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<RO> UFOs still unidentified[QL]

<BO> By JAN ZIEGLER<RO> [QC]

<BO> UPI Science Writer<RO> [QC]

WASHINGTON (UPI) [MD] Forty years ago Wednesday, businessman Kenneth Arnold was piloting a private aircraft when he observed nine disk-shaped objects flying north to south near Mount Rainier in Washington state. [PAR]

Although there had been other UFO sightings throughout history, Arnold's, on June 24, 1947, was the first to capture broad public attention in the post-war years. [PAR]

Sightings have continued, and many have been debunked as natural phenomena or quirks of radar. The government began a 21-year investigation and ended it. UFO groups have done countless investigations around the country. [PAR]

But no one [MD] that scientists know of [MD] has proven anything. [PAR]

Arthur T. Clarke, scientist and science fiction author, has always said not to worry [MD] if they land, we'll know, because no government on Earth will be able to keep it a secret. [PAR]

But an increasing number of scientists and serious observers believes the UFO phenomenon is not of ordinary origin and deserves serious investigation. [PAR]

"I think that whatever UFOs may or may not be, it's difficult to deny they represent something extraordinary," said Jerome Clark, a journalist who is vice president of the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies in Chicago. [PAR]

The center is named for its founder, the late Hynek, formerly an astronomy professor at Northwestern University and an advocate of UFO study. [PAR]

"We're dealing with something that is currently beyond our knowledge of either the physical world or the psychological realm, and the answer is going to be in one or the other," Clark said. "Whichever it is, we're going to learn something new." [PAR]

Many cases are easily explained using known phenomena, but a certain proportion [MD] some say 10 percent or so [MD] remain a mystery. Bruce Maccabee,

a civilian physicist who works for the Navy, said these cases are reported by credible witnesses. [PAR]

And, there is physical evidence, such as radar tracks and markings and radiation left on the ground, Clark said. [PAR]

"Wherever they come from, they're not ours," Maccabee said. [PAR]

The Air Force, which closed Project Blue Book in 1969, could not agree [MD] at

least at the time. No evidence was found to support extraterrestrial theories about UFOs. There is no overt government interest in the phenomenon now. [PAR]

If the government won't investigate sightings, it should make it possible for sightings [MD] whether military or civilian [MD] to be reported as quickly as

possible to reputable UFO organizations so data can be collected while it is still fresh, Maccabee said. [PAR]

As part of the latest wave of interest in UFOs, an increasing number of recently published books deal with abductions by extraterrestrial beings. Clark said mental health professionals have examined those claiming to have been abducted, finding their personality profiles are remarkably similar to those of victims of violent crime. [PAR]

However, Paul Kurtz, a philosophy professor at State University of New York at Buffalo and chairman of a group of debunkers known as the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of the Paranormal, believes abductions are

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questionable because hypnosis is used to reconstruct the events, and hypnosis is unreliable. [PAR]

''Although we think it ought to be carefully examined, there's no conclusive evidence that UFOs are extraterrestrial,'' he said. [PAR]

''It's a quasi-religious phenomenon. They (the aliens) are semi-divine creatures from afar. They're more intelligent than we are, they're mysterious and they come from another realm. They're greater in wisdom, maybe virtue.'' [PAR]

In some abduction stories, earthlings are sexually assaulted or impregnated by aliens, as in myths of old where gods impregnated the mortals, he said. In some cases, the aliens are viewed as dangerous. [PAR]

''We're open to the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe,'' Kurtz said. ''But that is separate from the question of whether extraterrestrial beings are now visiting the Earth. There's no evidence for that.'' [PAR]

''The basic question is, is there intelligent life on the planet Earth?'' he said. [PAR]

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