

Experts bewildered by UFO sightings

by L. Stuart Ditzen
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

It was a bright, clear afternoon last April, and John Velter, a businessman, and his company bookkeeper, Sandra Schell, were driving west on the Pennsylvania Turnpike near Valley Forge, Pa.

Far ahead, a shining silver object like a Frisbee tilted on edge descended from the sky and flew directly toward them. For several seconds, the object advanced along the line of the highway, 500 feet or so in the air. Then when it was almost overhead, it veered north, flew over a meadow and vanished.

"All of a sudden it wasn't there," said Schell. "I did not take my eyes off of it,

and then, it just wasn't there."

What they saw that day — apparently — was a UFO. Velter, owner of a company that sells spring water, and Schell reported the sighting to police and then to a UFO hot line in western Pennsylvania.

"I thought a crackpot had built an airship of some kind," Velter said. "I was waiting to see something in the newspapers."

But the sighting was just one — a comparatively undramatic one at that — of many UFO reports that are made regularly to police, government agencies and UFO organizations around the country and the world.

It has been nearly four decades since

the first major wave of UFO sightings in the United States in 1947, and the mystery concerning them has refused to go away. There are thousands of new sightings every year.

As many as 90 percent of UFO reports turn out to be aircraft, planets, meteors, space debris, weather balloons, kites, unusual atmospheric conditions and other explainable objects and events. But there are many sightings that even dedicated skeptics and debunkers are unable to explain.

"People want quick answers — Where are they from? What are they doing here? I wish I knew the answers," said J. Allen Hynek, retired chairman of the astronomy department at North-

western University and director of the Center for UFO Studies with offices in Lima, Ohio, and Scottsdale, Ariz.

The only discernable trend, Hynek said, is that a changing pattern in sightings seems to suggest that UFOs, whatever they are, are getting closer.

In the 1950s and 1960s, there were reports of "flying saucers" zooming about the sky. Now, according to Hynek and other researchers, the reports are frequently of "close encounters" in which UFOs are said to hover above treetops and to land. And in a growing number of cases, sightings of "humanoids" also are reported.

"The strangeness index has gone up,"
See UFO, page K-9

'strangeness index has gone up' lately

driving home from a date late at night with her boyfriend.

Hopkins said the woman had a conscious recollection of seeing a blinding light, a human-like creature descending in front of the car and nothing more — a blank memory. There were two hours of missing time from that night, Hopkins said, that had troubled the woman for 24 years.

As the tape played, the woman's voice rose in distress:

"Do you see that light? Oh my God, did you see that light? My God, I've never seen nothing like that. What is it? Oh God, what is it? . . .

"Oh my God, do you see that? We're going to hit him. What is it? What is it? We're going to hit him. My God, we're going to hit him. . . . Some kind, some kind of being. Oh my God. Oh God. There's no feet. There's no feet

to him. . . . It's just hanging in the air. He has some kind of metallic gray suit on. His hands hang to his sides. He has some kind of hooded top on his head. And, oh my God, his eyes, oh my God, oh my God, his eyes . . ."

As the woman's account moved into the realm of forgotten time, her voice became more tearful and terrified:

"I feel numb. Paralyzed. I can't, can't, can't move. I can't talk. . . . Oh my God, they're in front of the car. Oh my God, there are three in front of the car. . . . The same beings, same beings, the eyes, dark, oh God, the dark eyes, and they're just looking at us. Jesus, just looking at us. They say to me, 'Get out of the car. Get out of the car.' I open the door, and I just stand there like a zombie. . . . And one comes around the door and

takes, takes ahold of my arm. And there's lights all over. Lights all over. I can feel myself going someplace. . . . On the road, going north. . . . I'm numb. I can't fight him. I can't, I can't get away, can't get away. We're going north, up the hill. Oh God, oh God. . . ."

"What do you see now?" Hopkins asks on the tape. "What is happening?"

"Some kind of vehicle. Oh my God, it's round. Bright. Very bright light. . . . And he's trying to get me to walk up some steps. Oh my God. There's about 10 steps. The door slides, like into the wall, and we go inside. A large room. . . . And there are three beings, and they don't do anything. They just feel around on me. . . . I'm by the door. They just look at me. Piercing eyes. And next thing, I'm outside

again. I'm back in the car."

Asked about such cases, Allen Hynek replied: "The only thing I can say is that to the people I've talked to — and I've talked to quite a few now — it is absolutely real. . . . You cannot fob off the (accounts) as coming from a bunch of dodoes and crackpots."

The accounts are widely ridiculed by UFO skeptics.

"People see all sorts of things. They see pink elephants. They see fairies," said Paul Kurtz, professor of philosophy at the State University of New York in Buffalo.

Kurtz, chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, said abduction stories are "a product of the creative imagination or science fiction. It seems to be a psychological, sociological phenomenon."



UFO experts says

Continued from page K-8

said Hynek, 74, who is widely regarded as the elder statesman of UFO studies in America.

He and a small coterie of other scholars believe that UFOs hold possibilities for a spectacular development in human history — the opening of a window to the universe.

There also is a dedicated clique of skeptics. Its leader, Philip Klass, a senior editor of *Aviation Week & Space Technology* magazine, contends that UFOs are "popular myth."

Klass said he cannot explain every UFO sighting, but "we've had nearly 40 years. There is not a single piece of physical evidence. All these people claim to have been aboard a UFO, not one has brought back a souvenir."

Officially, the United States government has conducted no research on the subject for the last 16 years.

The Air Force collected reports on UFO sightings from 1947 until 1969, at which time it concluded that, although not all sightings could be explained, UFOs did not represent a threat to national security.

Since 1969, the Air Force has referred reports of UFO sightings to local police departments and to private UFO groups. All research on the subject has been done by individuals and a few scantily funded nonprofit organizations like Hynek's Center for UFO Studies, which operates on \$40,000 a year.

The most dramatic — and seemingly preposterous — of UFO sightings are those in which witnesses report seeing, and sometimes being abducted by, human-like creatures.

To describe these cases, Hynek several years ago coined the term "close encounters of the third kind," which became the title of Steven Spielberg's 1977 movie about a UFO landing on Earth.

The Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), based in Seguin, Texas, has collected 2,300 reports of close encounters of the third kind from around the world, dating back more than 40 years. According to MUFON figures, there were about 300 such reports in 1967. In 1975, there were 1,000. And in 1981, the number had grown to 2,300.

As a rule, researchers say, the

people who make such reports appear to be sane, stable citizens. Rarely do they seek publicity. Often their accounts come out reluctantly, sometimes years after the event, and sometimes only through hypnosis.

Budd Hopkins, a New York artist who published the book "Missing Time" in 1981, has studied more than 50 cases in which UFO witnesses recount abduction experiences.

A common trait among the cases, Hopkins said, is that the subjects have memory blocks associated with UFO sightings.

In a typical case, Hopkins said, an individual reports seeing a UFO briefly at close range but later discovers that what had seemed only a momentary experience actually lasted for as long as an hour or two.

To probe the time gaps, Hopkins enlisted a New York psychologist, Aphrodite Clamar, who hypnotized the subjects and led them back through their experiences.

A pattern emerged, Hopkins said: Many subjects told of being confronted by small human-like creatures with bulbous heads, large liquid eyes and frail, emaciated bodies.

They told of being taken inside UFOs, into large lighted rooms, of being placed on tables and examined, as in a doctor's office, and then of being released.

Hopkins said his subjects sometimes told of having a sense of telepathic communication with their captors and a sense of paralysis. Some, Hopkins said, came away with small bloodless wounds — an incision on the back of a calf or a plug of missing flesh on a shin — that healed into scars.

"Nobody has any idea what really is going on here," Hopkins said. "We have no answer to any of the big questions. We just know it's going on, and it ain't the Russians."

Nine of Hopkins' subjects were given psychological evaluations by Elizabeth T. Slater, another New York psychologist, in 1983.

Slater concluded in a written report that the purported UFO experiences of the nine could not be attributed to mental disorders.

Hopkins played a 1983 tape recording of a Nebraska woman recalling, under hypnosis, an experience she had in 1959, while

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA
NEWS

10 MARCH, 1985

CONTINUED