

**UFOs
HAVE
GOOD
AND
BAD
YEARS**

●
By
NEIL
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with
the kind
permission
of the
Melbourne
Herald

The only substantial reason I can offer for writing about flying saucers is that when I was in Canberra the other day I

Canberra the other day I bumped into my friend Arthur.

After a few beers and prawns at his golf club, Arthur, who works for the RAAF, became ufological. He occasionally gets that way, and I honestly doubt that the beer and prawns had much to do with it.

Ufologists are people who are interested in flying saucers, otherwise known as UFO (short for unidentified flying objects).

The RAAF has a UFO section which checks flying saucer reports from all over Australia.

Now, I have never been particularly interested in ufology. Space bores me. I'm one of those reactionaries who cannot understand why on Earth anyone should want to land on the Moon.

But for those among us who believe that flying saucers and other odds-and-ends from outer space are keeping an eye

outer space are keeping an eye (perhaps set cyclopsically in the middle of their foreheads) on us, I have comforting news.

The RAAF takes flying saucer reports seriously and has no intention of abandoning its UFO checking system.

This persistence keeps us, depending on your point of view, way behind or way in front of our Great and Powerful Friend.

In December, 1969, the U.S. Air Force closed down its UFO-watching department, known as Project Blue Book. This followed complaints from scientists that the department's continued existence could not be justified in terms of expense or national security.

Project Blue Book had a life of 21 years. It checked 12,618 reported sightings, including some of the more interesting ones from Australia, and spent millions of dollars.

dollars.



Arthur explained the reason for the RAAF's persistence: "Our UFO checking doesn't cost much. We're responsible for the air defence of Australia, and so any reports of unusual happenings in our air space are of interest to us.

"We certainly never rubbish any reports of flying saucers.

"On the other hand," he added, licking a few prawn crumbs from his fingers, "I wouldn't like you to get the impression that our interest suggests, at this stage, that we give credence to any 'little green men' theories.

"We're just openminded."

Indeed, some UFO sightings have been made by RAAF men, pilots flying commercial airliners and Civil Aviation officials.

The RAAF has not added

The RAAF has not added up all the reports it has checked since it went ufological in 1959. There have been — again depending on your point of view — good years and bad years.

In 1966, for example, 59 sightings were reported; in 1970 a mere 37.

The first UFO sighting over Australia was probably in 1893, though, with the lapse of time and the loss of documentation, no one seems to know where it was or how it was described.

The RAAF has a note that some Yorkshire monks sighted a “large, round, silver thing like a disc” in 1290. You can bet that caused quite a flap in the cloisters.

Some ufologists consider the Old Testament records the first UFO sighting. It is mentioned in the first chapter of Ezekiel, where the prophet has quite a bit to say about four winged - four - headed cherubim that seemed to be rushing about in wind and

rushing about in wind and fire on a wheeled vehicle.

His description is not notably precise. Perhaps it lost something in the King James translation.

If you think you have seen a UFO, go to the nearest police station, which will arrange for you to fill in a form for forwarding to the Air Department in Canberra.

As an encouragement to greater precision than Ezekiel

showed, this form lists 31 ques-

tions for you to answer.

If you are a conscientious form-filler-in and want to answer all the questions, it helps if you have noted the angle of elevation and the compass angle bearing of the UFO. But all that is realistically expected of you is that you give the time and place of the happening, describe the size, shape and color of the UFO and say how long it hung around.

hung around.

If the police think you are drunk, they may not be very helpful, I gather.

This strikes me as a serious flaw in the system. Anyone who did see what was in fact a flying saucer at close range would probably be shocked into giving a fair imitation of drunkenness.

Most UFO reports have been given a satisfactory explanation. The fact that a few — around three per cent — cannot be explained in terms of Earthly phenomena is the main reason that many sane, intelligent people believe in flying saucers.



Satisfactory explanations produced by the RAAF for many sightings include stray weather balloons, car lights reflected on cloud, Venus glimpsed through a haze, bits of junk from disintegrating American and Russian space probes.

and Russian space probes, comets and meteorites.

Two of my favorite reports and explanations are:—

● In Cabramatta, NSW, on April 29, 1970, a man was alarmed by “loud whooshing noises passing over his house.” Explanation: a nearby fireworks display.

● On October 28, 1970, a report from Binalong Bay, Tasmania, terrifyingly described an “aircraft-shaped object with two small wing projections.” This turned out to be . . . an aircraft, a Qantas trainer.

THIS IS WHERE WE COME IN



