

Flying saucers still up in the air

By FRANK CRANSTON

HAD Kenneth Arnold, a Boise, Idaho, businessman taken a different flight path home 20 years ago today the whole thing might never have started. And hundreds of cartoons, thousands of newspaper articles and a host of films might not have appeared.

On the afternoon of June 24, 1947, Arnold reported that he had sighted "a formation of nine disc-like objects skimming along at high speed — like a saucer would if you skipped it across water".

The era of the Unidentified Flying Object or Flying Saucer, had opened. In the intervening decades the government agencies of most coun-

tries have been deluged with reported sighting of 'things' in the sky, on the ground, on the water and alongside cars and aircraft.

In Australia, Royal Australian Air Force intelligence officers have investigated more than 200 such reports in the last six years and they have ignored hundreds of others as obvious furrphies.

Canberra, Goulburn and Queanbeyan have accounted for six of the investigations.

RAAF investigations have established every sighting ex-

cept seven to be the result of some reasonably explicable natural or astronomical happening. Of the 'unexplained' seven, five have not been solved because they were reported too late or because insufficient information was given. The remaining two are marked 'Unknown' in the RAAF's voluminous UFO files.

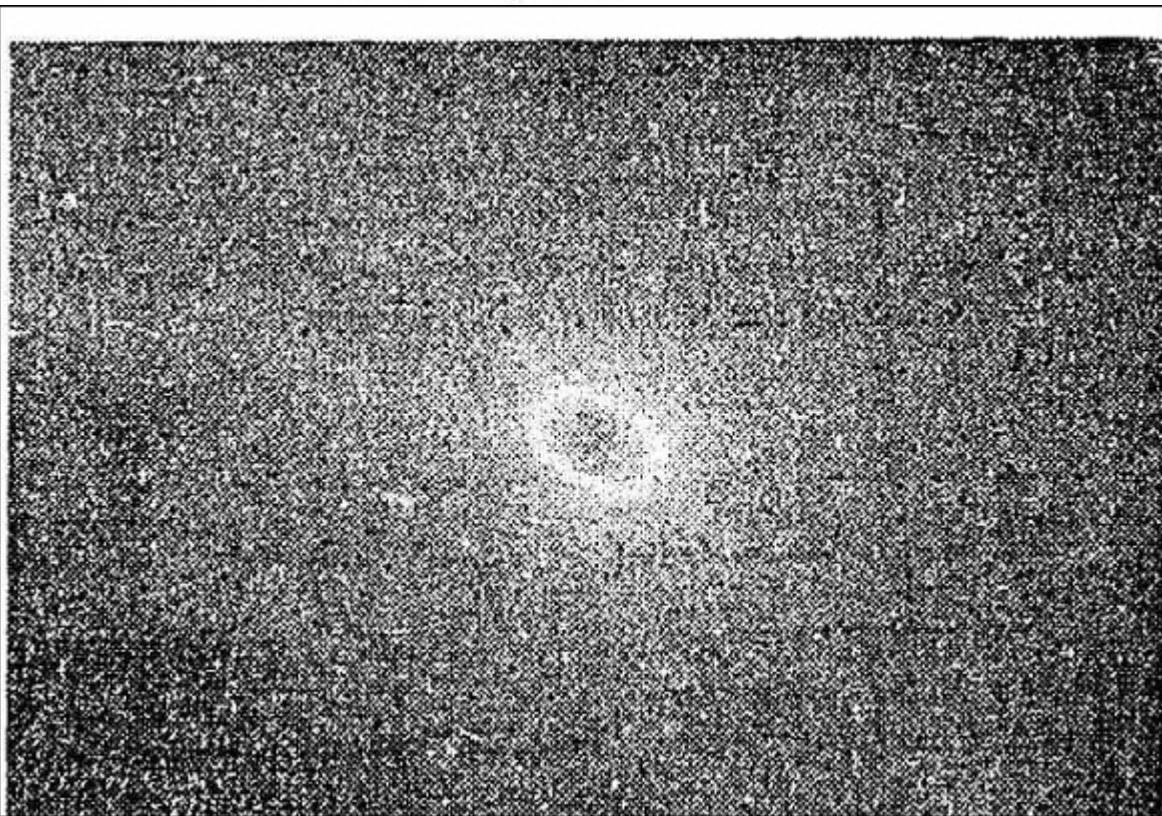
Most of Australia's UFOs have been shown to have been astronomical phenomena, satellites re-entering the earth's atmosphere, meteorological balloons, aircraft or temperature inversion reflections, similar to a mirage.

A "silvery disc-shaped formation of 30-40 objects" sighted from Launceston, Tasmania on December 7, 1960, turned out to be a flock of pigeons, while the "dull vertical narrow beam ascending from the sea" off Bunama Point, New Guinea, on November 2, 1965 was a water spout.

The RAAF has been careful not to give the appearance of "debunking" UFO reports. Its job is to know what goes on in the skies over Australia. Any attempt to discredit sincere observers could easily rebound if a foreign military aircraft

if a foreign military aircraft did sneak over the country and the only man to see what all the military had missed was afraid to come forward for fear of being ridiculed.

"As the result of investiga-



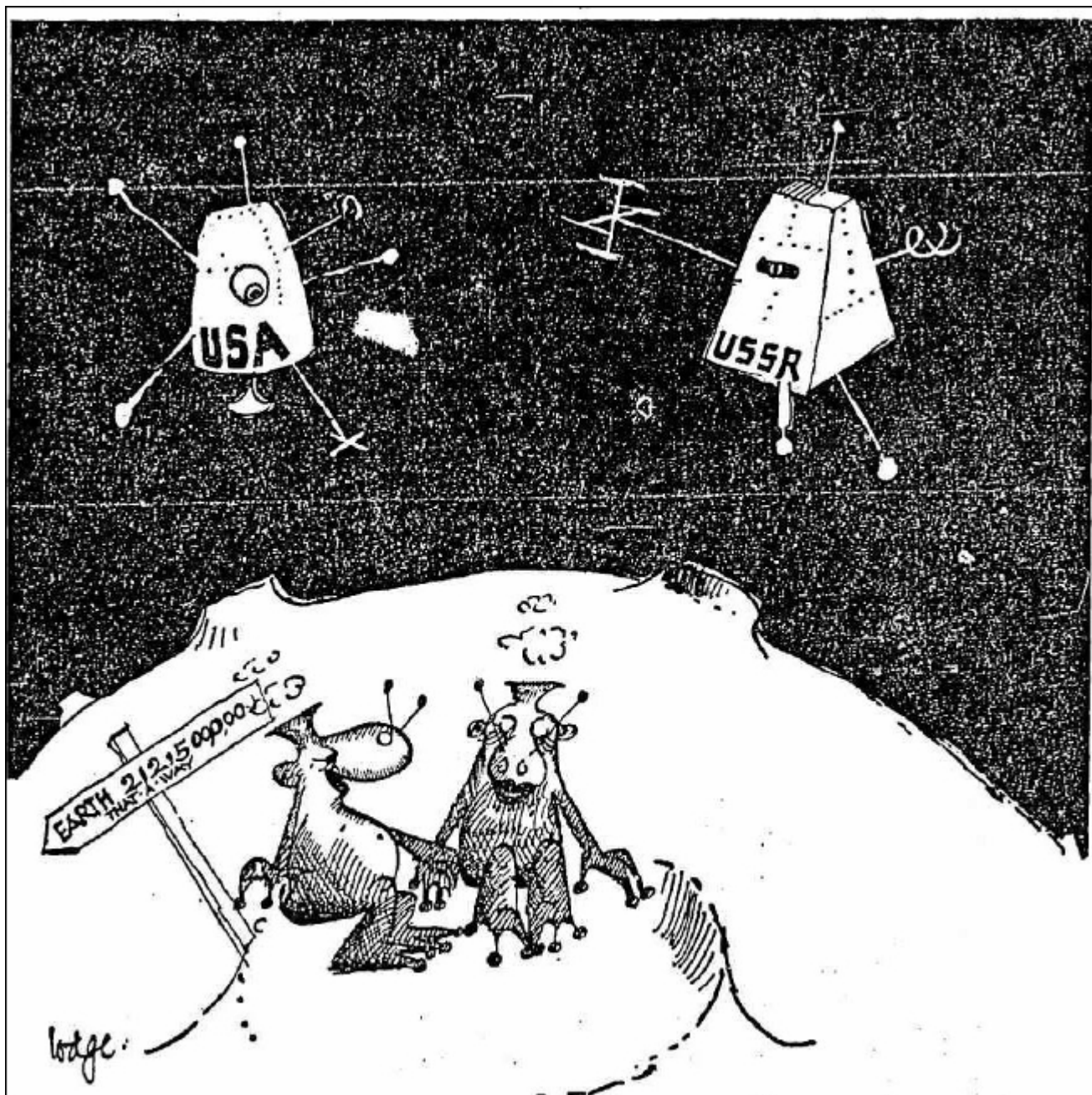
A Canberra resident claims to have taken this photograph of an object hovering over southern Canberra one October day in 1963.

tion in the past, there is no doubt that reliable observers have reported sightings, which today are inexplicable within the resources available to the RAAF", it admits. "Reports of this type are filed in an attempt to develop sufficient depth of evidence for accurate analysis to be made. It may,

analysis to be made. It may, however, be several years before the required depth of evidence is available".

"Large lights in the water which made the compass go 'haywire' with a shadow in the centre of the lights rotating clockwise and causing the lights to pulsate", were reported from a ship off Groote Eylandt on January 23, 1964.

Eylandt on January 23, 1964.
The phenomenon which



"Surely you don't think UFOs are really for real, my darling Gremlintine?"

caused this sighting is marked 'unknown'. An object seen from Schulea, Papua-New Guinea, on May 13, 1965, was reported to change col-

was reported to change colour from red to green and to have emitted sufficient blue light to illuminate the beach. This object too is recorded among the 'unknowns'.

When the RAAF is investigating a sighting it calls on the assistance of astronomers, civil aviation officials, meteorologists and other trained observers to cross-check any phenomena known to them which might tie in with the reported sighting. At this point it is pertinent to record that no UFO has ever been reported from an official observatory in any country.

Most Australian sightings, and they have been reported from all parts of the continent with about equal frequency, have been mis-interpreted astronomical phenomena, puzzling to the layman, but readily explained by the experts. Aircraft come second.

But, if the position in Australia is so relatively easily explained, it is not so in the United States where the USAF, which has charge of the investigations, first bungled the operation by making fun of the observers ("they don't want us to know what the Russians are doing" was the reaction to that) and then by maintaining too great a silence

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("they don't want to panic the
world by telling the truth").

'Project Blue Book' the
official USAF instrument
dealing with the UFO has a
staff of just three — two of
them clerical assistants —
and this the UFO pro-
tagonists say, indicates the
depth of US research of the
problem. Then too, the CIA
has been accused of ordering
the USAF to 'debunk' the
sightings as far back as 1953.

In April this year, the
senior physicist of the Institute
of Atmospheric at the
University of Arizona, Profes-
sor James E. McDonald, told
the annual meeting of the
American Society of News-
paper Editors the time had
come for a 'full-scale Congres-
sional investigation of the
UFO problem'.

"Pacing of aircraft and
buzzing of cars goes on rather
steadily", Professor McDonald
told the editors. These cases
so strongly suggest something
vaguely resembling surveil-
lance or reconnaissance that
the student of the problem is
forced to weigh the possibility
that the UFOs are probes of
some type that are engaged
in something we would loosely
call 'observation'. There are

call 'observation'. There are many other categories of sightings suggesting the same tentative hypothesis.

"There is, in my present opinion, no sensible alternative to the utterly shocking hypothesis that the UFOs are extraterrestrial probes from somewhere else".

The 'unidentified' proportion of sightings in Australia is about 1 per cent. In the US it is about 1.6 per cent. The more the US authorities try to 'disprove' the outer-space probe theory the more the UFO supporters cry "cover up". Fortunately the RAAF has never taken this attitude and is not now in the difficult public relations position faced by the USAF.

For no matter what the experts say, no matter what proofs they evince, it seems certain that, as they have in the past 20 years, many people in many countries will go on seeing things in the sky.