

"Before someone becomes a field investigator, they must study our *Field Investigator's Manual*, which is a 180-page book," he says.

Investigators first look for simple explanations of UFO sightings. After witnesses are identified and interviewed — if possible, at the site of the incident — MUFON's representatives contact nearby airports, military bases, weather service operations and police for further information.

Andrus says between 10 and 20 percent of all sightings are determined to be of unknown origin — official UFOs. The rest turn out to be everything from heavenly objects — the planet Venus is a favorite — to standard aircraft or weather balloons.

For years, MUFON investigators happily spent their time looking into relatively mundane sky sightings. But the recent explosion in abduction cases has tested MUFON in many ways.

"We just don't have enough people to investigate all these claims," Andrus complains. "We are just swamped."

The abduction cases tend to follow a specific pattern: "A victim usually have stretches of 'missing time,' long periods for which they cannot account.

One classic case broke down two teen-age girls whose car broke down on a deserted highway. After their mother went for help, a UFO appeared over the automobile. The girls locked the doors and dived to the car floor.

The girls then blacked out, awaking side by side on a grassy strip several yards from the vehicle. Approximately an hour had passed.

Abductees report a "screen" in memory. When trying to recall certain incidents in their lives, they instead see images of animals. Other times images fill them with a sense of dread.

Abductees often exhibit classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome — recurring nightmares, fear of being left alone, panic attacks. One MUFON investigator — history professor David M. Jacobs of Temple University — has posited the existence of "Post-Abduction Syndrome."

Some abductees manifest physical results — scars, burn marks, bruises. Many of the examinations reported are sexual in nature. There are several cases in which abductees are given CAT scans and what appear to be foreign objects are found in their brains.

Strieber himself says there are three spots in his head.

The primary investigative tool in such cases is regressive hypnosis, which purports to take subjects back to certain points in their lives in search of greater detail.

However, skeptics say hypnosis can result in suggestibility when not used properly. In other words, if a MUFON investigator using hypnosis believes his subject was snatched away by beings from another planet, that's the scenario the subject will assign to whatever is causing stress in his or her life.

The use of hypnosis plays a key role in the current controversy raging in the UFO community. Strieber maintains that hypnosis should be used only as a therapeutic tool, and not for investigative purposes.

"In my own case, the reason we stopped using hypnosis was because my output was becoming structured according to my own expectations," Strieber said in a telephone interview.

Hopkins, on the other hand, believes it's important to "get to the bottom" of the UFO abduction cases.

Strieber wanted to end his hypnotic regressions and figure things out by himself. Hopkins said, "He spent his time speculating rather than investigating his own case."

But ironically, it is Strieber's *Communist* that has brought an avalanche of abduction claims to MUFON. The book, first published in 1987, led to the top of best seller lists. Hundreds of thousands of people who never would dream of buying a book about UFOs purchased *Communist*.

Strieber said he could "very easily have become a guru" to the thousands of people who claim experiences similar to his.

"I have avoided that by directing these people into groups that have formed all over the country," Strieber said.

"I have not made myself a leader.

These groups are individual unto themselves. They are easygoing and social in nature, a place where people who have had this experience can talk about it without being bothered by UFO investigators."

Hopkins, a MUFON member, is more or less a "just-the-facts-mam" researcher.

He prefers not to wax mystical on the abduction issue and believes the abductees are conducting genetic experiments on humans.

Strieber, on the other hand, has long had an interest in things metaphysical, and in both *Communist* and his recently published sequel, *Transformation*, he speculates on whether his "visitors" were the inspiration for ages-old stories of fairies and sprites.

Perhaps they are part of a parallel universe or dimension, he muses.

Ed Conroy, a San Antonio-based writer and editor, has just finished a book investigating Strieber's claims and the public's response to them. *Independent Investigation of Whitley Strieber's Visitor Experiences*. It will be published in July by William Morrow & Co.

Conroy believes the traditional UFO community has been shaken to its roots by Strieber's approach and that professional jealousy propels much of the controversy.

"The UFO community has a fascination with nuts and bolts, the technology of it," Conroy said.

"They have been used to the position that UFOs are not from this earth. The contribution Strieber has made has been to open up this entire field for discussion."



Conroy

The question of UFO abductions was considered unfavorably in the UFO community. Much of the data is historical, stemming from groups such as the turn-of-century Fortean Society, or later boasters such as George Adamski, who claimed to have met long-haired beautiful people from Venus.

Although some UFOlogists — as academic researchers in the phenomenon call themselves — believe sightings have occurred since man's earliest history, the "modern wave" of sightings began after World War II, when people worldwide began reporting strange lights, disc-shaped objects and — occasionally — strange creatures.

Not only were people seeing these objects with their eyes, but they also were capturing them on film. And radar operators often corroborated visual, from-the-ground sightings.

In response, the U.S. Air Force began Project Blue Book, the public face of what apparently was a much larger investigation of the phenomenon.

According to federal documents obtained by MUFON through the Freedom of Information Act, Project Blue Book was actually one of three investigations conducted by the government. The other two were known as Project Sign and Project Grudge.

Project Blue Book was closed in 1969 with the pronouncement that the phenomenon was no longer worth studying. In January 1969, an Air Force-commissioned study of UFOs directed by the University of Colorado under the guidance of Dr. Richard U. Condon came to the same conclusion.

"The Condon Report," as the study's results came to be known, ultimately gave birth to MUFON. Andrus and others were dissatisfied with the report and the government's decision to stop investigating reported sightings. They cited the fact that 19 percent of the UFO cases studied by Condon could not be explained.

"That's a higher percentage than what MUFON comes up with these days," Andrus said.

Most of the early sightings investigated by first the Air Force and then MUFON were just that — sightings, lights and objects seen in the distant sky. It was not until 1966 that the first typical abduction-and-examination story burst onto the scene.

In his book, *The Interrupted Journey*, John Fuller tells the story of