

UFOs remain a mystery, Stanford professor says

By Carol Christ
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Unidentified flying objects remain a mystery to society, despite a history some believe stretches back to Biblical days, a noontime lecture audience heard Tuesday.

"All we have are reports," said Stanford University astrophysics professor Peter Sturrock. "What lies behind the reports we still don't know."

Sturrock was speaking on "The Evolving UFO Phenomenon" to 40 listeners at the Technology and Society Committee's (TASC) bi-monthly meeting.

Sturrock, a professor at Stanford's Center for Space Science and Astrophysics, was conservative

in approaching the topic.

He began the talk by telling the audience that he had "better get his beliefs out of the way" first.

"People ask me if I believe in flying saucers and I say, 'No, I don't believe in flying saucers, but I realize they may exist whether I believe in them or not,'" Sturrock said.

His lecture began with the Bible, which some perceive to be the first record of UFO sightings.

Sturrock cited a passage mentioning the "host of the Lord: a burning shield by day and a burning tower at night."

He said that many interpreted that to be a UFO sighting.

Sightings increased in the 1940s, Sturrock said.

PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE, Palo Alto, CA - Sept. 30, 1987

During World War II, he said, the Germans, the Japanese and the Americans all had accounts of UFOs but each assumed it was a secret weapon on the other side.

In 1947, an air rescue pilot named Kenneth Arnold, who was a deputy sheriff in Washington state, saw something fly through the air that he had never seen before.

In an attempt to explain to the media what he had seen, he said he had seen nine silvery objects that were flying at about 1,700 mph.

He described them as flying disc-shaped saucers.

One audience member asked Sturrock what probability he gave for aliens visiting Earth.

"I'm not going to give my own answer; I'll give another," said Sturrock.

He said that a 1972 survey of astronomers gave estimates ranging from .000000001 percent to 1 percent probability that aliens had visited Earth.

One audience member told the group he had seen a UFO aboard a ship near San Diego as a young sailor. "It was like a fire ball. It stopped when it got here and then took off in a 90 degree angle." He said the UFO was about seven miles from the ship.

He then said the navy debriefed him and told him not to mention the incident to anyone.

They told him it was part of an experiment they were conducting, he said.