

# UFOs: 'If you're crazy, I'm nuts, too'

By Mark Holmberg  
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Rural Retreat Police Chief Bob Lewis wishes he could find a lid for the can of worms he opened two weeks ago when he spotted an unidentified flying object.

"I didn't see anything," he joked as he opened the door of his modest brick home to confront another reporter. He stepped into his front yard and glanced at the mountains on the edge of town: "Man, I wish I hadn't said a word to anybody about it."

Lewis is one of dozens of Southwest Virginia residents who are certain they've seen large, silent objects hovering — or creeping along — in the crisp air over the multicolored mountains.

He carefully looked at each of the composite drawings of other recent sightings, made by Times-Dispatch artists with the help of the witnesses.

"I don't know what it was I saw up there," he said calmly after looking the sketches over, "but that's it right there."

He jabbed a finger at one of the drawings, a black-and-white version of the cone-shaped object drawn by the artists. It wasn't a depiction of one of the Wythe County sightings, but a drawing of an object spotted over Richmond skies.

A Southside woman was driving north toward Richmond on Interstate 95 Wednesday night. The following is her explanation of her close encounter:

"I sound crazy, I know. When I saw it I thought: 'This isn't me that's seeing this.'"

"It wasn't all the way dark; the crews had just finished. I was driving to Cloverleaf Mall to go to the Toys-R-Us. Right past the Willis Road exit, the boys [ages 2 and 4] started being calm. That's highly unusual.

"The kids said, 'Look at all those lights, mommy.' The traffic slowed. My radio stopped working and my lights got dim. The charge light came on. I looked over and oh, God! Oh, God! I started ripping apart my glove compartment, looking for my camera." She pulled her car over.

"It was about as high up as a telephone wire, maybe lower, and it was

about the size of that house" — she pointed out her back door to a house about 1,000 square feet in size, 50 yards away — "and it was that close.

"The lights were flashing; red, blue, green, yellow, yellow, blue. It was so beautiful. There was no noise. The sky was so quiet. I didn't want to take my eyes off of it. Other cars had pulled over. I asked one of the drivers, 'Am I crazy?' She said: 'If you're crazy, I'm nuts, too.'"

She continued to watch for about two minutes. A round, red object, much smaller and glowing brightly, approached the larger object, as if the two were playing hide and seek, she said. Once the small object "found" the other, both disappeared instantly, followed by a "shower" of white lights, like a tangle of shooting stars.

She then tried her ignition. The car started right up.

No one else called to substantiate the Richmond story, but have the Wythe UFOs strayed east?

After nearly a dozen interviews with UFO spotters there, a clear picture emerges:

- The UFOs are silent except for an occasional "little hum. Reminded me of a little bee or something," Patricia Aker said. She and her family saw two airplane-shaped objects before sundown more than a week ago, flying low at low speed. She and her husband, Elmo, helped with the other composite drawing.

- The UFOs can hover or fly so slowly that they appear to be hovering.

- The objects appear in groups of two or three. The red, green, yellow and white lights usually don't flash.

- Many spotters believe the objects are part of a secret military project.

- Dogs, usually alert to visitors, haven't paid any attention to the UFOs.

- The objects are being spotted by people who have never seen a UFO before.

- Witnesses say they feel the objects are not hostile; in fact, most smile while discussing their encounters.

It's hardly a laughing matter. Residents of Wythe are no strangers to aircraft, particularly military planes on maneuvers, and they say what they've been seeing are not normal aircraft.

"They'll jar your windows out," Elmo Aker said of the military aircraft that frequently fly by. "This one didn't hardly make any noise. What struck me was it was flying so slow. I don't see how anything that big could

stay in the air going that slow." He said it was larger than a bomber.

The Aker sighting was rare in that it was still daylight, although the light was fading fast.

"If I'd seen one after dark, it would have scared me to death," Mrs. Aker said. As it was, their children were terrified and cried: "Daddy, get out of here!" she said.

Many of the other sightings coincide with that one. Lighting patterns match almost exactly.

"It was big, lights flashing all the way around," said Gerald Musser, who spotted the object while bow hunting for raccoons "down in Black Lick. It was a humongous thing, then came another right behind it, just in a straight arrow." He then saw a big reddish-orange ball. "My buddy said it was their mother," Musser said with a laugh.

Billie Rosenbaum was watching the baseball game Wednesday night when he stepped outside to get a little air. He said he saw two objects almost exactly like those Musser saw. He ran over and woke up his neighbor and together they watched the objects make a slow tour of the ridge above his house.

Rosenbaum described his encounter while playing pool in his basement. "I'd give anything if he'd land over here," he said as he hunkered down for a shot on the 12-ball. "I'd go with them in a minute."

That same night, Jack and Carolyn Ellison spotted objects creeping through the air above their mobile home on the outskirts of Rural Retreat. The composite sketch of what they saw matched that of the Aker sighting.

Retired from the Air Force, where he worked on flight simulators, Ellison is no stranger to aircraft.

"I told her [his wife] that maybe that's some of the new Star Wars defense," drawled Ellison. "The next day that Stealth bomber went down ... made me think about what I'd seen."

Bettie Patton saw the same thing the others did, except she noticed the smaller glowing ball coming out of the top of the larger object. "The little one flew off a little bit and curved toward Cripple Creek. The big one followed it. ... It was strange. It was like you were being stared at." She, too, heard a low humming sound.

After the UFO left, Mrs. Patton remembered thinking, "I don't believe in this bull," and went outside to look up into the crystal clear skies to see if she couldn't spot the object again.

The air was crisp; the stars were brilliant. Everything was quiet.

"Then the hog snorted," she remembered. "It just about scared me to death."



Staff graphic by Martin Rhodes

Composite drawing of recent Richmond sighting



T-D graphic by Clarke Bustard

Silent, slow-flying object described in Wythe County