

# Man's Interest in UFOs Spans 40 'Costly' Years

By TOM MINEHART

LINCOLNTON, N.C. (AP) — In 1944, a 15-year-old Boy Scout named George Fawcett read a news story about "silver balls floating in the air" that the Nazis planned to use to confuse the Allies during bombing raids.

The story led to a 40-year interest in unidentified flying objects — a mission that has cost Fawcett \$27,000 of his own money and at least one job, sent him around the country to investigate some 1,000 reported UFO sightings and filled more than 20 file drawers in his Lincolnton home with UFO-related documents.

"I'm not the Billy Graham of UFOs, I'm more like the Curious George," Fawcett, 55, said during an interview at his wife's Lincolnton sandwich shop, which features a "UFO Room" full of framed pictures and clippings.

"It was just curiosity," he said. "Two, there was the deep feeling I got that they were not being treated with the respect due them. I felt that anything that's been going on for four decades in 140 nations deserves close scientific scrutiny."

Fawcett said that despite new efforts in China and the Soviet Union to investigate UFOs, official America is more tight-lipped about them than ever.

"Americans have accepted them without a government announcement," he said, however. "The skeptics are in the minority...People don't ask me if UFOs are real anymore, they ask what they've been up to."

Fawcett is the public relations director for the North Carolina chapter of the Mutual UFO Network, which has 75 field investigators in 45 cities across the state. He was MU-FON's state director from 1969 to 1980.

But this year, for the first time since 1952, he won't be providing his annual report of North Carolina UFO activity for the previous year.

He's had to look for a job because the newspaper where he worked closed down. He's also been spending more time on worldwide research — particularly a study comparing human reactions to UFOs with the hard evidence of radar trackings and ground markings.

**HE COLLECTED** information on three sightings in the state in 1984:

- On Jan. 7 near Edenton, a man and his 15-year-old son reported seeing a meteor-like object making 90-degree turns, loops and wave movements at high speed for about 50 minutes.
- In February near Lincolnton, four people in the same car reported seeing a circular object with two windows casting a beam of light on the ground.
- On April 25 near Lincolnton, four people in two

cars reported seeing a long object about 64 feet long with 10 windows hovering over the ground. They said it caused their headlights to go out and shined blinding orange and red floodlights at them.

Of the 1,000 reported sightings Fawcett has investigated over the years, he said all but about 22 percent could be explained as natural phenomena, man-made objects or hoaxes.

"It's frustrating — we put a man on the moon, but if we were using volunteers, we wouldn't have made it," he said. "We suffer from a lack of funds."

He said UFO investigators also lack cooperation from government agencies he believes are probing UFOs, including the Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Fawcett said his early efforts at researching UFOs were met with ridicule. But he said a wave of sightings in his hometown of Mount Airy in 1973 vindicated him there.

He says he personally has seen one UFO — an object "like an orange cut in half" hovering over Lynchburg College in Virginia in 1951.

Later, he was one of three candidates for a job in Florida. But when officials found out about his interest in UFOs, he said, someone else got the job.

UFOs gained credence in the 1960s and 1970s, and from 1979 to 1983, Fawcett taught a three-credit, 12-week course on UFOs at the Lincolnton campus of Gaston College. His 125 students came from 24 North Carolina cities and from a variety of professions and trades.

He has finished one book — "Quarter Century Studies of UFOs in Florida, North Carolina and Tennessee" — and is starting another. And he has begun to get nibbles on his proposal to build a UFO museum in Boone. All he needs is money and material to add to his considerable collection.

Fawcett said North Carolina ranks fourth in the nation in UFO sightings, possibly because of the large number of fresh-water bodies and power plants that he said attract extraterrestrial spacecraft.

Fawcett has collected 44 North Carolina cases from 1842 to 1983 in which people reported UFO landings or encounters with UFO occupants.

"I feel more comfortable with someone flying them," he smiled. "A taxicab without a driver is far more hazardous."

Fawcett, however, said UFOs are a "serious problem to national security and human survival." At least two North Carolina people have reported being abducted by UFO occupants, and other people worldwide claim to have been burned, tested or knocked down.

Other UFO occupants may be benevolent, he said.

"I'm one of the few who believe there are good guys in white hats along with the bad guys in black hats," he said.

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