

MANY INCIDENTS of UFO sightings only come to light years later. People are often afraid of ridicule or are under other restraints — sometimes "official" ones.

Retired RAF Wing Commander Cyril Townsend-Withers waited until the official 30-year secrecy rule ran out before approaching the Manchester UFO Research Association with his story.

Until his retirement in 1972, he was the Principal Scientific Officer at Boscombe Down, Wiltshire, chiefly responsible for testing experimental aircraft radar equipment.

That was exactly what he was doing one summer morning back in the early 1950s when his aircraft was confronted by something *not* of terrestrial origin.

His Canberra PR7 plane was fitted with a new radar ready for testing during flight.

The aircraft took off at 11 a.m. and began its ascent to 55,000 feet — something of a record in those days — high over Salisbury Plain. Some time later a blip appeared on the radar screen, representing an object some five miles behind them.

"I climbed up into the turret," he told me, "looked back and saw a glistening object following at the same speed."

The Canberra's pilot tried unsuccessfully to shake off the intruder, accelerating to speeds up to 225 knots. Finally he executed a U-turn. This gave them a better view of the UFO — but it also put them on a collision course.

"The object was very brilliant, almost

by PETER HOUGH of the Manchester UFO Research Association

fluorescent," recalls Townsend-Withers. "I could now make out two stabilising fins at the rear. All together it was about the same size as a small jet fighter, with about a thirty-foot wingspan.

"As soon as we got within four miles of one another, the thing suddenly shot vertically upwards at a terrific speed and vanished. Fifty, sixty, seventy thousand feet — as quick as that! There wasn't even a vapour trail.

"Radar experts were very interested, but there was no reaction in the sense they thought it was an enemy aircraft posing a threat. The attitude in those early days was, 'We'll look into it, but if it isn't Russian then we're not really bothered.'

"Over the years I've had talks with people from the Ministry of Defence, because similar things were being seen over Warminster and other areas around Salisbury Plain. I tried to find out if they were being reported to a central unit which I'd

heard was investigating the possibility that these things were from outer space.

"I became certain the British authorities were now taking the whole subject of UFOs *very* seriously," concluded Townsend-Withers.

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In October 1983, I interviewed Peter Todd, a motor mechanic, about a UFO sighting in 1978. At that time he worked at a service station on the M61, between the Lancashire towns of Blackrod and Horwich.

Peter and a work-mate were back at the garage after attending to a breakdown. It was 7.30 a.m. and the sun was newly risen.