

THE PINE BUSH ADVENTURE

UFO UPDATE

By Harry Lebelson

Pine Bush was in a frenzy. Dozens of townspeople were concerned about the strange lights hovering above their farms. Their efforts to get the attention of Air Force officials also were being ignored.

"About a year ago I was on duty one evening when I received a call," reports Tom Vicarro, an air traffic controller at Stewart Community Airport, ten miles from Pine Bush, New York. "Someone at the *Times Herald Record*, a Middletown newspaper, was getting calls from people about a UFO sighting and wanted to know whether we could spot anything from the tower." Vicarro then looked out the window nearest him and scanned the sky. Unable to see anything out of the ordinary, he notified operations that he had nothing in sight in that area. About 30 minutes later operations received a call directly from someone who had seen a UFO over the same area. "When I was notified of this, I decided to go over to the other side of the tower to take another look. What I saw was a very bright light hovering in the sky. It was much too intense and enormous

in size to have been a star or a planet."

The lights puzzled Robert Comeau, too. As police officer for Crawford Township for the past four years, he has seen more than lights. Several years ago Comeau was awakened by an object hovering above his home. "I could hear it whirring, like a turbine sound," he recalls. "I glanced out the window, and this disc-shaped, silvery object was hovering a few hundred feet from my home. It was approximately one hundred feet in diameter, with a row of windows around a domed top." Comeau dutifully reported the incident to his superior officer. When word got around, half the force believed him, but the other half didn't.

Other townspeople had witnessed these glowing objects. Three people driving in nearby Crawford Township were engulfed by mysterious beams of light shining down from some kind of metallic object. "I looked out the window and saw the object hovering silently over us," Harold Hunt remembers. He saw a series of lights around the edge of the large object. "I stepped on the gas and got

the hell out of there as fast as I could."

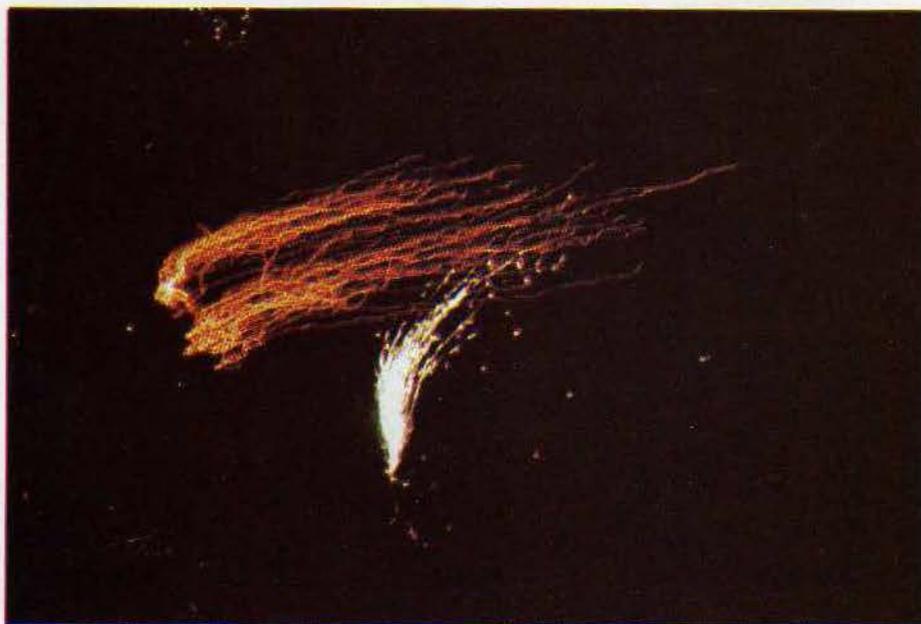
Despite the repeated claims made by Crawford Township residents, the Air Force remained uninterested. It is the Air Force party line to feign disinterest in such matters, but the military's openly indifferent attitude toward UFOs belies its covert activities and its concern.

A document released to the public under the Freedom of Information Act ordered all Air Force personnel to downplay reports of unidentified aerial phenomena. "It is strongly urged that no indication of CIA interest or concern reach the press or public, in view of their probable overreaction and interpretation of such interest as 'confirmatory' of the soundness of 'unpublished facts' in the hands of the United States government," the document states.

My response, as a field investigator for the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, to the Pine Bush events approached cautious skepticism, but I knew someone in the Middletown area and decided to ask some questions about the Pine Bush sightings. My Middletown connection proved far more interesting than I had expected.

Nestled among the hills and valleys of Upstate New York, Pine Bush is a remnant of the Thirties. Dust-covered asphalt roads wind in between the few buildings, old and new, that make up the town. The local gas station, diner, bar, and variety stores stand juxtaposed with buildings from a more prosperous time. Its outlying areas composed of cornfields and horse farms, Pine Bush is one of many small towns typical of the area. It is 20 miles from Middletown, on Highway 52.

My colleague Ellen Crystall, a UFO researcher, and I were put in touch with two young persons who supposedly had interacted with strange manifestations they said were UFOs. The couple described the objects as intensely bright orange lights, ellipsoid in form. The objects had followed them through the countryside while they were joyriding on their motorcycles after dark. Meeting us at their home, the couple, Bruce and Wendy, introduced us to teen-aged friends



Mysterious effects, photographed over a farm field in Pine Bush, New York, defy analysis.

who also claimed to have had collective and individual sightings of strange objects.

Besides Wendy and Bruce and their friends, others in this residential farm community of 9,000 claimed to have witnessed the phenomena. Policemen, barbers, store clerks, and laborers, all average working-class individuals, have interacted with one aspect or another of the UFO phenomenon sometime during the last 12 years.

The sky was dark when we arrived at the site where Bruce and Wendy had encountered the eerie lights. "The metallic disc had an orange glow around it as it hovered over those nearby trees," Wendy recalled. Just as she began talking, her attention was diverted to the far end of the field. "Look, there they are," she stammered. Ellen and I ran stumbling across the field in the direction of red and green lights that were suddenly rising at the base of a hill. We steadied our cameras and began to photograph them. The lights rose at the same rate of speed, while remaining equidistant from one another. This seemed to indicate that they were attached to certain objects. In addition, multicolored lights, spinning in a clockwise direction, could be seen suspended between the red and green lights of one object. It was too dark to make out other details.

The lights rose from the ground, moved across the sky, and appeared to land beyond some rows of trees. Their strange behavior led me to believe that my photographs could be significant at a later date. The patterns of the lights indicated that some objects were landing at one place and others taking off from another. It looked like Grand Central Terminal at the height of rush hour.

After documenting the evening's events, we headed back to Wendy and Bruce's home to discuss the phenomena. It was pitch-black outside as we began the drive home. A mile down the road, Bruce spotted a blazing red light. It had an ellipsoid shape. I jammed on the brakes as the object passed overhead. I tried to get out of the car, but the door was stuck, and I lost my opportunity to photograph the object. It was moving too fast. An instant later it disappeared beyond the horizon, leaving a faint glow.

After things calmed down, Wendy suggested that Ellen and I remain at their home overnight. The next morning we left early. We hoped to find the location of our sightings of the night before. After first scouring the area without any success, we came upon the remains of a dead deer. We stopped the car so that I could photograph the carcass for my photo collection. Two things happened when I bent down to take the photo: Coincidentally we discovered we were at the precise location where the previous night we encountered the objects, and Robert Comeau came walking into my view-

finder. He asked about the deer. After reassuring him that we had nothing to do with the animal's death, we inquired whether anyone had reported strange lights in the area the night before. He looked at me with a blank expression and said, "You mean like UFOs? Why I saw them myself some years back." He went on to say, "Half the police department has seen them, and the other half thinks those who've seen them are crazy." We exchanged names and phone numbers, promising to be in touch with him shortly.

It was the next weekend before we realized that the photos we had taken that first night in Pine Bush bore some interesting results. Six of them taken on the same day showed what appeared to be some kind of ionization process taking place as the objects moved across the sky. None of these electrical effects were visible to either Ellen or me that evening.

I later showed the photographs to Samuel Stecher, a physicist from Stevens

*• I could hear
whirring, like a turbine
sound. I glanced
out the window, and this
disc-shaped, silver
object was hovering near
my home, a short
distance from the trees. •*

Institute of Technology, in Hoboken, New Jersey. He thought the photos were significant and merited specialized analysis. He showed them to the head plasma physicist at Stevens. Unable to evaluate the photos and unwilling to venture an opinion as to their source, the plasma expert asked a photo analyst at the institute to evaluate them. He also was unable to offer any insights into the images.

The mystery of the photographs deepened Stecher's curiosity, enough for him to accompany us on a second visit to Pine Bush. It was just after dark when we arrived at the field. Within minutes two bright lights rose from beyond the trees. They silently bore down on us as we stood motionless. Three mute witnesses transfixed, we watched as the object moved within several hundred feet of us. Suddenly it veered to the left. We could see three large, square windows directly behind the lights. Internally lit, they cast an eerie glow in the sky while they crossed over the farm and disappeared without a sound. This was the first of several encounters Stecher would have in Pine Bush during our stay in the area.

We contacted the *Times Herald Record*. We were amazed to find UFO activity dating back to 1965. From the 1960s up to the present time the phenomena have encompassed a broader geographical area than we thought.

I called Stewart Airport for verification of some of the sightings. Vicarro told me that no logs were kept of the incidents. He recounted to me his own sighting of over a year ago, for which he could offer no reasonable explanation. "Quite some time ago operations received a phone call from someone who reported a mysterious object over the Middletown area," Vicarro said. He looked out the window of the control tower and saw a very bright light over the area. "Boy! Was that strange!" he exclaimed. "It was only about a thousand feet in altitude. It remained stationary for a short time and then shot across the sky." He claimed that no pilot of an airplane would take a chance and fly so low. The air traffic controller was insistent that in his 14 years on the job he had never seen an object display such odd behavior.

Perhaps the experiences of Air Traffic Controller Vicarro, physicist Sam Stecher, and numerous residents of Pine Bush will offset the attitudes and conclusions of Dr. Robert L. Hall regarding the UFO phenomenon. Dr. Hall, who in 1968 was head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois, spoke at a UFO symposium, convened by the House Committee on Science and Astronautics in 1968 to probe the UFO enigma.

The social psychologist suggested there was strong evidence that some UFO cases resulted from contagious hysteria. "Once people are sensitized to the existence of some kind of phenomena and there is emotion or anxiety associated with it, which results from the uncertainty of the situation, then, lacking any explanation, people will generate the news and explanations that reduce that anxiety," he said. He claims that there are many well-documented cases of this kind of mass hysteria.

Contagious hysteria? It didn't seem that way as far as I was concerned. Those metallike objects and brilliant red-orange discs seemed real enough to me. The testimony of those we talked to, both policemen and ordinary citizens alike, did not reflect opinions generated by fear and anxiety. In fact, the people in these communities seem to have a "live and let live" attitude regarding the phenomena. They view them as a temporary inconvenience that will go away someday, they hope.

Robert Jastrow, the noted astronomer, asked to comment on the Pine Bush photos, distinctly separated them from any natural phenomena when he said, "I'm unable to interpret these images as atmospheric electricity. They may be something totally unknown to us at this time."

Perhaps they are. ∞