

The loneliness of a UFO spotter

ON 31 December 1978, Melbourne television journalist Quentin Fogarty and a film crew travelling on an aircraft off the New Zealand coast saw and filmed bright, unidentified objects in the night sky. In 'Let's Hope They're Friendly', Fogarty tells how the chance encounter changed his life, broke friendships, strained marriages and affected the hopes and aspirations of many of those involved.

The sighting combined three elements — radar observation, visual observation by six people and a moving picture film. One experienced UFO investigator describes this combination as "unique in the annals of ufology". Many people, not least the news media, suggested the film showed an encounter with an Unidentified Flying Object, and research scientists from the American National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena, which has

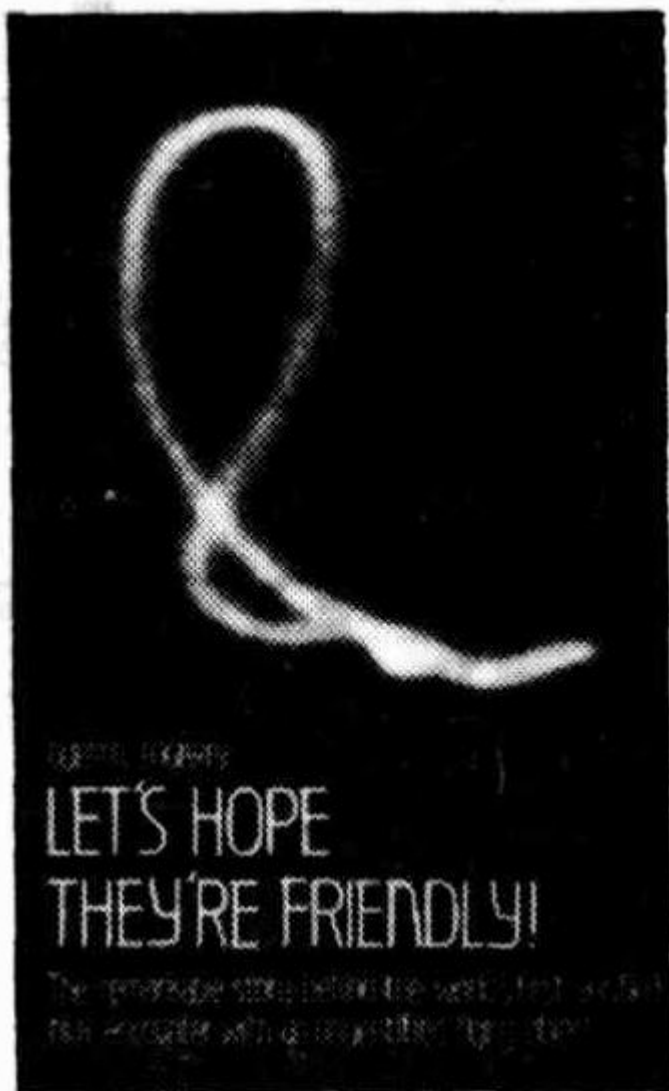
on **Aerial Phenomena**, which has investigated 20,000 reported UFO sightings during the past 22 years, concluded that the objects could not be explained in conventional terms.

But sceptics, informed and otherwise, have come up with a range of "rational" explanations, including sightings of various planets, light from the ground or from fishing boats, secret military exercises and even moonlight reflected off the underparts of migrating mutton birds!

The material in the book didn't convince me either way and, indeed, Fogarty's style and presentation do little to aid an objective evaluation of the evidence. What is more interesting is the author's account of how the apparently extraordinary occurrence of that December night affected a group of quite ordinary people.

The train of events is dotted with wrangles over ownership of the film's copyright, harsh words between old friends, the author's self-confessed

friends, the author's self-confessed "growing paranoia and panic", crank letters, malicious gossip and heated exchanges with debunkers. At one point, Fogarty recalls the period following the sightings as "days of hassles, mental and physical strain, rumour, soured friendships and, very occasionally, a little



bit of happiness", and adds, "I certainly got myself a world scoop, but at a price."

at a price."

Fogarty has become sympathetic to the conjecture by members of the American National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena that the American authorities want to "keep the lid on" UFOs because they don't know what they are. On a trip to the USA, he was shown documents which, he says, indicate UFOs are "travelling through American air space at will, buzzing military bases and missile

LET'S HOPE THEY'RE FRIENDLY. By *Quentin Fogarty*. Angus and Robertson. 178pp. Illustrated. \$9.95.

Reviewer:

BRIAN JEFFREY

sites . . . That sort of impotence is not something that a world super-power wants to brag about. So it would seem logical for the authorities either to ignore UFOs, or to belittle reported sightings."

Not surprisingly, the book comes to no firm conclusions, although a deal of "evidence" is presented together with selections from correspondence with supporters and detractors. Perhaps Professor J. Allen Hyneck, Professor Emeritus of

Hyneck, Professor Emeritus of Astronomy, Northwestern University, USA sums up the situation best when he writes in one such letter, "In my long association with the UFO subject, which reaches back well over thirty years, one outstanding fact has impressed me: the UFO experience, whatever its cause, is above all a human adventure. It is actually a frightfully human sort of thing, pulling out many of the stops on the keyboard of human emotions and reactions: awe, fear, wonder, the sense of the presence of an unknown world, of beauty and spectacle, and of extreme puzzlement".