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Jim Riecken

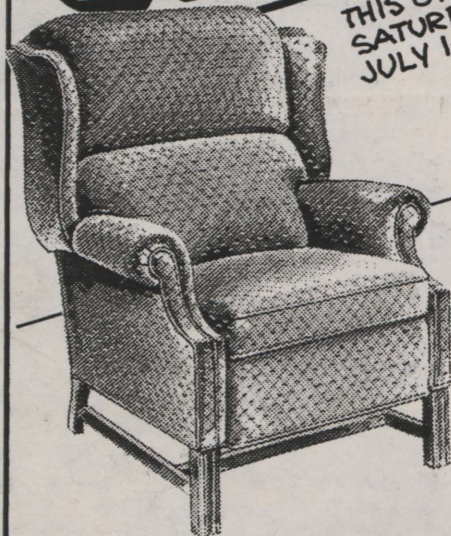
NEW GODS

Inquiry Into The Little Matter Of The Hudson Valley UFOs

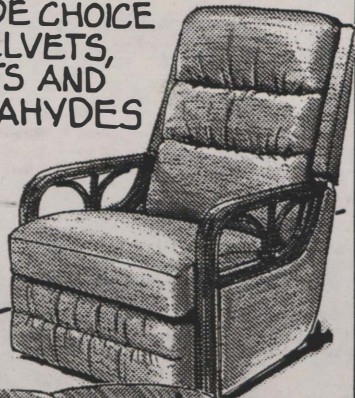
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ON THE COVER

The skies above New York City have been stingy with glimpses of "flying saucers," those mysterious lights that we now know as UFOs. But not so the Hudson Valley, where unidentified flying objects have been increasingly sighted hovering over the region's reservoirs and lakes. These continued incidents have led one UFO hunter to call for a wide-ranging probe.

By Alton Slagle
Cover photo by Chip Simons

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"A LOT OF HEART HAS GONE INTO THIS NEWSPAPER"

It was called the Illustrated Daily News when it first appeared, and it was America's first tabloid, and it wasn't kidding about the illustrated part. The tradition lives on as the Daily News turns 70 tomorrow.

By Henry Lee
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SUNDAY FRONT

Over the years, a number of wanted criminals have surrendered to The News in search of fairness. A special edition of The Justice Story chronicles the 1958 case of Dr. Rodrigo Sarmiento, accused of the brutal slaying of a nurse.

By Joseph McNamara
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SECOND TIME AROUND

Phoebe Snow hurtles back from oblivion.

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PLANS 8, 10 AND 11 FROM OUTER SPACE

The Mystery Of The Hudson Valley UFOs
By ALTON SLAGLE



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HE WAS STANDING THAT balmy night on the lawn of his Putnam Valley home near Brewster, N.Y., his eyes, and his video camera, pointed toward the dark sky. It was 10 p.m., July 24, 1984, a Tuesday.

"It looks like it's just hanging up there," Bob Pozzuoli said to his wife. "It's very, very bright. One, two, three, four, five . . ."—he counted the lights—"The first six are white. They're heading south-southwest. The next one behind them looks reddish, and the one way behind is reddish also . . ."—the camera followed until the object was lost behind a stand of pine, but the mike caught Pozzuoli's awed voice—"I'm going to tell you something. I don't know what the hell it is!"

Analysis of Pozzuoli's videotape by a number of prestigious institutions and experts—including Dr. Al Hibbs, a computer enhancement specialist at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., where the National Atmospheric and Space Agency's photographic examinations of other planets are studied—all have backed his assessment. To this very day, the object caught by Pozzuoli's camera remains unidentified.

Had Pozzuoli, vice president of a major New York City electronics firm, seen what has become known as the Hudson Valley UFO? Are there, indeed, unidentified flying objects the size of a football field that, for the last 60 years or more, have been hovering over reservoirs and lakes and people in New York's heavily populated Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess counties—and on even into western Connecticut?

And if so, what intelligence guides their course to this affluent jumble of bedroom communities just a few miles north of New York City? Is our government more knowledgeable than it admits? Has it, indeed, as some insist, made a bizarre pact with otherworldly beings to exchange earthly biological specimens for alien

technology? Are we facing close encounters with new gods from other galaxies, creatures who have come here to hover, and to watch, and perhaps to wait for the proper time to hurt—or help—us?

The skies above New York City have been stingy with glimpses of "flying saucers," those mysterious lights that we now know as UFOs. Only a few "sightings" have been chronicled here. (Back in 1975, for example, a large, silvery spacecraft reportedly landed in Riverside Park to disgorge

its cargo of small, silvery tourists who then were seen by an apartment-house doorman and an off-duty city cop. Then, two years ago, a deluge of calls flooded emergency phone lines with reports of "little" UFOs that prompted a city Department of Environmental Protection official to opine, "New Yorkers are so cut off from nature that they don't recognize a seed pod [blown from trees] when they see one.")

But not so the Hudson Valley. For centuries, this thickly wooded, mountain-encased region that

stretches northward from the city toward Albany and Lake Champlain and that was settled by the Dutch in the 17th century has been rich in folklore. Here is Sleepy Hollow, where the Headless Horseman rode. Here is where the world's master sleepyhead, Rip Van Winkle, took his long nap. And now, in the waning days of the technologically rich 20th century, comes the alien being.

MEET PHILIP IMBROGNO, HIGH school science teacher and hunter of the Hudson Valley UFO.

Imbrogno—Connecticut resident, husband, father of two, chairman of the science department of super-exclusive Windward School in White Plains, astronomer and board member of the Bowman Observatory in Greenwich, Conn.—became interested in UFO reports in the tri-state metropolitan area following a series of sightings in 1983. He's by no means the Hudson Valley's only UFO hunter—a New Jersey woman, Ellen Crystall, claims to have photographed more than 1,000 since spotting her first UFO back in 1971. But years of research and observation have made Imbrogno a leading authority and led him to co-author (with the late Dr. J. Allen Hynek, professor emeritus and former chairman of the astronomy department at Northwestern University and scientific consultant to the U.S. Air Force's now-defunct Project Blue Book, and science reporter Bob Pratt) a book on the subject: "Night Siege: The Hudson Valley UFO Sightings" (Ballantine Books, 1987).

Now, according to Imbrogno, "there are more UFO sightings here right now than anywhere else."

These continued incidents have led Imbrogno to call for a wide-ranging probe. "I'd like to see people with scientific backgrounds involved with UFO research, who have open minds, involved with the government. . . . It's all building to a head. You've never





seen public awareness of the UFO phenomenon like it has been in the last five years, and it seems that the Hudson Valley triggered it all."

Imbrogno was not always so demanding. Originally, he says, "I was kind of an agnostic. You had to show me for me to really believe." But then, on the night of March 24, 1983, police stations in at least 15 communities in Westchester and Putnam counties were flooded with reports of a large, low-flying UFO with red, blue and green lights in a boomerang pattern. The sightings were similar to ones in the same general area Feb. 26 and March 17 of that same year, but were reported by more people. One local newspaper screamed: "Hundreds claim to have seen UFOs," and a Yorktown cop recalled: "It hovered directly over my head for five minutes — and airplanes don't hover."

"My first impression was that there was a logical explanation," says Imbrogno. "Usually, there's a logical explanation." But here were "lots of people, people with very solid backgrounds, reporting the same thing. I began to wonder if there is something to all this."

Within a few days, Imbrogno was involved in a full-fledged investigation. Over the next months and years, the number of sightings increased, and with them his interest. "Obviously," he says now, "a good percentage of those reports were quite explainable, people seeing something strange and not seeing something strange at all. How many reports I get of Jupiter on the horizon, or a bright star, or Venus."

Police throughout the Hudson Valley have become used to such reports. A Brewster-based state trooper, following up a claim from an attorney who had been driving a Westchester County road in the early morning hours when he'd spotted a fireball appearing out of nowhere in the cloudy sky ahead, thought the man had had a "close encounter with a bottle of Scotch." But, the trooper investigated and then determined that the "fireball" actually

had been caused by a downed power line that had sent sparks flying in all directions: Enough sparks to be seen for miles around — and above.

There also were flights of Black Hawk helicopters, of planes in formation — some, Imbrogno believes, on mysterious government missions from a restricted section of Stewart International Airport near Newburgh across the Hudson.

"But there's a pretty good percentage of raw reports that I've personally investigated that defy explanation, especially when they involve professional people," he says. These Hudson Valley residents, sometimes frightened, sometimes fascinated, aren't just reporting strange lights in the night sky, but "something with a solid structure, obviously some type of vehicle, not some astronomical phenomenon."

Imbrogno spent hours, days, in libraries, poring over microfilm. He studied reports going back to the 1920s, especially those since the late '40s, when the UFO phenomenon really took off. In 1947, Kenneth Arnold had been flying his small two-seater from Chehalis, Wash., to Yakima. Near Mount Rainier, he was dazzled by a bright flash — a light that he claimed came from a flight of "nine peculiar-looking objects." The first UFOs had been sighted.

But Imbrogno's studies showed



that in the tri-state area, UFOs had been reported as early as 1927, and "the same type of phenomenon has been seen over and over, the same descriptions." There were a dozen area sightings in '83, and 20 the following year. By conservative estimate, says Imbrogno, since the end of 1982 more than 5,000 people have seen the strange object over a 1,400-square-mile area just north of New York City.

And the reports are coming from well-educated, affluent, professional people with reputations to worry about. "That's what makes the Hudson Valley cases different from anything else," he says. "In the '50s, kooks saw UFOs. In the '60s, people were 'seeing something strange.' In the '70s, it got a little more involved, and in the '80s, it's no longer the realm for kooks. Now, many people have an open mind about this sort of thing. Their total outlook has changed. People are more willing to believe."

Trouble is, they're not sure what to believe. "I don't think anybody has a handle on what's really going on," Imbrogno says. "There are many, many theories, and a couple of them are pretty amusing."

Imbrogno casts a skeptical eye on claims of abduction by aliens. But not sightings. He contends he himself has seen the Hudson Valley UFO on two occasions. "The main scenario is that this is an extraterrestrial spacecraft over the Hudson Valley."

It's a phenomenon, he adds ominously, "that perhaps the American public should be aware of, and that our government knows about. The government has been withholding information on UFOs, that's a fact. Under the Freedom of Information Act, we have obtained hundreds of documents from the CIA, the National Security Agency and the Air Force, all talking about sightings near bases. They are withholding 200 documents they consider vital to national security that are UFO-related."

One theory holds that the valley's

UFO is some type of experimental government vehicle similar in form to the Stealth bomber. "What people are describing bears a striking resemblance to the Stealth," says Imbrogno, "even down to the structure on the bottom, the color, the low reflectability, the design of the wings. And remember, this was being reported before anybody knew what a Stealth bomber was."

"This scenario is that our government has a super-secret aircraft finally perfected and that the Stealth bomber they unveiled is not the real aircraft; it's a smokescreen." Under this theory, the government is using the UFO phenomenon to cover up flights of the new weapon, patterned after an advanced World War II German flying wing, even to disguising planes with unusual lighting, a la UFOs, and flying them in formation "to discredit the Hudson Valley sightings."

But in Imbrogno's mind, and in the minds of the thousands of people who have reported seeing it, the Hudson Valley UFO is very real. Just what it is, what it represents, is the mystery. "It would seem it's some type of surveillance operation," says Imbrogno. "What else could it be, just scanning, flying over cities?"

Imbrogno grows a bit philosophical when considering the reason for the alien visits. The mistake being made in UFO research, he insists, is to "always think in human terms. It's like somebody in the 17th century trying to explain how the sun burns. I think we're looking at UFOs and we're saying, 'Oh, they're using nuclear power, using ion propulsion, using antimatter to drive their spaceships.' But we may be looking at something that is so far beyond our technology it looks like magic."

Traveling at the speed of light — something that for humans is possible only on "Star Trek" — the nearest star, Imbrogno points out, is only 3.4 years away. "We're talking about an alien race probably thousands of years ahead of us. They

may have about as much in common with us as we do with the chimpanzee."

Perhaps, he adds, our visitors have been here for hundreds of years.

"If you go back to the medieval ages, you find that people saw things in the sky," he says. "Many of the encounters of dwarfs and gnomes bear a striking resemblance to our UFOs, which leads a student of history to conclude that whatever our ancestors were seeing, identifying it with religious or demonic labels, we're seeing today, but identifying it as aliens and spacemen.

"If an alien intelligence were trying to make contact with our world, would they just appear in the sky and say, 'Here we are'? I don't think so. I think that slowly, over generations maybe, they would make their presence known until we would be ready 100% to accept them. How would you do this? You would make limited contact with maybe several thousand individuals across the country, reliable people, who could tell stories that they'd seen these things and they're real."

In short, he says, you would gain your hosts' trust. And it may be working.

"You'll notice that something strange has happened," says Imbrogno. "In the '50s, movies about flying saucers were always envisioned as alien invaders. Now we're seeing movies that show them as benevolent beings, kind beings really doing no harm to anyone. Before the movie "ET" came out, when people had UFO sightings they were terrified. After the movie, people who had sightings felt good, that this may be an extraterrestrial but they don't fear anymore, they feel wonder, awe.

"This is the change in attitude we're seeing. Is it just happening automatically, or are we being programmed to accept something that is going to occur in the future, and that something is contact with an alien intelligence? Because contact with this intelligence is inevitable."

To Imbrogno, the millions of dollars the government is spending on its SETI program, a search for extraterrestrial intelligence, is misguided. "They're looking for something out there," he says. "Maybe something found us first." ■

Alton Slagle is a Daily News staff writer who for more than 20 years covered the U.S. space program. And though he has a house in upstate Dutchess County, he himself has never seen a UFO.