

Thompson

## UFOs remain unproven, but interest is still high

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WASHINGTON — Forty years ago today, 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.

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.

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 United States.

But no one — that scientists know of — has proven anything.

An increasing number of scientists and serious observers believes the UFO phenomenon is not of ordinary origin and deserves serious investigation.

"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.

"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.

Many cases are easily explained using known

phenomena, but a certain proportion — some say 10 percent or so — remain a mystery. Bruce Maccabee, a civilian physicist who works for the Navy, said these cases are reported by credible witnesses.

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

The Air Force, which closed Project Blue Book in 1969, could not agree — 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.

As part of the latest wave of interest in UFOs, an increasing number of recently published books deal with abductions by extraterrestrial beings.