



ORBITER

The New England Aerial Phenomena Report

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MESSAGE FROM APRO

In my last correspondence with APRO I was informed that Mrs. Lorenzen was very ill. There were hopes that she would be in a condition of health that would allow her to resume her duties as editor and memory bank for publishing the bulletin. Unfortunately, this now appears to be an impossibility with her doctor advising a complete rest from any responsibility. Let's keep her in our prayers.

RADIO-TV LOG

January 13 - Paul Cerny and Budd Hopkins were guests on Channel 5, KPIX, People Are Talking

March 10 - Budd Hopkins was a guest on the Wil Shriner Show, NBC.

March 14 - Phil Klass and Stan Friedman were guests on People Are Talking, WOR-TV, New York.

March 18 - Paul Cerny and Tom Page were guests on KCBS radio.

March 31 - "The UFO Incident" was aired on Channel 6, Rhode Island, 4:00 p.m.

CASE REPORT

On March 21, 1988 I received an unconfirmed report from Dave H. of Duxbury, MA. While listening to Boston WRKO radio talk program, a UFO report was mentioned on the 1:00 p.m. newscast on Sunday, March 20. It was announced that an airline travelling along the South Carolina coast was paced by an unknown object. The crew and passengers all observed the object. The pilot took evasive action and asked the air traffic controllers if they had an object on radar. They responded "negative". Both the crew and passengers lost sight of the object when the pilot maneuvered the aircraft away from the object.

A second airline, destination Boston, was travelling north along the South Carolina coast and was monitoring the transmissions. When the air traffic controller asked the first airliner if the object was still pacing the aircraft, the pilot responded "negative". The object then appeared along side the second aircraft and was observed by that crew and all the passengers. Duration of sighting was 15 minutes. End of report. We are attempting to locate more data on this report.

NEW BOOK

UFO ABDUCTIONS A DANGEROUS GAME by Philip J. Klass.

Note: The New York Times book review on Feb. 28, 1988 listed Communion (paperback) as number one.

CONFERENCE

The UFO Experience conference, sponsored by Psi Symposium, affiliate of the Unitarian-Universalist Church, an organization interested in investigating paranormal phenomena, New Age realities and holistic living - and now UFO's. Conference dates: May 6 & 7, 1988 at the Best Western Motel, Route 128, Waltham, MA. Scheduled speakers are: Rev. Richard Fewkes (Psi Symposium), John White (topic: from outer space to inner space), Raymond Fowler (topic: The Andreasson Affair), Dave Webb (solar physicist and investigator), Marianne Shenefield (abductee), Diana DeSimone (abductee and MUFON investigator), Budd Hopkins (author: Intruders). For further information call: 617-890-7800.

GULF BREEZE, FLA. A SPACE ODYSSEY

Are there intelligent beings living beyond the stars? And if so, what are they looking for in the Florida Panhandle? A Scientific Investigation.

OK, there is definitely something strange going on in Gulf Breeze, Fla. The two most likely explanations are:

1. Somebody is perpetrating a hoax and a bunch of other people, through inexperience, imagination or ignorance, are falling for it.
2. Intelligent beings from elsewhere in the universe, driving craft with fantastic capabilities, have come to Earth, and they are observing us, and they have a Paralysis Ray and — this is going to make some South Floridians nervous — they apparently speak Spanish.

After spending a few days in Gulf Breeze checking things out, I've decided for myself which of these two possible explanations is closest to the truth. Here's the story as far as I know it; see what you think.

GULF BREEZE — Pictures of what was labeled as a glowing unidentified flying object published in the Nov. 18 edition of *The Sentinel* of Gulf Breeze have prompted a half-dozen residents to report similar sightings.

Duane B. Cook, editor and publisher of the weekly, said the object looks like the top of the Space Needle in Seattle, but he hopes it's an alien spacecraft. He said the state's Mutual UFO Network will examine the three photos taken Nov. 11 near the town that appeared with a letter written by the anonymous photographer.

Here at Tropic we are always on the lookout for

DAVE BARRY is a Tropic staff writer. His most recent cover article was a year-end review.

The Wire Story

On Dec. 3, *The Herald* published this item in a roundup of wire-service stories from around the state:



The Town of Gulf Breeze

Gulf Breeze is a small residential community just across a bridge from Pensacola, way at the far western end of Florida, almost in Alabama. It is the opposite of Miami, geographically and in many other ways.

I begin my investigation by driving through downtown Gulf Breeze. Even at slow speed, this takes less than five minutes. It appears to be a normal beach-oriented town, very quiet in the off-season. There are a lot of things in the sky, because this is an area of extremely heavy air traffic: Nearby, besides the commercial airport in

stories of potentially intergalactic significance, so I immediately checked the Herald files to see if any other strange unexplained phenomena had been reported in the Gulf Breeze area. You can imagine how my pulse quickened when I discovered that:

- On Dec. 5, at The Zoo, a privately operated zoo in Gulf Breeze, a wedding ceremony was held for giraffes. This really happened. Their names are Gus and Gigi.
- On Aug. 19, a Gulf Breeze man was bitten by a pygmy rattlesnake as he (the man) examined a potted plant in the garden shop of the Wal-Mart store in nearby Fort Walton Beach. Just two days later, at a Wal-Mart in North Fort Myers, a woman examining a potted hibiscus was bitten by another pygmy rattlesnake. Wal-Mart officials were unable to explain this rash of pygmy-rattler attacks and described it as "unusual."
- Well, of course, I needed no further convincing. I grabbed my camera — you have to be ready — hopped on a plane and was off to conduct my investigation.

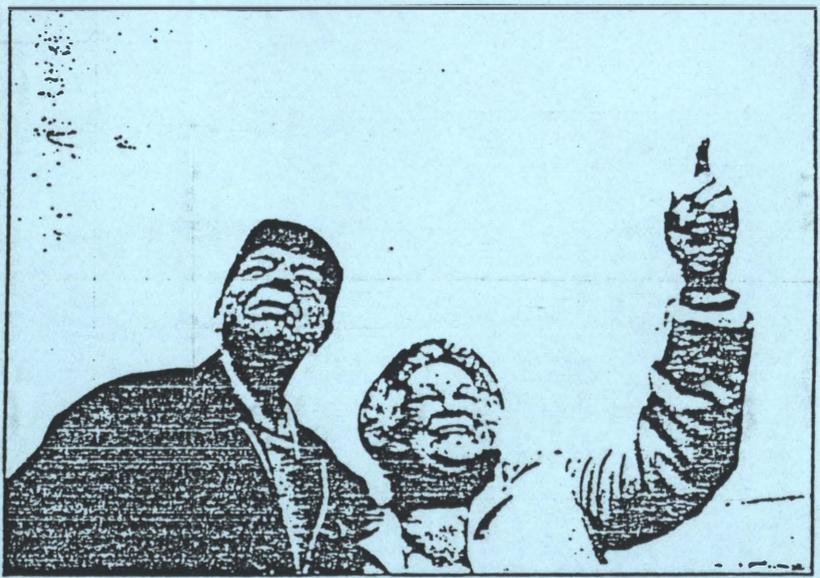
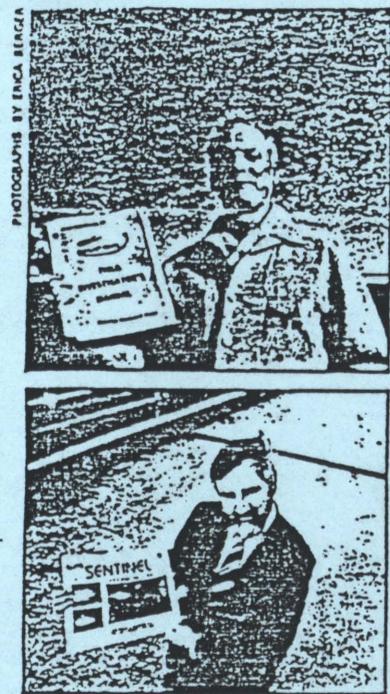
Pensacola, are the Pensacola Naval Air Station, Eglin Air Force Base and several other airfields. Almost any time you look up, you see a plane or a helicopter. In looking around, however, the only phenomenon I notice that does not seem to have an obvious earthly explanation is a bumper sticker that says "BUSH 83."

But you never can tell. As you know if you ever watched *The Twilight Zone*, there are times when everything seems to be perfectly normal, and then suddenly, without warning, something happens, something that you know is somehow . . . wrong, and you start to hear that piercing high-pitched electronic-sounding *Twilight Zone* music — deedeedeede deedeedeede — and the hairs on the back of your neck, even if you use Extra Hold styling mousse, stand on end.

Little do I realize, as I drive through the quiet town of Gulf Breeze, that before I leave, I am going to experience that very feeling. More than once.

The Newspaper

My first stop is *The Gulf Breeze Sentinel*. The *Sentinel* is a weekly newspaper with a circulation of 3,500, soaring to 4,500 in the summer. It is not the kind of paper that practices the kind of snide, cynical, city-slicker style of journalism exemplified by this article. It's the kind of newspaper where many stories consist mostly of local peoples' names. You can get into *The Sentinel* merely by having your birthday. Also there are many photographs of local boards, clubs, civic groups, etc., engaging in planning activities. In the Nov. 19 issue, there's a front-page photograph of a man smiling and holding up, for no apparent reason, bags of Hershey's Kisses, accompanied by



Charlie and Doris Somerby (above) say they definitely saw something weird over the bay. Editor Duane Cook (bottom left) put the story on the front page; MUFON investigator Donald Ware (top left) thinks it has "great significance."

the caption: Dave Boceman, manager of the *Piggly Wiggly*, is planning now for the Annual Gulf Breeze Christmas Parade. *Piggly Wiggly* plans to have several entries, including the *Folgers Race Cars* and, of course, *The Pig!*

In short, *The Sentinel* seems to be your basic small hometown paper doing hometown stories about hometown people. Except that in the same Nov. 19 issue, right above the *Piggly-Wiggly* manager, is a story headlined: **UFO SIGHTED OVER GULF BREEZE**

Below this are three photographs of this thing, shaped roughly like a fat disk with a glowing, tapered bottom and a small glowing protrusion on top. There are regularly spaced dark marks going around the side. The thing is in fairly clear focus. It appears to be hovering in the evening sky; you can see the dark blurred shapes of trees in the foreground.

The "story" accompanying the photographs consists entirely of the text of an anonymous letter to the newspaper, allegedly written by the photographer, who says he took five Polaroid pictures of the thing from his yard on the night of Nov. 11.

"I was reluctant at first to show [the photographs] to any one," says the letter. . . . but my wife convinced me to show them to Ed. Ed in turn said that the photos should be shown to the press. . . . I am a prominent citizen of the community, however, and need anonymity at this time. I know what I saw and would feel much better if I knew I was not alone.

"Let me reassure you that this is not a hoax."

It was "Ed" who brought the photographs to *The Sentinel*, according to Duane Cook, the editor and publisher. Cook, 43, is a former computer salesman who took over the

paper from his stepfather in 1980. Cook thought the pictures looked convincing and "Ed," whom Cook knows, said the photographer was responsible. So Cook decided to go ahead with the story, but he was still "nervous a little" about it until the morning of Nov. 19, when the paper was just about to go to press. On that day Cook's stepfather and predecessor as editor, Charles Somerby, and his wife (Cook's mother), Doris Somerby, stopped by the paper. Cook showed them the Polaroids.

They did not act surprised. They said they had seen the same object.

On the same night, deedeedeede deedeedeede "I lost all fear of going to press with it," Cook says.

The Witnesses

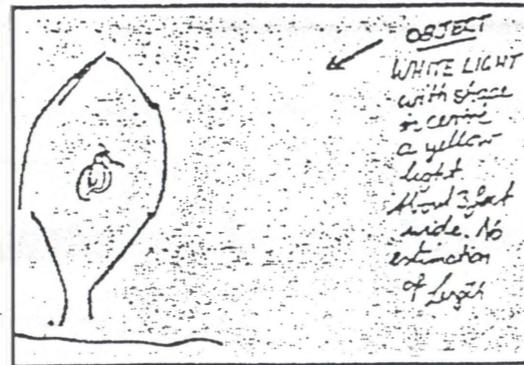
If you called up Central Casting and asked for two people to play the parts of *The Reliable Witnesses*, they would send you Charlie and Doris Somerby. He's 69 and, before his newspaper career, served as a naval communications officer in World War II and Korea. She's 67 and holds the world indoor record for grandmotherliness (when I visit their home to interview them, she has an actual apple pie cooling on the kitchen table).

The Somerbys say that on Nov. 11, while taking a walk at sundown, they saw an object over the bay headed toward Gulf Breeze. It made no sound, they say, and it did not look like any kind of aircraft they had ever seen. They watched for some mention of it on the evening TV news, but there was none. Until Cook showed them the photographs, they had not planned to say anything about it.

I ask them, several times and in several ways, if they're sure that the

Australian Center for UFO Studies
P.O. Box 728, Lane Cove, NSW 2066 Australia
THE MUNDRABILLA, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, INCIDENT

Poss. CE2 20 Jan 88 Mundrabilla WA approx. 0500 hrs



Drawing by Knowles family given to police

The front pages of many newspapers of the 21st of January reported provocative details of a family's alleged encounter with a UFO. The glowing object resembled a giant egg in an egg cup. It allegedly stopped their car and left behind physical traces. Follow-up reports gave details on other alleged witnesses. The unidentified driver of a car with caravan travelling in the opposite direction to the Knowles family, reportedly swerved to avoid the object. Graham Henley, driving a truck 10-15 km ahead of the Knowles, saw in his rear vision mirror, a bright white light hovering over the car's headlights. Another truck driver, probably John De Jong, travelled some distance behind the Knowles' car. There was possibly one other unidentified truck driver who may have first reported the incident to the Eucla police. Other reports came from Alan and Tina Parkes, who saw a very bright, greenish-bluish object stationary on the horizon while driving from Mt Gambier to Melbourne on 16 Jan. Two separate tuna boat crews reported sighting UFOs in the Great Australian Bight.

The following details on the central Knowles family sighting are derived from preliminary reports compiled by Keith Basterfield and Ray Brooke of UFO Research (South Australia) and kindly provided by Vlad Godic of UFORA, and from media sources. Ceduna police telephoned Ray Brooke some 10 hours after the incident had occurred, whereupon an interview with the family was arranged for when they reached Adelaide. Unfortunately, TV Channel 7 intercepted the family enroute and arranged an "exclusive" deal with them. After negotiations with the network, Keith and Ray were able to informally talk with the Knowles, though in a hectic atmosphere sandwiched between TV studio interviews.

Mrs Fay Knowles and sons Sean, Patrick and Wayne were travelling in a 1984 blue Ford Telstar from Perth, Western Australia to Melbourne, Victoria. At a point some 40 km west of Mundrabilla, Sean, the driver, saw what he at first took to be a truck's light approaching

along the road from the E. It was "jumping about a bit", disappeared, became visible again and continued to approach their vehicle. Sean commented that it looked like a "spaceship". It became bigger and brighter. They kept driving towards it. It then disappeared.

The next thing they knew it was behind them. Sean accelerated the car in an attempt to get away from it. Suddenly it was in front again. At some stage, Sean did a U-turn and travelled W for a while, then did another U-turn to resume the original E travel. It is not clear whether this was an attempt to elude or follow the light. At another time, the light was seen close to their vehicle and they swerved to miss it and nearly hit a car and caravan coming the other way.

The exact sequence of events from here is very confused, but included:

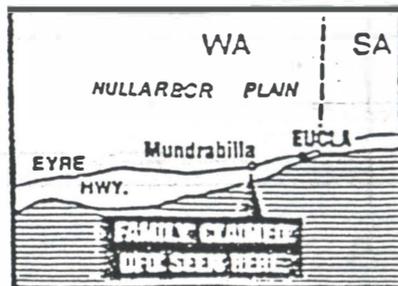
- The rear right tyre blew out whilst they travelled at speed. Sean braked the car to a halt.
- Mrs Knowles placed her hand on the car's roof and felt a "spongy substance". She retracted it after feeling the material. Immediately the back of her hand felt warm for a few seconds, then the sensation of heat faded.
- The family wound down the windows and a "greyish-black mist" came into the car.
- The sound of their voices changed in pitch and appeared to slow down.
- They believed the object had landed on the roof of the car, although upon questioning, they said they did not see anything protruding front, rear or over the sides of the car.
- A humming sound was heard.
- Sean blacked out for a period.
- They all became hysterical, shouting and crying. Mrs Knowles said she believed they were going to die.
- They believed the car was lifted off the road. However, when asked if they had looked out and saw the car off the ground, they said they had not done so.
- They reported the vehicle dropped to the ground and the tyre burst.
- Their two dogs went "crazy".
- They reported a smell like "dead bodies" in the air.

After a period of time, Sean stopped the car and they all got out to hide in adjacent scrub. They reported the light/object remained in the vicinity of the car and then departed. Some 15 minutes after stopping, the family returned to the car and rapidly changed the tyre. They proceeded to the Mundrabilla Motor Hotel in W.A.

A sample of the "soot/ash" found on and in the car was collected 10 hours after the event by a police forensic squad officer who was at Ceduna police station on another matter. Results of the analysis are still awaited. On 25 January, Channel 7 announced that its experts said "analysis of black material on the car reveals that it is mostly iron oxide consistent with residue from worn brake linings" and that the almost perfect cut on the right rear tyre was probably caused by running a considerable distance on the rim. This could likewise explain the shaking and smoke. There were also four slight indentations discovered at the four corner points of the roof. It is possible, though yet to be confirmed, that the marks may have occurred when the family's two suitcases strapped to the roof disappeared, presumably by being ripped off at high speed.

The UFOR(SA) investigators have emphasised that "the physical evidence is not as strong as the media have reported and caution is urged until technical reports are in". They concluded that the family appeared to be down to earth people trying to cope with some traumatic episode. Indications of a hoax are minimal. At this date, the entire incident is still open to a number of interpretations. Investigations are continuing and a more detailed report is in preparation.

(Media sources include: "Daily Telegraph", Sydney "Sun" and "Daily Mirror", 21-22 Jan; "Sun-Herald" and "Sunday Telegraph", 24 Jan 88; and Channel 7 "Nightly News" and "NewsWorld", various dates.)



DESERT: Where UFO was sighted



PRELIMINARY REPORT OF SIGHTING OF UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT

NAME OF WITNESS: VAL . Bank Road, Nashua, N.H. 03062
 DATE OF SIGHTING: SATURDAY, MAY 30, 1987
 TIME OF SIGHTING: 6:30 - 7:00 PM
 LOCATION OF SIGHTING: SOUTH NASHUA, N.H. OFF SPIT BROOK ROAD , ROBY PARK
 DURATION OF SIGHTING: 20 SEC.
 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE: COLOR PHOTOGRAPH
 CAMERA & FILM: NIKON 35MM, F-STOP 16, KODACOLOR ASA 200
 ESTIMATED DISTANCE OF OBJECT FROM VIEWER: 2 -3 MILES
 ESTIMATED ANGLE ABOVE HORIZON: 15 - 20°
 ESTIMATED ALTITUDE OF OBJECT: 1/2 MILE
 ESTIMATED SIZE OF OBJECT: 300 FT. DIAMETER
 DIRECTION OF TRAVEL: EAST TO WEST
 SOUND: NONE
 APPEARANCE: DISC SHAPED (SEE BELOW) SHINEY METALLIC , NO VAPOR OR LIGHTS
 OTHER WITNESSES: SECURITY GUARD
 MISCELLANEOUS: WITNESS WAS RELAXING AND WALKING IN WOODS. REMAINED CALM.
 INDIVIDUAL IS EMPLOYED AS A DRAFTER.

SKETCH BY WITNESS



The above photograph is currently going through photo analysis. The photograph was taken by Val P. a Russian immigrant who resides in Nashua, NH. The photo was passed on to us by Mr. Carl McCoy, a technician at Raytheon. Carl was unable to analyze the photograph because of lack of time and resources. Shutter speed was set at 1/100th of a second.

If you come to any conclusions about the above data or know of any similar sightings, please contact me: Jim Melesciuc, 43 Harrison St., Reading, MA 01867, (617) 944-0686.

Uncovering The Coverup

by Bonnie Meroth

FREMONT - Richard Giordano of Fremont, N.H. has a lot to say about what the United States government isn't saying. This forty-year old man, who moved to New Hampshire from Boston three years ago, has dedicated much time, energy and money in attempting to "set the record straight".

As an independent investigator, Richard deals in facts, and facts only concerning government cover-ups on

sightings of unidentified flying objects. He knows there is misrepresentation by government agencies because he has official documents in his possession that prove that the government is hiding information. His objective is not to convince anyone that UFO's are extraterrestrials. Realizing that there is no evidence anywhere that links UFO phenomena to "visits from another planet", he wants only to prove conclusively, in any court of law, that

the objects or crafts that make up the core of UFO phenomena are real. The documents that he has attest to the fact that UFO's are entities and that data can help end the misuse and malignity that abuse the subject of UFO's. Revelation of government intelligence can end all speculation.

Mr. Giordano's interest in this topic began when he was nine years old. At that time, he witnessed the sighting and experienced the news coverage of a UFO in his neighborhood. When the famous incident at Exeter occurred in 1965, he became active in the business of investigating events related to UFO's.

Rick has used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain UFO documents. He has also been involved in a court battle to force America's two top spy agencies to release documents which could unlock the secrets of UFO sightings around the world in recent years.

In 1980, a group known as Citizens Against UFO Secrecy (CAUS), consisting of 300 subscribing members, asked the U.S. District Court of Appeals in Washington

to order the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency to release all its files on UFO's. Richard, a CAUS member, has a copy of the twenty-one page, formerly top secret, affidavit that was shown to the judge who was going to hear the case. The affidavit allegedly proposed justifications as to why data on UFO's should remain confidential to protect national security. The judge read the material and threw the case out of court. The NSA, the agency that admits to holding 135 unreleased documents because of "security reasons", finally released a virtually useless copy of the affidavit. Ninety-eight percent of the data is deleted.

On October 20, 1986, Giordano wrote a letter to the National Security Agency and the Central Security Service at Fort Meade in Maryland. By right of the Freedom of Information Act, he requested documents, notes, memos, cables, summaries and conclusions located in their files regarding a secretly coded project concerning UFO's. The diligent UFO-logist had acquired the highly confidential project code name. He received a phone call from the representative of the government agency who somehow obtained Giordano's unlisted phone number. Giordano was queried on his source of information. Richard wasn't talking and neither was the Security Agency who delayed giving any information in correspondence through January 15, 1987. NSA requested \$250. In two installments of money orders made payable to the Treasury of the United

States for any information they might release. Giordano faithfully answered all letters. After receiving several dispatches offering no enlightenment, Rick finally earned a letter stating "no records responsive to your request were located". The earnest man elaborated on his thoughts about government releases. "There are two piles," he stated, "one A and one B. Pile A is the real sensitive, critical information. The stuff we're going after. Pile B is what we're getting. We want this responsibility of the breach of security."

When asked about the moral imperative, Richard replied, "The truth should be known. I am not sure that the United States government has the answers but they know a lot more than they're saying. We live in a democracy and the information is there. Let the people make up their own minds. The government agencies always contradict themselves. They've been covering up for so long now that admitting the truth would admit that they lied".

In 1947, a top secret government file, from the Major General of the USAF Director of Intelligence Office, revealed, "It is the opinion that the phenomena reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious." A year later, the USAF documented that the unidentified flying objects were "not of domestic origin." It is not advisable to present the press with this information. Don't let them know the unknown, only the solvable."

Giordano wants to "take the subject out of the supermarket mentality and put it in its proper perspective." He's tired of the credibility of eye witnesses being impugned. Working with legitimate organizations like CAUS and The Mutual UFO Network, Inc., Richard

seriously studies and researches all his data in his immaculate and extremely organized home office. He and his colleagues constantly receive phone calls from all over the world. Immediately knowledgeable, he counsels the callers on various UFO sightings. His library includes over 100 video titles from documentaries and TV shows that range in length from 10 minutes to 2 hours, and include Oprah Winfrey and Merv Griffin recordings from Banbury, England. His audio file contains over 125 different chronicles from a 1956 Mike Wallace program to a Paul Harvey news broadcast. He even has a 20 minute recording taken during an active sighting in England. Richard knows that the CIA had over 1,000 documents on UFO reportings. The FBI had 2,000. They've been passed back to NSA.

An Air Force official went public in 1969 and said that the Air Force was out of the UFO business, but current documentation diminishes that statement -- another government contradiction according to Giordano.

Rick wants the government to come clean. It hasn't happened yet. He shares these sentiments. "After researching and investigating the UFO phenomenon for some twenty years, the up to date result of my research is the overwhelming conclusion that we are dealing with tangible, though Unconventional Aerial Objects that have posed a threat to national security, operating in our airspace under intelligent control and far beyond the range of any government's technological development.

I feel that the subject warrants full-time unbiased scrutiny by the scientific community. I also feel that the resolution of the critical

Coverup to

page 22

Coverup from page 2

questions regarding the phenomenon lies in the release of yet unobtainable government documents or in the phenomenon itself revealing the answers.

However, I seriously doubt that either of the above circumstances will occur in the near future."

On April 3, Venus is at its greatest elongation, standing 46 degrees east of the sun.

Dutch Police Chase Purported Spacecraft

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) — Police deployed a dozen patrol cars and a helicopter in a late-night chase for a craft from outer space, a police spokesman said yesterday.

The hunt, accompanied by dozens of calls from all over the Dutch capital reporting unidentified flying objects, failed to yield anything extra-terrestrial, according to spokesman Klaas Wilting.

"We were alerted late Thursday night by Schiphol (airport) air traffic controllers who observed bright lights in a stationary position over the port

area which didn't show up on their radar screens," Wilting said.

After a radio newscast had mentioned the Schiphol sighting, calls started pouring in from all over the city, describing objects ranging from "airplane-like things to fantastic contraptions with Darth Vader at the helm," said Wilting.

Around midnight, 12 patrol cars and a police helicopter were involved, Wilting said.

After several hours, "we found nothing except some strong lamps on top of a 50-meter (150-foot) high crane.

Mark. Union Leader 3.4.88

In April 1986, the beginning of Daylight Saving Time was moved from the last Sunday in April to the first Sunday in April. The earlier start, The World Almanac estimates, saves more than \$28 million in traffic accident costs each year. This year Daylight Saving Time begins at 2 a.m. on Sunday, April 3.

When Pancakes Flew

If aeronautical engineer Charles H. Zimmerman had had his way, the Navy would have been flying pancakes instead of serving them in mess halls.

Zimmerman flew in the face of conventional design with his 1940s Navy fighter. The Vought XF5U-1 was designed to take off and land vertically, to slow to a virtual hover, and to zip along at 500 mph. It was an aeronautical oddity that was unmistakably pancake-shaped. But due to last-minute Navy waffling, the "Flying Pancake" never flew.

An earlier Pancake, the V-173, did get off the ground and in fact flew a total of 131 hours. Vought chief test pilot Boone T. Guyton made most of the flights at

The full-blown Pancake stopped when jet engines made propellers obsolete.

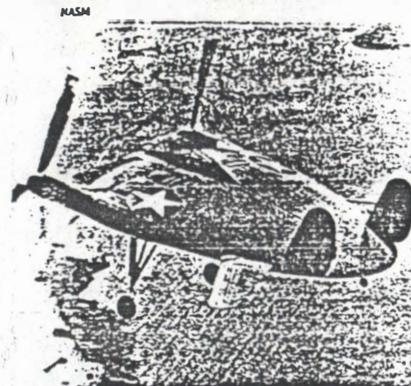
Bridgeport Airport in Stratford, Connecticut. Writing later for the *Historical Aviation Album*, Guyton recalled, "The initial flight . . . was one of the most interesting I had made in my career as a professional pilot." No doubt. Upon completion of the V-173's 13-minute maiden flight on November 23, 1942, Guyton "felt exalted and had a foolish impulse to yell, 'Charlie, she flies!'"

Zimmerman couldn't have been surprised. He had been working on the concept of an elliptical flying wing for over a decade, convinced that combining powerful rotor-like propellers and a low-aspect-ratio body would result in a craft that could perform over a wide range of speeds. Zimmerman's research indicated that counter-rotating propellers at the leading edge of an airfoil could counteract wingtip vortices, that a circular form

offered great structural strength, and that a pilot lying prone could endure higher G loads than one sitting up straight. He was right. In 1933, while employed by the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (the forerunner of NASA), Zimmerman entered a flying wing in a NACA lightplane design competition and won. NACA declined to develop the aircraft, however, deeming the concept too advanced.

By 1939 Zimmerman had moved to Chance Vought, where he built a remote-controlled Pancake that performed well enough to persuade the Navy to sponsor the V-173, a full-fledged prototype. After wind tunnel tests at NACA's Langley Field in Virginia, Guyton made his exhilarating first flight.

During five years of test flights, only two major problems emerged: insufficient



Although it was underpowered, the V-173 made nearly 200 test flights.

Windows in the V-173's nose helped the pilot see better during landings.

power—two three-blade propellers, each powered by an 80-horsepower Continental engine, were barely adequate to propel the one-and-a-half-ton wood-and-fabric craft—and pilot discomfort, exacerbated by poor visibility, due to the required prone position. (The V-173 was modified to allow the pilot to sit up, and a window was installed between the pilot's feet to provide visibility during landings, though Guyton claimed he never used it.)

In general, the strange-looking machine lived up to Zimmerman's expectations. The V-173 was controllable at a 45-degree angle of attack, could take off within 200 feet, landed at under 50 mph, and, despite Guyton's best efforts, would not stall or spin. The V-173's top speed in level flight was only 138 mph, however, and true vertical flight was impossible—a problem both Zimmerman and the Navy blamed on low-power engines.

The Pancake's sturdiness was dramatically demonstrated during an emergency landing necessitated by a vapor lock in the fuel line: forced to land on a beach, pilot Richard Burroughs swerved to avoid a sunbather, and the Pancake, true to its name, flipped over. By the time a rescue crew arrived, Burroughs had clambered out unhurt. The aircraft, too, was unscathed.

All this persuaded the Navy to proceed with construction of the XF5U-1. Its two Pratt & Whitney R-2000-7 Twin Wasp engines, producing 1,350 horsepower apiece, would solve the power problems. The airplane was also given two specially designed four-blade propellers. The wing structure and surfaces were made primarily of Metalite, a new balsa-aluminum composite that was both sturdy and light.

Fabrication began in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1943, and rollout followed in 1945. The craft was painted midnight blue, and the "nose" sported Bugs Bunny riding a magic carpet, based on artwork by the Warner Bros. studio.

Guyton and his colleagues made taxi and other ground tests at the Vought factory over the following 18 months, resulting in a little fine-tuning. Flight testing was scheduled at the Muroc Dry Lake facility (now Edwards Air Force Base) in California. But on March 17, 1947, just as the Pancake was being readied for shipping through the Panama Canal, the Navy telegraphed that the project was canceled. The Pentagon had seen the future, and the future was jets.

Another propeller-driven fighter seemed an unjustifiable expense. The contract was terminated and the Flying Pancake terminally grounded: Navy brass ordered the aircraft demolished. The reason for the destruction order is a mystery. "I have never found anything that explains why the Pancake was destroyed," says Navy aviation historian John Elliott.

The XF5U-1 was wrecked—with some difficulty, bolstering its reputation for strength—in 1948. The partially disassembled V-173 at the National Air and Space Museum's facility in Suitland, Maryland, is all that remains of Zimmerman's vision of Flying Pancakes.

—Katie Janssen

