

UFO watcher seeks closer encounters of the 'weird' kind

By John Helton
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FORT WALTON BEACH — Donald Ware admits people might find him a little weird.

But those are normally closed-minded people who haven't given much thought to the possibility of life beyond our solar system, he said. Ware, 50, has been giving the subject a lot of thought since 1952; the more research he does, the more evidence he finds somebody is watching us, he said.

"I believe our planet is being watched right now and has been for thousands of years," he said.

Since retiring from the Air Force in 1983 at the rank of lieutenant colonel, Ware has devoted most of his time to the Mutual Unidentified Flying Object Network (MUFON), a 17-year-old organization that researches UFO sightings and encounters. He serves as the network's Florida state and section (the four westernmost counties) president and as a field investigator.

A native of Richmond, Va., Ware said hadn't given the subject much thought until he saw a UFO over Washington, D.C., when he was 17. Since then, Ware has earned a master's degree in nuclear engineering, has flown 100 combat missions over North Vietnam and has put thousands of hours into learning everything he could about extraterrestrial visitors.



John Helton/News Journal

Ware studies 'absolutely weird' UFO sightings.

Not to be confused with Donald E. Ware, an Okaloosa County Commission candidate, Donald M. Ware can rattle off case after case of sightings, abductions and visits, the product of those hours of research. And he has a compulsion to be precise, halting in the middle of a sentence to search a reference to make sure he's absolutely correct.

After ending a 26-year Air Force career, Ware said he wanted to spend his retirement doing what he wanted to do. Splitting time between six volunteer organizations doesn't leave time for much else.

He gives lectures, 14 last year, about UFOs to civic and community organizations, lectures he calls a broad view of the UFO phenomenon.

"Some of these things are absolutely weird, there's no explanation," he said, "and you can't hit somebody with too many thoughts. It involves too many thoughts that aren't generally accepted."

One of those talks and an article last year about his work brought forward people who had sighted UFOs but didn't know how to go about reporting them.

One was from a teacher, now in her 30s, who said she saw an egg-

shaped craft in Fort Walton Beach. Another came from a retired Navy man who said he watched a round object pass overhead as he mowed his lawn. Both sightings were documented on some of the 11 forms MUFON investigators fill out, recording everything from the weather to animal reactions to the witnesses' medical condition.

"MUFON looks at the phenomenon as a study of advanced science," Ware said, pointing out the organization's consultants, who have doctorates in 40 different fields.

Everyone has their own specialties, he added. Ware's is in the strange writings associated with UFOs. He is currently gathering as many samples as he can for analysis, which he said will be a 10-year project.

With only 54 MUFON members in Florida, many sightings go uninvestigated, Ware said. Part of his job as president is to recruit investigators and train them. For the \$25 yearly membership dues, anyone can join the organization to be trained as an investigator in Fort Walton Beach or just to help out where they can. Ware can be contacted at 862-6582.