and three others saw on Craney Hill. Was it a UFO?

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

BY RICHARD WOLKOMIR



ROBERT GIGLIO

Something strange is happening in Hillsboro, New Hampshire. For three years residents of this small New England town—scores of them—have seen eerie objects in the sky, on the roads, even at their windows.

Mostly they have kept quiet, afraid of what their neighbors might say. But now, chiefly because one man refused to be silent, the people of Hillsboro are opening up. In their clapboard homes on streets lined with maples and chestnuts, in the village's cluster of shops, over coffee at the inn, they are beginning to talk about "the situation." And about what it has meant to them.

For Bob Giglio, a photographer for Hillsboro's weekly newspaper, *The Messenger*, and for the county's various police departments, it began on July 6, 1977. His life has not been the same since.

At 1:30 A.M. on that date, his 18-year-old daughter came home from a party, full of excitement: "Dad, you should have seen the weird light up on the hill!" she said. Giglio, a burly, gravel-voiced man who operates at high voltage, immediately gathered up his cameras, anticipating a good shot for *The Messenger*. Trying not to awaken his sleeping wife, Patricia, he whispered, "Let's go."

Most of Hillsboro's 3,000 residents were asleep as the Giglios drove through town, past the darkened Sylvania head-lamp plant and the Norton abrasives factory. After they passed the last streetlight, driving east along Route 202 toward Concord, the state capital, the night turned black, except for the yellow tunnel of their headlights. Forests spilled down the hills to the roadsides.

"Dad, look there!" Giglio's daughter cried. He swerved onto the shoulder and braked.

Up on an uninhabited mountainside, a white light pulsed. Giglio stared, bewildered. It wasn't a fire. "I knew that weird thing didn't belong there," he says. As they stared at the light, his daughter began to cry. Abruptly, he U-turned and roared toward Hillsboro's police station.

An hour later they were back, this time in a police cruiser

with two officers. Now the light was even brighter. Giglio snapped photograph after photograph, bristling with curiosity. What was this thing?

After a while the light vanished. Later, Giglio hired an airplane to scout the area where the light had been. Nothing was there but trees. He had a photographic expert at the ITEK laboratory in Lexington, Massachusetts, examine the negatives. The expert agreed that something round, about ten feet in diameter, had been on the mountainside. Meanwhile, worn down by his relentless questioning, Giglio's police-officer friends in Hillsboro and surrounding villages admitted to him that, on night patrols, they frequently saw strange lights and objects.

Why hadn't they reported them? Because they feared ridicule, they said. If they were branded crackpots, they might lose their jobs.

"I became a night person, always looking," says Giglio. And then he had the shock of his life.

One night he received a call from the police in nearby Henniker, New Hampshire—the strange light was back and he should hurry over with his camera. He was speeding along a back road when suddenly his car began to vibrate.

"And just then this ungodly thing came up over the hill," he says.

Something huge, round and illuminated sailed up from behind the trees and passed over his car. He slammed on the brakes.

"It sounded as if I was surrounded by a bunch of bees and hornets," he says. "Then the thing—it was just fifty feet away—flipped over on its side, the light went out and it vanished."

To this day Giglio refuses to drive past the spot. "I won't go up there any more because I know that there is somebody or something in these objects," he says. "I don't know what they are and I really am a little bit nervous."

From then on, solving the riddle / turn to page 24

continued

became Bob Giglio's crusade. He is from the Boston suburbs, and, unlike his self-contained New Hampshire neighbors, he is a talker. He told everyone about what he had seen. He asked the policemen with whom he worked to radio to him whenever there was a sighting. And he began asking everyone he met in the Hillsboro area: "Have you seen anything strange?"

What he learned astonished him. Scores of people in Hillsboro and the surrounding villages had been seeing unusual things, sometimes in the sky, sometimes right next to their homes. But they had kept the sightings to themselves. Some feared what others would think if they reported what they had seen. Some doubted their own sanity. One Hillsboro resident, George Hill, who had a terrifying encounter late one night on a country road, puts it this way: "The real story in this town isn't these things we're seeing—it's the reactions of the people."

Some react with scorn. For instance, an out-of-town visitor recently pulled into a service station just outside of Hillsboro and asked the owner if he knew Bob Giglio.

"That's the guy who's been getting everyone to talk into a tape recorder about UFOs," the owner said. "You can find him at the police station or at the newspaper."

Had he himself ever seen a UFO?

"No," the man said, pulling down

the brim of his red-plaid woolen cap and looking off at the fir-covered hills. "But a friend of mine saw one—I tell him he's crazy."

Others are less quick to dismiss their neighbors' sightings. One is Ron Ellis, editor of *The Messenger*.

Ellis, his wife, Carolyn, and their four children, ages four to 17, moved to Hillsboro in June, 1980. After years of editing papers for other people in Massachusetts, he wanted to own a paper himself and to live in northern New England. The Ellises moved into the upstairs of a rambling old house on a tree-lined side street, and now the whole family pitches in to help in the newspaper offices on the first floor. Ellis, a tall man with graying black hair and serious blue eyes, says that when he first heard about Hillsboro's UFO infestation he was skeptical.

"Being concerned about the paper's image, I had to be very careful in assessing the situation," he says.

But then he listened to some of Bob Giglio's tapes. The energetic photographer has recorded nearly 100 area residents describing their sightings; so many people have seen so many UFOs that now he records only the most dramatic experiences. He estimates that approximately one person in ten in the Hillsboro area has seen something inexplicable.

"What makes me believe it is that those tapes are from extremely cred-

ible people in the community—police chiefs, police sergeants, business people," says Ron Ellis. "Whether you call them UFOs or not, there is definitely something going on around the Hillsboro area."

Why have people been so unwilling to discuss their UFO sightings?

"There's a certain element in town that says UFOs aren't real, so there's a stigma attached to anyone who supposedly has seen a UFO," says Ellis.

Charles and Mae Hogg, who live in an old farmhouse in the forested hills that surround Hillsboro, have no doubt that something strange is happening. They have frequently seen unidentifiable objects flying overhead. In fact, Charles, a special policeman working with several of the area departments, says that on patrol he has averaged two sightings a night. But the Hoggs' most puzzling experience was with something they *didn't* see.

One chilly Saturday morning in March, 1980, Mae looked out her kitchen window and saw footprints in the snow where nobody should have been walking. Going out to look, Charles found—to his astonishment—that the prints began near the garage, circled past the kitchen window and then marched back to where they had begun. No prints led into the circle, none led out of it. Apparently the walker had dropped from the skies, taken a little hike and then reascended.

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in fear. And some of Hillsboro's human residents, too, have become wary of their own windows.

Arthur and Annette Vayens are retired farmers from Derry, in southern New Hampshire. They moved to Maine, then to Florida when Annette's arthritis worsened. A few years ago, they moved back to New Hampshire to be near their grown children. Now they live in a trailer at a park near the center of Hillsboro, and Arthur adds to their retirement income by driving a van for one of the local colleges.

On a Sunday night in September, 1980, Annette was sitting in her favorite living-room chair, watching "Trapper John" on television. It was nearly 11 o'clock when she happened to glance at the window behind the set.

"These four lights came down over the trees and right up to the window," she says. "Then they backed off from

without waking up, and he groggily thought it must be dawn. But the clock beside his bed said 2:10 A.M. Outside his second-story window was no street-light and no other houses. Still half asleep, wondering about the eerie light, he dozed off. Then he opened his eyes again. Now the room was dark.

"I had the feeling that someone or something was watching me," he says. "Then, outside the window, I saw something grayish-blue and round, like a kids' beachball. I switched on the light and it was gone."

He looked out the bedroom window and other windows on that side of the house. But nothing was there. "When I told my wife about it in the morning, she said I was crazy," he says. And so, except for Bob Giglio, he discussed his experience with no one else.

"Was I frightened?" he says. "No. If there is something out there that wants to hurt us, it could have hurt us before now."

But he says he would like to know what is going on, because he has heard so many people say they have seen odd things. "I know one fellow, who's into astronomy, who says he's frequently seen these things, two or three of them, the size of the moon, come over his house with no noise, no nothing, and then they're gone," says Mitchener.

Mitchener, a native of the Hillsboro area, says that if the UFO sightings seem to leave many of the region's people unperturbed, it is because New Hampshireers are "very, very self-contained." He has an idea why some of the area's residents see more flying objects than others: "They're the people who live up on a hillside and can view a whole valley," he says.

Does it bother him, living with his wife and small children in an area where so many strange things are happening? "I suppose if some weird-looking thing knocked on my door and asked for a glass of milk, I might get

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Charles Hogg is a tall, rawboned man who wears a size-11 shoe. But the prints were huge, dwarfing his own boots. And whoever made the prints had taken 42-inch strides. As a police chief who examined the strange footprints the next day remarked, "If this thing comes back, don't call me."

Are the Hoggs frightened in their isolated farmhouse?

"Maybe if I saw it, I'd be shaken, but right now I'm just inquisitive," says Charles. "I'd like to know what it really was."

Mae says the first thing she did after seeing the prints was to buy some window shades: "Now, if it comes back down, at least I won't see it," she says, laughing.

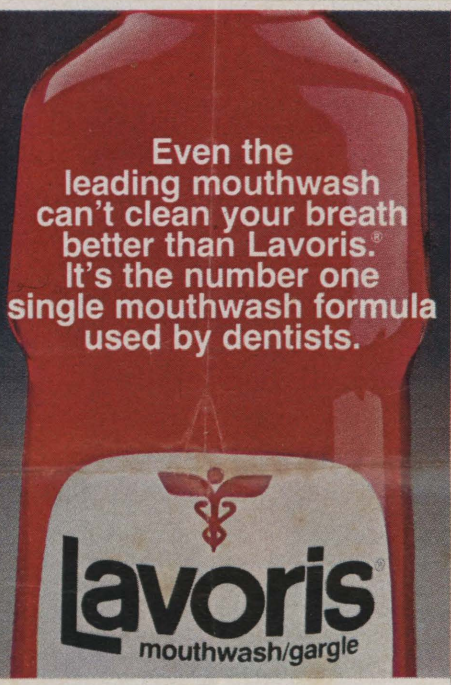
But, like her husband, she is not frightened by the pulsating lights they and their neighbors frequently see swooping over their homes. "I think that, if my animals were hurt or we heard that people were disappearing, I'd be frightened," she says. "But so far everything seems to be peaceful."

Why does she think so many of their neighbors have remained quiet about their sightings?

"They're afraid to say anything," says Mae. "Not knowing what the things are, they're afraid that, if they say anything, maybe the things will come down and hurt them, or attack their families, or take them away—who knows?"

And she thinks that it might be just as well that people have been keeping quiet: "You can panic people when there are all these kinds of things around—people get scared stiff and they're afraid to come out of their houses," she says. "My friends told me that, after seeing those footprints, they wouldn't stay one minute in this house, that they would move."

The Hoggs' Pekingese dog seems to agree. After the footprints appeared, says Mae, the dog frequently barked at the window at night, backing away



the window, zoomed back up over the trees, and were gone."

The reddish-yellow lights were intense, she says. They were arranged in a square, two on top, two on the bottom. And each light was a foot in diameter.

Startled, she rushed to the window, but nothing was there. Since then, she and Arthur have tried turning on their car headlights and driving toward the window from all directions, but nothing duplicates the phenomenon. She is convinced that what she saw has no normal explanation.

Except for Bob Giglio and an elderly neighbor, Annette Vayens has described her experience only to her two sons. "They laughed at me," she says.

Rick Mitchener, a Henniker real-estate agent, also had a strange experience by his window. He awakened one night to find the bedroom filled with bluish light. His wife slept beside him

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a little alarmed," he says. "But, as it is, this doesn't bother me."

Laurie Barr, 20, on the other hand, is alarmed. An education student at New England College in Henniker, she had a startling experience in February, 1980, driving home after a date with her fiancé, Billy Gould, 22, who works in his family's well-drilling business. The Goulds live on an isolated farm, near the home of Charles and Mae Hogg. And, on this frosty night, Billy and Laurie had parked their truck in a field behind the Goulds' barn. They were talking over their marriage plans when Laurie noticed that Billy was staring out the window, transfixed.

"Then I saw a light, like a street-light shining in the woods," she says. "It floated up over the trees and came toward us."

Laurie huddled close to her fiancé as the lighted object hovered directly over their truck. Abruptly the truck's police radar detector went on, filling the cab with its red light. Laurie screamed to Billy to turn off the engine so the light would go out—she didn't want them to be illuminated inside the cab.

"It looked like a rounded-off football over the truck," Laurie says.

Slowly the object drifted away. Leaving the truck's light off, Billy switched on the engine and slowly followed the craft across the field. Suddenly the object accelerated and whizzed away like a bullet.

"For a couple of weeks, we talked about it with each other, but we never told anyone," says Laurie. "If some friend had told me she had seen that, I wouldn't have believed it."

Eventually, they did tell friends. And they were surprised by the reaction.

"You wouldn't believe how many other people said they'd seen it, too. Now people are beginning to believe us," she says.

Since then, wire services have picked up the story. Now Laurie and Billy discuss the affair as infrequently as they can, hoping to maintain their privacy. But the experience has changed things for Laurie.

"For one thing, we began to look up at the sky a lot, and we began to see more of them," she says, shuddering. "When we drive home at night, my eyes are always up in the air—I'm scared to death."

She was less frightened at first, partly because she tried to avoid thinking about what she had seen. But now, because of the publicity, she has answered so many questions about the incident that she is forced to think about it.

"Whenever I start talking about this, I get nervous," she says. "I want some answers."

So does George Hill. Probably nobody in Hillsboro has had a closer—or more frightening—encounter than this 50-ish family man. Once an assistant superintendent of schools in Monroe, New York, he and his wife, Dorothy, moved to Hillsboro with their children

to deal in antiques and "get away from the clamor." Considering all that has happened, he says, "that is the comical part."

To augment their income from selling antiques, Hill has been working as a part-time maintenance man at several schools in the area. Late one night in autumn, he was driving home from the Washington school, 16 miles from Hillsboro on isolated Route 31. Many people have sighted UFOs along this lonely stretch of road, and Hill himself had often seen lights that behaved oddly in the sky—diving steeply, zipping upward at stunning speeds, abruptly reversing direction. Rounding a bend, he jammed on his brakes and stared in astonishment: Blocking the road ahead was an incredible object.

"It looked like a child's top, about twenty-five feet in diameter, about eighteen feet high," says Hill. "It looked as if someone had strung Christmas-tree lights around it, and a revolving light protruded from the top."

Metallic-looking, noiseless, the object floated a few feet above the pavement. Suddenly it slid off the road into a swamp. As Hill watched, aghast, something like a submarine's conning tower slid up from the top. Then an object that looked like a child's sliding board slowly slid out from the bottom, only to draw back in almost immediately. For seconds the craft was motionless. Then, slowly, it floated upward to about 40 feet over the ground. And then it simply disappeared. Whether it shot away too fast for his eye to follow or vanished in some other way, Hill does not know.

"I felt the presence of something awesome, something I couldn't understand," he says.

Shaken, he reached for his CB radio; George Hill's close encounter with a UFO was soon known all over Hillsboro.

He quit his job at the Washington school rather than drive Route 31 at night. And he says: "I don't believe our lives will ever be the same again."

At first people accused him of perpetrating a hoax. A lay preacher at the local Congregational Church who drinks nothing stronger than Ovaltine, he was deeply hurt. "In fact, for a while I stopped eating, it bothered me so much," he says. But then Bob Giglio's efforts induced more and more Hillsboro residents to come forward with their own stories, and Hill felt to some extent vindicated.

"Feelings are mixed," he says. "I'll stop in the coffee shop and some people will ask me if I really believe the things exist. Some will say they don't believe it, and some will praise me because I had the courage to speak out."

He says that many people in Hillsboro are afraid. And he adds that he understands why some who have seen the objects keep the sightings to themselves: "Before I had my picture in the paper, I was just George," he says. "Afterwards I was 'the UFO man.'"

Now UFOs are the hottest conversational topic in the Hillsboro sandwich shop, he says. "If you want theories, just walk through this town," he adds.

He himself has no theories, but he also has no plans to resume traveling along Route 31—"I'm omitting a stretch of roadway that frightens me very much," he says.

Dorothy Hill also has seen inexplicable lights in the sky. And, like many others in the area, she prefers not to discuss them. "There's something there—I don't know what it is," she says tensely. "I wish I knew."

Bob Giglio says: "What I want to know is, why here? Why this community?"

"If we can identify these things, then the mystery will be completely gone—and I hope to God we can identify them," says George Hill. "But there's a feeling in me that we'll never know what they are—not ever." ■

WHAT DO THE SCIENTISTS SAY?

According to John P. Timmerman, chairman of the board of the Center for UFO Studies, in Evanston, Illinois, Hillsboro's experiences with UFOs are typical. For years, he says, people from around the world have been reporting objects that look like inverted plates, rounded-off footballs or children's tops, as well as lights that maneuver oddly in the sky.

Not quite so typical, he says, are the large number of sightings over several years in one small town, although such intense experiences with UFOs have been reported from time to time. "Part of the difference may be that this particular town has a man like Bob Giglio, who pays attention and accumulates information," says Timmerman. "The same number of sightings could be occurring in other towns, but there's no one there to coordinate it."

The Center for UFO Studies is a national clearinghouse for UFO data. Law-enforcement agencies and scientific organizations nationwide use a 24-hour hot line to alert the center of sightings, and private citizens also can report their sightings to the center.

Dr. J. Allen Hynek founded the center in 1973 and now serves as its science director. An astrophysicist at Northwestern University (he chaired the astronomy department until his retirement in 1977), Dr. Hynek also served as scientific adviser to the Air Force's Project Bluebook, the government's UFO study agency from 1952 until 1969. Today the U.S. government has no agency that studies UFOs scientifically. Dr. Hynek founded the private, nonprofit Center for UFO Studies to fill that gap.

All reports received at the center are carefully evaluated for investigation by trained researchers. Often the researchers use highly technical laboratory and field tests to determine if a sighting can be explained or if it is truly unidentifiable. The center's workers file the unidentified sightings for statistical study in a computer bank, which now contains over 100,000 entries.

Anyone who wishes to report a UFO sighting can write to the center at 1609 Sherman Avenue, Suite 207, Evanston, Illinois 60201. Center telephones are manned 24 hours a day. The number is 312-491-6666.