

Seguin man's group attempts to unearth UFO mysteries

By John MacCormack

TIMES HERALD SAN ANTONIO BUREAU

SECUNIN — On Nov. 17, the crew of a Japan Air Lines jet traveling from Iceland to Alaska reported that the plane was being shadowed by three unidentified flying objects, one several times larger than an aircraft carrier.

Activity on radar screens of ground controllers seemed to confirm the report, and federal officials who later interviewed the pilot and two crew members found them to be "professional and rational."

When news of the sighting leaked out Dec. 28, it created quite a stir on the host planet, particularly at the home of Walter Andrus.

Andrus, who lives near Seguin, International director of the local UFO Network (MUFON), an organization that claims 1,200 members who study and document hundreds of UFO reports each year.

"For about two weeks it was wild," Andrus said of the period after the Japanese sighting. "We were running one to five talk shows a day and our mail jumped about three times. We

were even interviewed by Bunte (a magazine) from West Germany and by the London Sunday Mirror," he said.

Andrus, 66, is a short, bespectacled man who speaks with unerring good humor about his mission. He's taking the latest flurry of activity in stride. It has happened before and will no doubt happen again.

When UFOs were reported in Brazil last May, the phone rang in Seguin. When there was a sighting shortly afterward in Petaluma, Calif., Andrus soon dispatched MUFON investigators to the site.

As head of the largest UFO organization in the world, and professed witness to one UFO visitation, Andrus lives in anticipation of such episodes, buoyed by a cheerful confidence that eventually some extra-terrestrial navigator will linger long enough to be dispatched.

"This is UFO education we're doing now. We're preparing people because we think a visit is inevitable. We're trying to force the government to admit there are UFOs; come out and say it," he said.

The association has been on the watch since 1969, when the federal government officially shelved its own UFO investigative project. Andrus describes himself as "an objective skeptic," and said the group is dedicated to scientific investigation. Membership is by invitation only and annual dues have just been raised to \$25.

He has been the organization's director since 1970, a long time to be so closely associated with a subject that receives its most enthusiastic support from super-market tabloids.

"You have to have a sense of humor to get involved in such a controversial subject. People are going to take shots at you, and you have to roll with the punches," he said.

His resume, however, belies his other-worldly fascination: born in Des Moines, graduate of a technical institute, a Navy electronics technician during World War II, and from 1949 to 1973, an employee of Motorola, Inc., retiring as production manager of the company's Seguin plant. Andrus is a practicing Presbyterian, twice a grandfather and maintains an interest in stamp collecting, ham radio and public speaking.

Andrus became interested in UFOs after he and his family saw

four metallic spheres in the sky over downtown Phoenix in August 1948. Andrus said the objects disappeared one by one and moments later reappeared in a different part of the sky.

In Seguin, the only clue of his unusual association is the mailbox, MUFON, painted on his mailbox. In his study are filing cabinets, a wall of UFO books, a Speed Queen automatic washer and dryer, and a few odd toy flying saucers and antenna-headed specimens.

"People say that if we knew about UFOs it would destroy our religion and the stock market would crash and so on. But I don't believe that at all. We fear the unknown and if we knew all about UFOs, there would be nothing to fear," he said.

When a sighting is reported, MUFON is quick to interview witnesses and compile information. About 90 percent of the UFO reports it investigates turn out to be airplanes or natural phenomena. The best of the rest are described in the organization's monthly journal.

In the case of the recent Alaskan report, it was Andrus who did some of the early legwork.

"The first thing we always do is to find out who our closest investi-

gator is. So, I called a fellow who lives in Fairbanks, but he was in the states. Next, I tried Anchorage, but had no luck. So I elected to call Paul Stuecke, the FAA spokesman in Anchorage."

Stuecke, who said he received at least 200 media inquiries following disclosure of the sighting, referred calls to Andrus' group.

Which to Andrus suggests the Japanese crew saw the real thing. However, UFO investigator Philip Klass, an editor for the magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology, looked into the sighting and has concluded that what the crew saw was an unusually bright image of the planet Jupiter and possibly Mars.

Nevertheless, Andrus is convinced that the government has systematically suppressed evidence about UFOs for almost four decades and would quickly retaliate the Alaskan episode if it had any means to do so.

It's only a matter of time, he said, before UFOs decide to make themselves known to the human race.

"How could we on the planet earth be so egotistical," he asked, "to believe that God created life only on this little speck of dust and ignored the rest of the Universe?"