

First of two parts

3464 Studying the UFO phenomenon

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One is a technical writer for Hanford Nuclear Facility near Richland, Wash., the other is an unemployed Pendleton man with training in law enforcement.

Although as different in appearance as they are in occupational background, they nevertheless have one common bond — their mutual fascination with the UFO phenomenon and what they call their healthy skepticism of it.

Greg Long, 34, of Richland is a lanky, scholarly-looking man with dark hair and a quiet eloquence of speech. Cole Cordray, 38, of Pendleton has the solid build of a boxer, coupled with a frank, open, personality.

Neither has any resemblance to the wide-eyed eccentrics who hover about the fringes of the UFO cult. Neither talks glibly about trips to Venus and Mars or of telepathic contacts with alien beings who dole out cryptic messages for the betterment of mankind.

Instead, the empirical objectivity of Long and Cordray seems as stern as that of scientific researchers in more accepted fields, an objectivity so strict, the two will not permit themselves to publicize their personal views of the five or so current UFO theories.

There is simply not enough information, they say, and they must keep their minds open to other possibilities.

Their mutual quest for the underpinnings of the UFO mystery is a lonely, usually thankless search done with their own funds and spare time, they admit. Yet neither has thoughts of giving it up. It is important that SOMEONE look into the phenomenon, they maintain, since the U.S. government won't.

At present the only NATO country with an official government investigation of UFOs under way is France, says Long.

The U.S. Air Force's Project Blue Book, a low-level effort to collect such information during the 1950s and '60s, was discontinued in 1969.

Both Long and Cordray are members of a UFO investigation organization called MUFON (Mutual UFO Network), composed of about 1,200 mem-



Cole Cordray of Pendleton and Greg Long of Richland, Wash. look over a MUFON (Mutual UFO Network) field investigator's manual. (Photo by Steve Dieffenbacher)

bers. Headquartered in Seguin, Texas, near San Antonio, the organization's purpose is to scientifically document legitimate UFO sightings, says Long.

Long is Washington state director in the organization, Cordray is Oregon state director.

There is no sense of territorial turf in the titles though. When a promising UFO sighting presents itself, the two often work together on the old premise that two heads are better than one, says Long.

"The reason we work so well together is that we both think alike," said Cordray. "We're both skeptics."

Although they do not have the mechanical equipment to measure burn marks and other physical evidences of UFOs which were popularized in the TV series "Project UFO," they ask careful questions, using printed MUFON guidelines. They also will take photographs of burn patterns when appropriate.

Besides the appearance of the UFO, they collect data as to duration of sighting, the object's altitude, speed and distance.

When possible, they get statements of corroborating witnesses. They record this

data on forms, which are then sent to MUFON headquarters. All inquiries are kept confidential.

"There is a growing public awareness of the UFO phenomenon, but there is still a reluctance to take that first step and tell someone about a sighting," says Long.

Because of the government's official indifference to sightings, many still feel there is a stigma attached to seeing a UFO, the two say. Witnesses risk being labeled eccentric by relatives, friends and public authorities.

Consequently, MUFON recommends that witnesses NOT contact the military, at least not until after a MUFON representative has been notified, says Long.

The reason is that the government, for whom the UFO phenomenon is an embarrassment, may not make good use of the information, he maintains. MUFON will at least keep a record of it, unless it proves to be a hoax or is identified as a recognizable object, he says.

The two are quick to point out that they know of no conspiracy by government to suppress UFO information. The phenomenon simply receives little attention there.

Neither Cordray nor Long have personally had a UFO experience. They both became MUFON investigators out of sheer curiosity — the characteristically human desire to know. Greater public familiarity has made their quest seem less eccentric now than it was as recently as 10 years ago, they say.

"Surveys have shown that three out of four people in this country believe UFOs exist," says Cordray.

Despite Eastern Oregon's low population density, it is actually as good or better a place for UFO sightings than a metropolitan area, Long adds.

"The problem is that ranchers or farmers are more apt to keep things to themselves, unless they can find someone who will treat them with the respect they deserve," he says.

"Actually, city people tend not to look up as often as rural people and the skies aren't as clear in cities. A higher percentage of UFO sightings are reported in less populated areas."

Next: an account of a "close encounter" as reported to MUFON investigators Greg Long and Cole Cordray