

entertainment

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UFO

By Joan Rice
and Janet Zenke

For centuries, man has looked into the heavens, wondering if perhaps elsewhere there exist other life forms.

As yet, nothing has reached the public to provide a definitive, absolute answer to the recurring speculation. In the 1960s, however, UFO stories abounded. These not only alleged sightings, but they also involved "close encounters."

Despite the sensational nature of such unexplainable phenomena, a St. Louis metropolitan group has been unobtrusively investigating reported area UFO sightings for the past 12 years. The UFO Study Group of Greater St. Louis, Inc. has taken a methodic, scientific approach to the fantastic subject.

Specially-trained members of the group record sightings and attempt to discover the identities of mysterious objects. In whatever case, the group sends its information to the Mutual UFO Network, Inc. (MUFON) a nationwide organization which duly tabulates it. Based in Seguin, Texas, MUFON handles on the average of two or three calls concerning UFOs daily, says Walter H. Andrus Jr., international director of the organization. Between 80 and 90 percent of these calls, upon initial investigation, are determined to be of natural or human origin, Andrus reports.

However, he adds that between 10 and 20 percent of such probes result in conclusions which "defy earthly explanation."

Since 1800, the national list of determined "unidentified" reports numbers about 80,000, but this doubtlessly includes duplicate sightings, he notes. Andrus says 60,000 better reflects the number of "individual" reports.

The local study group was organized when John Schuessler, head project engineer for the highly-successful shuttle which McDonnell-Douglas has on loan to NASA, discovered that several colleagues

Synod, says Schuessler and Palmberg got together with Willard Armstrong, formerly a professor of electrical engineering and physics at Washington University. In 1969, the three formed the nucleus of a UFO study group which first met at each others' homes once a month, Schroeder recalls.

Three or four months after the first meetings, Schroeder says he got wind of the small group and joined. "The meetings were more or less a mutual sharing of information," he adds. Now the 80-member group channels its discoveries to MUFON and to the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Ill., he says.

It is estimated that the UFO Study Group of Greater St. Louis has investigated approximately 4,500 sightings in the bi-state region since the group was formed in 1969. Since the group was not incorporated until 1972, it took a number of years before one man's idea became a reality.

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No engineer or scientist, Schroeder says his interest in the extraterrestrial objects stems from a relatively close encounter with what he believes to have been an alien craft during his youth. It took place in 1941 in Cleveland, Ohio.

Schroeder, then 17, was a grocery store clerk. He left work one Saturday night in early November and met his older brother, an employee at a nearby hardware store. The two bought a carton of ice cream before setting out for home. Both hoped to make it home before a storm hit their community, Schroeder remembers.

"We were running home to avoid the rain storm, when the ground was suddenly lit up by a huge arc of light," he reports. Looking up, he recalls seeing "an intense blue white light" emitting from behind low cloud cover. The two stopped in their tracks, then saw the bright lights much more clearly as a disc came through the cloud bank and hovered over a house.

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"It looked like it was a self-contained system. There was very little energy loss," he says. He adds that the disc had about eight small circles which flashed lavender, alternating with eight more which flashed orange. "Those are opposite colors on the chromatic scale," explains Schroeder, an accomplished artist.

"It stayed 30 seconds at least. Meanwhile, we got drenched," he says, smiling. "We both saw something that looked like a small figure sitting inside, working controls." The two were able to see the entity because it appeared in a transparent dome located on the top of the saucer.

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Though a believer in the UFO phenomenon, Adams' response to such calls is purely objective.

The investigative process "becomes a question of probabilities - it was probably this, or it was probably that," says Adams. "It's a matter of going through all the (natural) explanations, until you come to the one that it is." When a sighting cannot be identified, the investigator has to make up his own mind as to what he thinks the witness saw, Adams says.

According to Adams, the most typical sighting occurs at night, and in that instance the first objective of the investigator is to rule out the possibility of airplanes, stars, advertising aircraft, and weather balloons.

A local UFO study group has maintained a large membership because of its efforts to discover what lies beyond mere sightings.

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Of alien beings visiting the Earth in strange space crafts, Adams contends that a recent public tendency to neither believe nor disbelieve is more prevalent now because of the space program. "People are becoming more open-minded," he claims. Further, he says, "It's never been proven that it can't be."

Adams says his strong belief in UFO existence is tied to a memo, dated March 22, 1950, sent from the Strategic Air Command to the director of the FBI. It was released under the Freedom of Information Act, says Adams, and according to his sources is an authentic government document. In part, the document reads:

An investigator for the Air Forces stated that three so-called flying saucers had been recovered in New Mexico. They were described as being circular in shape with raised centers, approximately 50 feet in diameter. Each one was occupied by three bodies of human shape but only 3 foot tall, dressed in metallic cloth...

When an unidentified flying object has been reported, there are generally two standard descriptions given to investigators, says Adams.

The first is commonly known as the "flying saucer." According to Adams, this first kind is circular, with a transparent dome on top and often has protrusions from the bottom. The disc-shaped objects generally emit a glow from the bottom, "like neon or mercury," says Adams, which he says is probably the result of energy developed by the machine which ionizes the air around it.

The other common description is a space ship of triangular shape, with lights on the bottom side rather than a glow, and typically the lights are in colors. One witness described such a ship as a "piece of French toast with two corners cut off," said Adams. Such analogies are attempts by witnesses to relate totally foreign



these aliens are reported to be five to six feet tall with slanted or oval eyes and less pronounced noses and mouths. In most of the abduction cases the entities described are normals. This type wears different-colored suits and helmets.

Investigators are taught that entity observations usually fall into two categories - intentional and unintentional encounters.

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Formerly a St. Louisan, Schuessler and McDonnell-Douglas design engineer Cliff Palmberg discovered in 1965 that they had "common interests," according to John Schroeder, regional chairman of MUFON and a member of the UFO Study Group of Greater St. Louis.

Schroeder, staff communicator for the Missouri Lutheran Church

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Its appearance reminded Schroeder of "brushed aluminum," he says, adding that there were no "rivets" or seams to break the object's polished surface.

"The grid at the bottom of the saucer was bright white," Schroeder says, elaborating on the description.

As it came down to a distance of 25 feet above the boys, the white grid ran in "waves" in one direction across the bottom of the metal object. When the disc hovered, the

waves were pulsating from the center of the dish to the outer perimeter, he explains.

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According to Adams, the most typical sighting occurs at night, and in that instance the first objective of the investigator is to rule out the possibility of airplanes, stars, advertising aircraft, and weather balloons.

If necessary, local agencies, such as community police departments, the planetarium and various faculty members of nearby colleges may become involved the verification process, says Adams.

For instance, he explains, a professor in a college science department may be able to confirm or deny a natural environmental cause for the sighting by answering the question - "Could this be swamp gas?" - in pursuit of solving one hypothetical case.

Police department can verify whether or not similar reports were filed for the same sighting, while information from planetarium sources will verify the positions of stars at particular times, Adams notes. The agencies may also refer calls about UFO sightings to the organization, he says.

Adams, an electronics engineer at AT&T Technologies, believes "the normal progression of mankind is to

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outer space." His interest in man's relationship to outer space was heightened during his tenure as senior engineer on the Inertial Guidance System Project of the Gemini space program. "Gemini proved man could exist in space," he says.

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The other common description is a space ship of triangular shape, with lights on the bottom side rather than a glow, and typically the lights are in colors. One witness described such a ship as a "piece of French toast with two corners cut off," said Adams. Such analogies are attempts by witnesses to relate totally foreign images to a common experience, he noted.

Only about 10 percent of reported sightings are rendered inexplicable, says Adams, and of that number, only 5 percent (excluding cases that involve "abductions" and the element of "lost" time, which will be explained later) might include alien sightings.

Sightings of extraterrestrial beings also tend to be consistent in description, Adams points out.

One creature common in reports, referred to in the MUFON Field Investigator's Manual as "dwarfs," stands only three and one-half feet tall, with large, rounded heads, round eyes and disproportionately long arms. The manual also indicates that dwarfs are often seen wearing shiny, silver coveralls and helmets.

"Normals," according to the manual, are the second most common type of alien being reported. Similar in appearance to humans,



these aliens are reported to be five to six feet tall with slanted or oval eyes and less pronounced noses and mouths. In most of the abduction cases the entities described are normals. This type wears different-colored suits and helmets.

Investigators are taught that entity observations usually fall into two categories - intentional and unintentional encounters.

According to the MUFON training manual, witnesses have described unintentional encounters when entities appear to be surprised by the presence of the witness. The witness may be paralyzed, "by a ray or force field of some kind until the entity leaves," as stated in the manual.

An intentional encounter may be apparent in cases where UFOs land near homes or on roadways, blocking vehicles. Such landings, as described in the training manual, usually occur in less populated areas.

Whatever the case, Adams indicates a witness will only be endangered if the entities feel threatened. "They are peaceful people," he believes.

Hypnosis, according to Adams, is a specialized tool of investigation, used in rare cases.

In order to obtain data such as distances or height, an investigator may stage what Adams refers to as a "dummy run" - having the witness re-enact the alleged sighting.

The challenge to an investigator, says Adams, is to "take one piece of evidence - you don't know where it's going to come from or what form it's going to take - and develop it."

Combining that shred of data with other pieces of the information puzzle will someday lead to the clear picture, believes Adams.

UFO field investigators are required to attend a 14-hour training session, led by Adams. Persons interested in such training need not have a scientific background, says Adams, emphasizing, "All you have to have is the willingness to do it."

For the time invested, Adams says an investigator will be called upon to use his skills maybe twice each year.

For non-believers, discovering the natural cause behind each case is only a question of time.

(To Page 2G)

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revenge for the death of his younger brother, one of the three victims. The other American, played by Lee Marvin.

A local UFO study group

From Page 1G

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At least one member of the UFO Study Group says he cannot accept the findings of investigations at their face value.

Both witnesses and investigators read into their observations not only current perceptions but also those which have been collected in their memories, says Jeff Kretsch, president of the St. Louis study group. He works as a map-maker for the U.S. Department of Defense.

Kretsch says he must base his study of UFOs on a generally-accepted collection of facts common to most sightings.

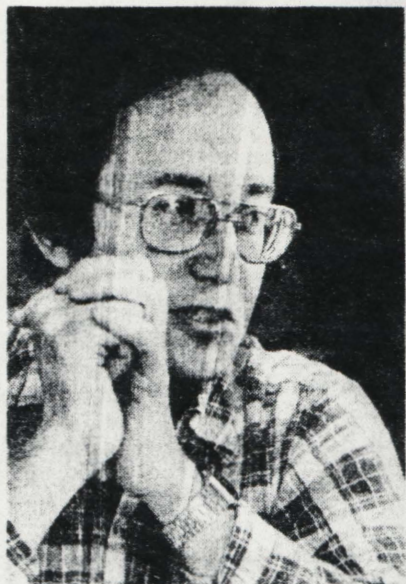
Yet, in the 35 or so years which have passed since the first UFO sighting, there is "no solid knowledge" on which to build, Kretsch observes. His inclination to look for facts instead of relying on observations comes from a concentrated scientific background.

Kretsch graduated from Northwestern University in 1975 with a bachelor of arts degree in astronomy. Three years later, he graduated from Southern Illinois University with a master of arts degree in physics. He earned yet another master's degree from Purdue University in 1981 after having studied photogrammetry, the science of making reliable measurements by the use of photographs, and aerial photos in particular.

Such a background can be both helpful and a hindrance, he remarks. It provides him with a good perspective on extraterrestrial phenomena, yet it is so complex as to confound his explanations to those without the specialized knowledge, he says.

"The way that we look at our data distorts our beliefs," Kretsch says in response to a query as to whether he believes in UFOs.

Using the term "ufology" to refer to the study of UFOs, Kretsch notes that "in order for it to be a science, we have to have a body of fundamental knowledge that people generally agree on." As yet, there is none, he says. "This might be one of our goals to eventually accomplish," he suggests.



Jeff Kretsch

If most of the reports he investigates as an astronomer offer little factual evidence on which to base a belief, one may wonder why Kretsch concerns himself with the group, a phenomenon in itself.

He frankly admits that he is fascinated with the subject. This captivation was enough to compel Kretsch to find out more about the UFO Study Group of Greater St. Louis. "These groups usually generate data about UFOs, and I wanted to understand how it was gathered and selected," he says.

Ironically, his involvement precluded an objective study of the group's investigations. "I ended up getting involved in the process itself," wryly comments Kretsch.

Immersion has its good points, however. According to Kretsch, the study group provides him with the means to put his background in astronomy and physics to good use; he is an avowed puzzle-solver.

He has participated in "a couple of dozen direct investigations," he estimates. Of those, there were "a few that didn't pan out." Yet, there were also "a few that I couldn't explain," he adds.

This fact keeps Kretsch's interest alive, but it also strengthens his need for finding factual evidence behind observations. "I don't believe because I can't prove (the existence of UFOs.) But I don't disbelieve it, either. I think it's something worth studying."