

UFOs Observer Still Believer

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By ED SMITH

Since his first "close encounter" with an unidentified flying object, Floyd Hallstrom of Oxnard has remained steadfast in his belief that UFOs exist.

Moreover, he said, "Anybody that knows me says, 'If Floyd says he has seen it, he's seen it.'"

"I'm not a type of person to stretch a story," he said.

"I don't know what this whole thing is about, I know there must be a reason for it," he said.

"I know they're there. My big question is why?" he said. "Maybe some day I'll know."

Hallstrom, 63, has been retired for several years from Abex Corp. in Oxnard. He has more than 40 years of aviation experience. Both his mother and father were pilots.

On New Year's Day 1978 at 12:35 p.m., Hallstrom took off from Oxnard Airport in his Cessna 170A following a friend, Jim Victor, who was flying his plane to San Diego where it would be sold. Hallstrom was going along for the ride, so to speak, and to bring his friend back to Oxnard.

Here is what Hallstrom said happened:

At 1:07 p.m. Hallstrom called Victor on the radio to report he was seven miles behind him. Hallstrom was flying at 7,500 feet above the business district of downtown Santa Monica. Victor was at 7,700 feet over Los Angeles International Airport.

Hallstrom was looking ahead to see if he could locate his friend's aircraft. He observed a smog layer at about 6,500 feet.

Hallstrom saw a black spot in the sky and thought it was Victor's plane.

Hallstrom, in an interview seven years ago, said he knew it was some type of aircraft approaching him, so he kept a watchful eye as it grew larger, approaching at a lower level.

"It took on the form of an aircraft, but there were no wings on it," Hallstrom said in that first interview.

He initially concluded that it was a helicopter, noting he had some experience flying helicopters during his 30 years in the Navy.

Rapid thoughts began surfacing in Hallstrom's mind. What's a helicopter doing out of LAX at 6,000 feet? Whatever it is, it is moving at a terrific rate of speed for a helicopter.

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As the craft approached off Hallstrom's left shoulder, about 30 to 40 degrees below, it took on the "full shape of a saucer," he said. "I could see the dome on it that looked like a half-sphere."

Hallstrom said there were no markings or smoke or evidence of propulsion.

He admitted that his subconscious recognized it as a flying saucer before his conscious recognized it — and it startled him.

Hallstrom didn't panic as the strange craft maneuvered 1,500 feet below him. Instead, he reached for a piece of paper and began drawing a rough sketch of the strange craft. He estimated the diameter of the craft at 30 feet.

Later, Hallstrom charted the flight of his small plane and that of the UFO and concluded that the period during which the UFO was in "identifiable view" encompassed only 25 seconds. He estimated his plane had traveled only 2½ miles, while the UFO had traveled more than 12 miles. He based that conclusion on his aircraft's air speed of 136 miles per hour and the UFO's estimated speed of 650 miles per hour.

Hallstrom made several attempts to confirm the sighting with official sources such as the Federal Aviation Administration and the Ontario Airport control tower. Rejected at nearly every corner he turned, he admitted that he began to develop self-doubt about what he had experienced.

In the weeks that followed, he began to recount what he had experienced on tape, charts and maps that he prepared. He still has those records today.

A published account of Hallstrom's experience drew considerable interest from phenomena research organizations. And after one two-hour interview with Hallstrom, one official declared that what Hallstrom recounted represented "the best case I've ever had in the county. It's well documented." And the interviewer concluded that Hallstrom was telling the truth.

It was not the only UFO sighting Hallstrom was to experience.

On July 4 of that same year, Hallstrom was flying with a friend, Keith Sorenson of LaCanada. It was 3:30 p.m., the sky was clear and the two men had been airborne out of Oxnard for about an hour, Hallstrom said.

The two flyers were returning in their small plane and were just south of the Saticoy Bridge across Highway 118 flying at about 3,500 feet, he said.

Suddenly, Hallstrom spotted a UFO at about 1,500 feet.

"It was four feet in diameter with a dome on it," he said. "It was going 900 miles an hour. It turned toward Las Pintas Country Club and then it

came back. It came straight toward the airplane."

"I held my position and didn't move," he said. "It went over the right wing."

Sorenson, who prior to this experience was a skeptic of UFO proponents, suddenly changed his mind.

"He (Sorenson) was no longer a skeptic," Hallstrom said.

The incident was reported to the Phenomena Research Organization in Seattle, Wash.

In May of 1979, two of Hallstrom's neighbors told him they had sighted a UFO over his house while he was out of town. They described it as 40 feet in length. They are two people who believed Hallstrom to be telling the truth, and were more convinced following their experience, Hallstrom said.

Since 1979, however, there have been no further sightings by Hallstrom — and not many by anyone else, according to UFO experts.

An air traffic controller at Point Mugu naval complex reportedly spotted something on his radar screen "about seven years ago," according to Ray Lucasey, public affairs spokesman.

Lucasey recounted the sketchy details of the incident.

He said a commercial aircraft had taken off from Oxnard Airport when the air traffic controller "saw something on his screen."

The controller advised the pilot of the commercial aircraft: "I have something that looks like it is coming at you very fast," Lucasey recalled. "He (the commercial pilot) said 'I see it.'"

The controller turned up the sensitivity on his radar screen to get a better look at the object, but it had vanished.

"That's the only thing that had anything to do with UFOs in our log book in years," Lucasey said.

What has followed in the last six to seven years is a marked decline in the number of reported sightings. UFO experts contend the decline, in part, is due to such movies as "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "Star Wars." The people who have allegedly spotted UFOs are reluctant to report them because of the negative impact that likely would follow.

"It's an established fact that most people are unprepared to make an accurate report about something they see in the sky at night," said Alvin Lawson, who operates the UFO Report Center in Orange County.

Lawson has used the debate over UFOs in his class on critical thinking at California State University at Long Beach.

"I think there is a lot going on up there that we don't understand," he said. "I don't believe we are being visited, but I think people are perceiving something. It is very likely a psychological matter."

Lawson said when he first established the hotline about 11 years ago he was receiving about 500 calls per year, sometimes three to four calls per day.

"After 1977, people began to be more circumspect about reporting," he said.

Today, his hotline receives only a relative handful of calls, many from pranksters, and some from people who do not wish to leave their names, he said.

Lawson contends that most people who are unprepared to accurately report what they see, because they are uneducated toward the stars and the various lights in the sky, tend to

make their reports "in the perspective of contemporary science."

"A hundred years ago it was an angel or a ghost, now it's extraterrestrial visitors," he said.

"But they are accurately reporting what their senses tell them," Lawson said in defense of UFO sightings.

"People will continue to report things in the stars that are puzzling," he said.

Lawson said there are two phenomena that warrant serious research. One is the fact the "wave" of UFO sightings tend to occur about every five years, starting back in 1947. Second is the origin of what caused people to claim they saw a UFO.

"It's very similar to a religious or near-death experience," Lawson said of those who claim to have spotted UFOs. But, he added, "People have no ready way of responding to it."

Lawson said the release of such movies as "Close Encounters" is a likely source of triggering a "new enthusiasm" for UFO sightings in the late 1970s.

Lawson is critical of the news media for its treatment of such events.

"It's treated like a day at the zoo," he said.

What are needed, he said, are "good reports" followed by good research.

"We need serious, objective investigation," he said.

Lawson said that "Close Encounters" director Steven Spielberg used "about a dozen items" out of UFO literature in his hit movie.

"The truth is murdered by both sides to some degree," he said.

The country's bureaucracy, in Lawson's view, is ill equipped for dealing with the possibilities that exist should UFO proponents be correct.

"There have been a lot of horror stories, but officially there are no UFOs," he said.

"Evidence for interesting phenomena is being destroyed," Lawson said.

For now, Lawson said, "I think it is about time for a wave."

Lawson has no timetable, although he admits the five-year cycle is a little behind schedule. But, he concluded, "It could happen tomorrow."