

UFO team cites rise in abduction claims

By DWIGHT SILVERMAN
Special to the Chronicle

SAN ANTONIO — On a clear, starry night, a group of approximately 30 men and women meet in a local aviation maintenance company office to talk about things seen in the sky.

The walls display cutaway drawings of jet engines, a coppery rendering of Jesus' head and a photo of an unidentified flying object.

It's a monthly meeting of the San Antonio chapter of the Mutual UFO Network, a nationwide, 2,100-member organization that investigates and catalogs UFO sightings and incidents.

Chapter President Thomas Deuley, a retired U.S. Navy intelligence officer, told the group that he and MUFON investigators seldom have been as busy.

"It's almost a cliché in the UFO business," he said matter-of-factly, "but something is going on."

Indeed, MUFON, which reaches a sort of institutional maturity with its 20th birthday in May, suddenly finds itself swamped with reports of new and disturbing UFO incidents.

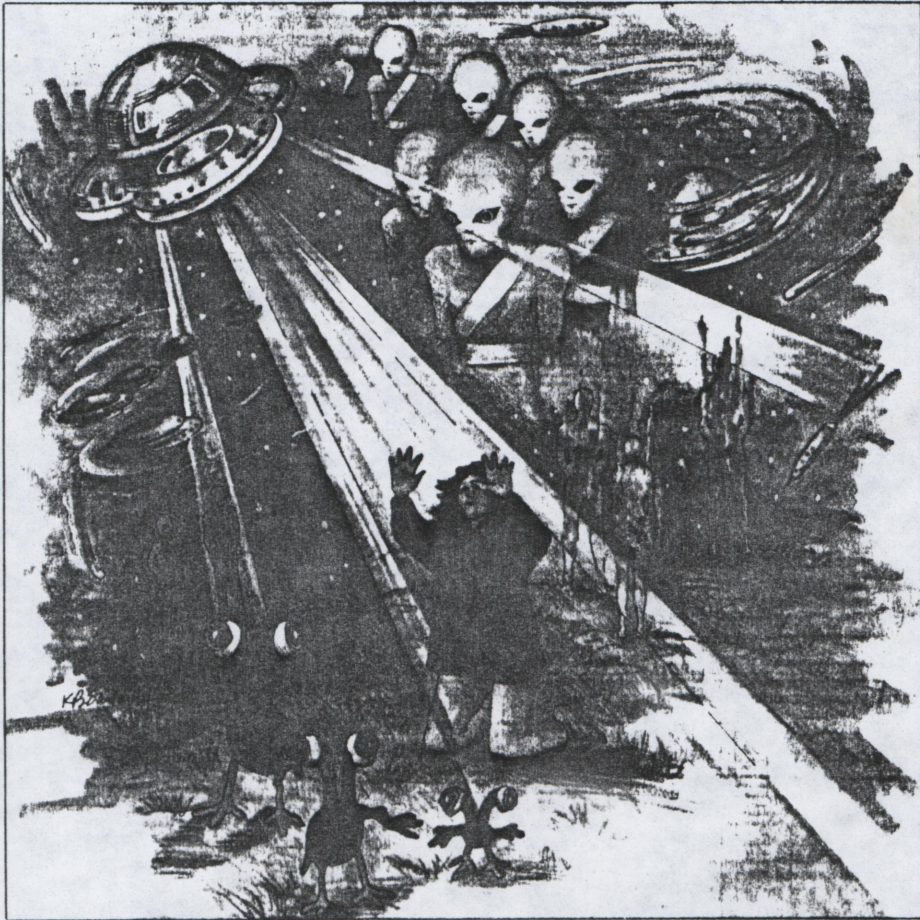
Both the group's resources and political fabric have been stretched to the limit by thousands of people claiming not just that they saw some strange craft in the sky, but that they were *abducted* and *examined* by creatures within them.

Each tells remarkably similar stories of being spirited away by small creatures with enlarged heads, grayish skin and huge, slanted, oval eyes. Often their memories of the events must be unlocked through hypnosis.

The supposed victims come away from their ordeals with what amounts to post-traumatic stress syndrome, according to articles published in MUFON's monthly journal. Many have trouble sleeping, insist that all their doors and windows be locked and, when they do sleep, often dream of monsters.

Skeptics say these are emotionally unstable people who are ascribing other problems in their lives to the modern mythology of UFOs. MUFON's members, however, believe the abductions are real and the associated stress causes the emotional instability.

MUFON is based in Seguin, approximately 35 miles east of San Antonio on Interstate 10.



Kellye B. Sanford illustration / Chronicle

UFOs

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the home of president and co-founder Walter Andrus. Andrus says he's not sure of the number of people who have reported celestial abductions to his organization.

"We just have had so many received by all of our state directors that we have not been able to get a precise number," says Andrus, who is a retired production manager at Motorola's Seguin telephone and computer module factory.

But two New York City-based writers who tackled the subject in popular books have received more than 7,500 letters from people who say they are victims.

Those writers are also at the focus of a growing and often acrimonious schism within the UFO community.

Whitley Strieber is the San Antonio-born author of *Communion: A True Story*, in which he says he has been abducted at various times in his life by creatures he calls simply "the visitors."

Budd Hopkins wrote the 1981 book *Missing Time*, which partly inspired Strieber to tell his own story. Hopkins was the man to whom Strieber turned when he first realized what was happening to him (Strieber autographed a copy of *Communion* for Hopkins with the words, "you saved my life"), but the two men since have become antagonists.

For the most part, the relatively conservative and cautious members of MUFON have sided with Hopkins.

Forever concerned about its credibility — Deuley says MUFON struggles to avoid "the Silly Factor" — the group does not seek publicity and is very careful about which members of the press it allows into its circle.

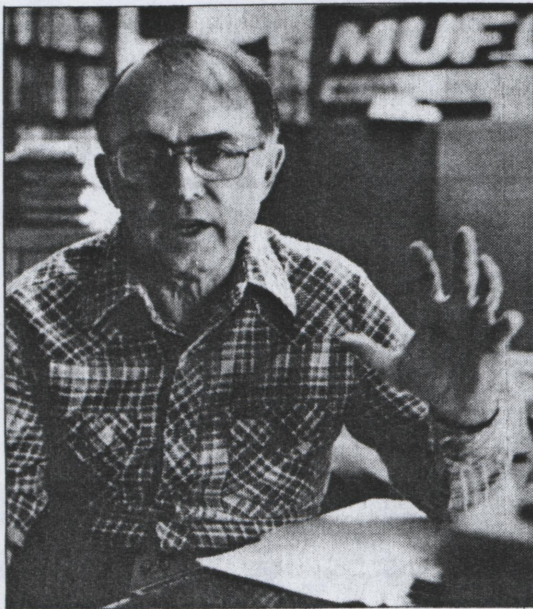
MUFON's membership list has some impressive and well-credentialed names. Its advisory board includes people with doctorates in chemistry, atmospheric sciences, biology, engineering, entomology, physics and religion. Dr. Wayne Webb, for example, is the assistant head of the Charles Hayden Planetarium in Boston and MUFON's consultant on astronomy.

The highly structured organization is broken down into state and local divisions, and has representatives in different regions of the world.

Andrus says MUFON prides itself on its systematic and thoughtful approach to investigating UFO cases.

"Before someone becomes a field investigator, they must study our *Field Investigator's Manual*, which is a 160-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, mil-



Dwight Silverman / Special to the Chronicle

Walter Andrus of Seguin, of Mutual UFO Network, talks of increased reports of contact between humans and alien life, compared to earlier times when reports were mostly of craft sightings.

itary 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.

Victims usually have stretches of "missing time," long periods for which they cannot account.

One classic case involved 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, awak-

ening side by side on a grassy strip several yards from the vehicle. Approximately an hour had passed.

Abductees report a "screen" memory. When trying to recall certain incidents in their lives, they instead see images of animals. Often, those 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 reported 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 such 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 *Communion* that has brought an avalanche of abduction cases to MUFON. The book, first published in 1987, shot to the top of best seller lists. Hundreds of thousands of people who never would dream of buying a book about UFOs purchased and read *Communion*.

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-ma'am" researcher.

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

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

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. Titled *Report on 'Communion': An 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 tied to the position that UFOs are not from this earth. The contribution Strieber has made has been to open up this entire field for



Conroy

discussion."

The question of UFO abductions was considered unfavorably in the UFO community. Much of the disdain is historical, stemming from groups such as the turn-of-century Fortean Society, or later hoaxers 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, discs, cigar-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 facade of what apparently was a much larger investigation of the phenomena.

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 investi-

gated 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 New Jersey couple Betty and Barney Hill. The two claimed to have been taken aboard a UFO and given a bizarre physical examination.

Under hypnosis, the couple gave a detailed description of their abductors and the procedures performed on them. They also allegedly manifested physical symptoms from the examination.

Both Strieber and Hopkins believe that abductions have been occurring since the beginning of the modern wave of UFO sightings. In fact, they believe that few abductees are ever taken aboard UFOs once, but rather are first "tagged" early in their lives and then experience "follow-up" visitations.

There are even instances, they say, of multiple generations of family members being abducted and examined. In *Communion*, for example, Strieber wrote about experiences his son appears to have had.

But Strieber and Hopkins differ sharply on the why of it all.

Strieber rejects Hopkins' theory, that these are otherworldly scientists conducting genetic experiments on the human species.

"According to that hypothesis, the visitors came here in the 1940s. Forty years later, they're still performing the same experiments on people," Strieber said. "What's the matter with them? Are we dealing with morons who travel faster than light?"

Instead, Strieber believes we don't yet know the creatures' motivations or origins.

The popularity of *Communion*, as well as a growing body of photographic and physical evidence regarding UFOs, has created a new peak in the public consciousness.

Andrus is pleased to point out that such mainstream publications as the Washington Post and the New York Times have done major, sober pieces on the abduction phenomenon.

Even the psychological profession is beginning to take note of the numbers of people coming forward with abduction claims. A symposium of psychologists who have worked with such cases is planned for later this year in Tarrytown, N.Y.

Nearly everyone involved in MUFON, and most of the abductees themselves, readily agree that the abduction scenario sounds very, very crazy.

But at the same time, they point to the large numbers of people coming forward.

Says Andrus, "Many of these people are prominent and have a lot to lose by having others think they are nuts."