

# ● Officers encounter strange lights in

MN-016 MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE

MAR 9 1984

## S.D. sky

By Jim Dawson  
Staff Writer

Gary Myers said he has read a little science fiction in his day, but it didn't prepare him for his night shift in the desolate hills of Bennett County, S.D.

When the Martin City police officer reported for duty Tuesday there was an assignment waiting for him and Bennett County sheriff's deputy Tom Jensen. Sheriff Ed Rolfe asked them to drive into the hills to check out several reports from ranchers of "strange lights in the southwestern

There had been five reported sightings in the past few weeks, Myers said Thursday, and the sheriff was curious.

A short time later Myers was standing on a dark hill, clutching his shotgun, while Jensen talked nervously to headquarters on his radio. About 150 yards away a large array of red and white lights floated silently in the air, Myers said.

The two officers were involved in what UFO researchers call a close encounter of the first kind — meaning they were within 200 yards of an unexplained "phenomenon."

J. Allen Hynek, founder of the Center for UFO Studies at Northwestern University, said he already has interviewed the officers and the ranchers and is impressed by their account.

Hynek, who was an adviser to the U.S. Air Force during its two-decade "Operation Blue Book" investigation of UFOs, which ended in 1969, said he doesn't believe the objects come from outer space.

"I've often thought in terms of a parallel reality," he said, "an interface with another universe."

Myers was thinking more in terms of secret military aircraft, he said, "but

I don't know what it was."

"If either one of us had been out there alone," Myers said, "we wouldn't have told anybody about it because we'd get branded as crazy."

"We didn't take this seriously at all," he said as he and Jensen prepared to head into the hills again last night, this time armed with a tape recorder, binoculars and a camera. "We thought it (the reported UFO) was a hoax, a joke."

Just after 10 p.m. Tuesday, at the time ranchers said the UFO usually

appears, "we got out on top of a hill," Myers said.

It was a clear, starry night, Myers said, and as he and Jensen scanned the horizon for about 10 minutes they didn't see anything but stars and distant town lights.

"We got back in the patrol car, drove about 2 or 3 miles down a dirt road and stopped on another hill," he said.

"We looked back and there were two lights, a bright white one on the right and a dimmer red one on the left, about 100 to 200 feet in the air right over the position we'd been parked in before," Myers said.

"It was spooky. They started moving toward us at a slow rate of speed about 100 yards to the south of the road. After it got halfway to us, he (Jensen) got on the radio and started describing it to the dispatcher."

When the lights were within a half-mile, he said, "the big light shut off." Myers said he grabbed his shotgun and watched as the remaining light moved directly opposite his squad car, about 150 yards to the south.

"It had three or four white lights on its side, four red lights on the back and we could still see the lights on the front," he said. At that point, he said, "it struck me that we weren't hearing any sound. None at all."

After hovering silently for about two minutes, he said, "it appeared to accelerate fairly rapidly to the southeast. When it did that we heard a low jet-engine type of sound for five or 10 seconds, then it cut off. It was very quiet."

Myers said neither he nor Jensen could make out any structure or shape behind the lights during the 10-minute "encounter."

"We radioed to a state trooper and told him to go to Hwy. 18 (to the southeast) to try to see it, but he didn't see it," Myers said.

The two officers drove quickly to Clayton Merchen's ranch, "and with-

out even discussing the pattern of lights we'd seen, they described the same thing." The Merchens are one of the families that have reported seeing the lights several times in the past few weeks.

Another ranch owner, Jerry Grass, has reported seeing similar lights and also finding three of his cattle mutilated. Cattle mutilations have been associated with past UFO sightings in the south and western United States, and the federal government funded a study of the incidents in 1980. The study concluded that natural predators caused the mutilations.

Myers said he patched through a call to Ellsworth Air Force Base in Rapid City and asked if the Air Force had any aircraft in the area.

Air controllers at the base said no aircraft were in the vicinity and did not recognize the light pattern described by Myers as matching any of their planes. The controllers increased the range of their radar to scan the area of the sighting, Myers said, but reported no aircraft.

Jensen was less inclined to talk about the encounter, but he said he was heading back to the spot with Myers last night "because I want to know what that was. It was spooky."

(M)