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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:07,000

In New Zealand, mysterious lights pursue pilots through the skies.

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00:00:07,000 --> 00:00:12,000

Within a matter of weeks, we had two strong and unexplainable UFO incidents.

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00:00:12,000 --> 00:00:16,000

While a camera crew captured a baffling phenomena on film.

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00:00:16,000 --> 00:00:22,000

There are six unidentified objects coming straight towards us. Let's hope they're friendly.

5

00:00:22,000 --> 00:00:25,000

I still don't know what they were. I wish I did.

6

00:00:26,000 --> 00:00:32,000

Deep in the jungle of Vietnam, a group of US paratroopers have an extraordinary encounter.

7

00:00:32,000 --> 00:00:38,000

But here, from the back of my neck stood up, I thought, oh, look at that. What's going on here?

8

00:00:38,000 --> 00:00:41,000

The soldiers fear it's a secret weapon.

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00:00:41,000 --> 00:00:46,000

Never saw anything like it before, that, or ever again.

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00:00:47,000 --> 00:00:55,000

And the UK appears to be under siege as a wave of unknown objects sweeps across the country.

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00:00:55,000 --> 00:01:02,000

The government was absolutely inundated with UFO reports, which involved orange balls of light.

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00:01:02,000 --> 00:01:07,000

In one encounter, a police helicopter narrowly avoids a mid-air collision.

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00:01:07,000 --> 00:01:10,000

The public demand an explanation.

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00:01:10,000 --> 00:01:18,000

There was media and public panic, and this just played into a whole obsession with the UFO phenomenon.

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00:01:18,000 --> 00:01:22,000

Does anyone know what these phenomena are?

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00:01:22,000 --> 00:01:26,000

And do our governments know more than they ever reveal to us?

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00:01:26,000 --> 00:01:31,000

The answers may lie in the untold stories of UFO conspiracies.

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00:01:41,000 --> 00:01:47,000

South Island, New Zealand. December 20, 1978.

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00:01:47,000 --> 00:01:57,000

At Woodburn Air Force Base, warrant officer Ian Uffendell and Flight Service Officer Bill Frayme are on duty.

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00:01:57,000 --> 00:02:05,000

As the men make their final checks, something strange suddenly appears in the sky.

21

00:02:05,000 --> 00:02:10,000

And I said, well, what are those lights? And he said, well, I don't know.

22

00:02:10,000 --> 00:02:13,000

He said, I'll ring really Wellington radar.

23

00:02:13,000 --> 00:02:19,000

And that was when Bill said, oh, perhaps we're going to get a visit from the little green men.

24

00:02:19,000 --> 00:02:23,000

Senior air traffic controller John Cordy picks up the call.

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00:02:23,000 --> 00:02:26,000

He said, have we got any airplanes out of Cape Campbell?

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00:02:26,000 --> 00:02:29,000

Well, we didn't have. We asked him why.

27

00:02:29,000 --> 00:02:32,000

He said they got a lot of lights in that area.

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00:02:32,000 --> 00:02:36,000

We looked on our radar and we could see some little targets moving around.

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00:02:36,000 --> 00:02:42,000

As the mysterious lights travel across the sky, the unidentified radar targets follow them.

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00:02:42,000 --> 00:02:45,000

The movements were so exact and so precise.

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00:02:45,000 --> 00:02:49,000

They were being controlled by something or somebody somewhere.

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00:02:49,000 --> 00:02:55,000

So we had a joke actually. We said it was Father Christmas testing the slave of Christmas Eve.

33

00:02:55,000 --> 00:03:01,000

For John and Ian, it's all a bit of a laugh until they suddenly have a terrifying realization.

34

00:03:02,000 --> 00:03:10,000

Two pilots and a 20-tonne Argosy cargo plane are speeding through the sky at over 200 miles per hour.

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00:03:10,000 --> 00:03:13,000

The radar shows there's something in their path.

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00:03:13,000 --> 00:03:18,000

Any mid-air crash would be deadly.

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00:03:18,000 --> 00:03:24,000

As the plane flies over the Kaikoura coastline, an unidentified radar trace speeds towards it.

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00:03:24,000 --> 00:03:31,000

This object tracked that Argosy 90 degrees to it right on its wingtip for 40 miles.

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00:03:31,000 --> 00:03:37,000

It was airborne. It was at the same altitude as the Argosy, 14,000 feet going south.

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00:03:37,000 --> 00:03:44,000

What follows are the original recordings of the pilots and radar operators as the dramatic events unfolded.

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00:03:44,000 --> 00:03:48,000

We've got a science-brewing target of South-East of Wellington.

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00:03:48,000 --> 00:03:50,000

There's definitely something there.

43

00:03:50,000 --> 00:03:56,000

I've tried to find practical explanations and there's a big idiot.

44

00:03:56,000 --> 00:04:04,000

At 3.25 a.m., a bright light the size of a house appears and keeps track with the plane.

45

00:04:10,000 --> 00:04:13,000

At the time, there was quite an air of tension.

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00:04:13,000 --> 00:04:21,000

If the Argosy had said, this thing's now in front of it, it's the biggest metallic, it's open the door and we're going in, we wouldn't have been surprised.

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00:04:27,000 --> 00:04:32,000

Unknown objects in controlled airspace would pose a serious threat.

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00:04:33,000 --> 00:04:39,000

In their thousands of hours of flight experience, the pilots have never seen anything like this.

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00:04:40,000 --> 00:04:45,000

They file a report of their UFO sighting, but the Air Force takes no action.

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00:04:45,000 --> 00:04:52,000

I got teased something rotten about the night of the 21st. Nobody wanted to know it was Christmas.

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00:04:53,000 --> 00:05:00,000

Ex-Air Force pilot James McGehey can see why the pilot sightings weren't followed up.

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00:05:01,000 --> 00:05:11,000

As a pilot in the Air Force for over 20 years, I can say that pilots and lots of people do not want to hear this make mistakes.

53

00:05:11,000 --> 00:05:17,000

They make mistakes in flying airplanes, but they also make mistakes in identifying objects outside the cockpit.

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00:05:17,000 --> 00:05:19,000

It happens all the time.

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00:05:20,000 --> 00:05:32,000

The Ky-Cora lights is an interesting pace, but when you look at it, it's really about pilots' misperception.

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00:05:34,000 --> 00:05:40,000

But the lights can't be so easily explained. Air Force personnel aren't the only witnesses.

57

00:05:40,000 --> 00:05:50,000

Police sergeant from in town said, boy, did we have a night last night. He said we had lights down the coast.

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00:05:50,000 --> 00:05:55,000

He said no, we're sending down beams of light and people were ringing up about it all the time.

59

00:05:55,000 --> 00:05:58,000

He said, don't want another one like that.

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00:05:59,000 --> 00:06:03,000

By morning, the unexplained lights over Ky-Cora are a media sensation.

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00:06:05,000 --> 00:06:09,000

Journalist Quentin Fogarty cuts short his vacation to investigate.

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00:06:09,000 --> 00:06:15,000

I didn't really see it as being a particularly serious story. It was the silly season. It was Christmas.

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00:06:16,000 --> 00:06:27,000

Just before midnight on the evening of December 30th, Fogarty and a local camera crew boarded the very same Argosy aircraft and retraced the route of the encounter 10 days earlier.

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00:06:28,000 --> 00:06:37,000

When we boarded the Argosy, I thought we were going to get some good nighttime footage basically of the flight crew, two people at the controls.

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00:06:37,000 --> 00:06:44,000

I was going to do a couple of pieces to camera and then we'd shoot a little bit of footage out and see what would happen.

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00:06:44,000 --> 00:06:48,000

Maybe we might be able to see the coastline. That's all we thought we'd be getting.

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00:06:54,000 --> 00:07:01,000

We're now approaching the Clarence River where the highest concentration of UFOs was sighted on the morning of December 21st.

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00:07:01,000 --> 00:07:10,000

We're at an altitude of 14,000 feet and we're on exactly the same route taken by Captain Powell when he encountered those mysterious objects.

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00:07:11,000 --> 00:07:16,000

Almost half an hour into the flight, the Argosy is approaching the town of Ky-Cora.

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00:07:17,000 --> 00:07:26,000

I was in the cargo area doing a couple of pieces to camera. When Bill started, the pilot put his head down the stairwell and said,

71

00:07:26,000 --> 00:07:34,000

you guys should get up here. There's something happening. We're up the flight deck, up the little staircase, up on the flight deck.

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00:07:34,000 --> 00:07:41,000

That's when the crew pointed out these lights towards the town of Ky-Cora. So the show began.

73

00:07:44,000 --> 00:07:52,000

As they fly over Ky-Cora, balls of gold light start to appear and hover beside the plane. Then they disappear.

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00:07:52,000 --> 00:08:05,000

They were quite hypnotic. There would start as a black sky, then this little pin point of light would start and then it would just blossom up into this huge ball of light,

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00:08:05,000 --> 00:08:13,000

sort of gold with an orange and red tinge and then it would disappear. And there'd be three or four on a row and then they'd all go out again.

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00:08:13,000 --> 00:08:21,000

As if somebody was sort of switching them on and off, which, you know, this is about 14,000 feet in the day of the night.

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00:08:22,000 --> 00:08:29,000

Just as before, air traffic control picks up mysterious radar returns.

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00:08:29,000 --> 00:08:39,000

Sierra, Africa, the strong target, right in formation with you now, your target has doubled its height.

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00:08:39,000 --> 00:08:48,000

Cameraman David Crockett desperately tries to film the mesmerizing sight, but these distant lights are all his 16 millimeter camera manages to capture.

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00:08:48,000 --> 00:09:01,000

We have an object confirmed by Wellington radar. It's been following us for quite a while. It's about four miles away and it looks like a very faint star, but then it's a very bright, white, red light.

81

00:09:01,000 --> 00:09:14,000

When you've got professional pilots who are showing some concern, it's not surprising that you as a mere journalist out of this comfort zone is going to feel a bit apprehensive.

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00:09:14,000 --> 00:09:21,000

Air traffic control have no idea what's following the plane or if it's the same object John's radar picked up before.

83

00:09:21,000 --> 00:09:30,000

I control the airspace covering a third of the area of New Zealand and anything that wanted to fly at night, it had to have a clearance from me.

84

00:09:30,000 --> 00:09:36,000

And the strange object that we got didn't have a clearance. It wasn't an airplane.

85

00:09:36,000 --> 00:09:44,000

We've just heard from Wellington radar that we've got an object about a mile behind us and it's following us.

86

00:09:44,000 --> 00:09:46,000

Let's hope they're friendly.

87

00:09:46,000 --> 00:09:54,000

Suddenly realize that we had stumbled into a pretty major news story. So, I mean, it was exciting professionally from that point of view.

88

00:09:54,000 --> 00:10:04,000

It was exciting to be there physically and it was just exciting to see this. We had no idea what they were, but we knew this was highly unusual.

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00:10:04,000 --> 00:10:11,000

Fogarty has the story of his career, but for the rest of the crew, it's terrifying.

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00:10:11,000 --> 00:10:21,000

We can now see the lights of Christchurch in front of us. We've just been informed by Christchurch radar that there are six unidentified objects coming straight towards us.

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00:10:21,000 --> 00:10:25,000

It's really getting a bit frightening up here.

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00:10:25,000 --> 00:10:32,000

Despite their fears, the plane lands safely, but the Kaikoura event is far from over.

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00:10:32,000 --> 00:10:40,000

I was excited. I knew I was on to a big story and the chance of an encore was too much to resist.

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00:10:40,000 --> 00:10:57,000

Quentin is going back for more. The extraordinary footage he captures and the extensive government investigation that follows will make Kaikoura one of the most famous UFO cases in history.

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00:10:57,000 --> 00:11:01,000

1.45 a.m. December 31st Christchurch Airport.

96

00:11:01,000 --> 00:11:08,000

Ten days after the initial sighting, reporter Quentin Fogarty has just witnessed more strange lights in the sky over Kaikoura.

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00:11:08,000 --> 00:11:17,000

Despite the terrifying encounter, Quentin is obsessed with getting more footage. If he captures the strange phenomenon on film, he'll have the story of a lifetime.

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00:11:17,000 --> 00:11:27,000

It's about a quarter to two and in about another 20 minutes we intend to take off again in the Argosy and retrace the route we took only a few moments earlier.

99

00:11:27,000 --> 00:11:39,000

We've just heard from Wellington radar that there are still targets in the Kaikoura area. So this time we're hoping to get better film than we did last time and all I can say is we'll see what happens.

100

00:11:39,000 --> 00:11:46,000

At 2.16 a.m. the Argosy takes off from Christchurch Airport.

101

00:11:46,000 --> 00:11:53,000

Shortly into the flight, they're joined by the mysterious large white lights that seem to show up on radar once again.

102

00:11:53,000 --> 00:11:58,000

David Crockett has his camera at the ready and captures these perplexing images.

103

00:11:58,000 --> 00:12:10,000

We have an object confirmed by Wellington radar. It's been following us for quite a while. It looks like a very faint star but then it looks very bright, white and green light.

104

00:12:10,000 --> 00:12:19,000

This is just a little bit frightening but you can try to get something that has no logical explanation.

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00:12:19,000 --> 00:12:24,000

So what did the cameraman capture at 14,000 feet?

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00:12:24,000 --> 00:12:36,000

This is probably the single best frame from the entire film. This is when the camera movement stopped and we finally found a frame that wasn't moving, that was fairly stationary.

107

00:12:36,000 --> 00:12:46,000

And let's face it, that looks classic flying saucer shape. So when we saw that in the edit suite back at the station we thought we've got it.

108

00:12:46,000 --> 00:12:51,000

Quentin's UFO encounter is headline news.

109

00:12:51,000 --> 00:12:57,000

What you have just seen, we believe, is the best documented evidence ever of an unidentified flying object.

110

00:12:57,000 --> 00:13:03,000

The encounter is unique because it was seen by five people in the cabin of that plane.

111

00:13:03,000 --> 00:13:09,000

It was visible on radar in both Wellington and Christchurch. It was also visible on the aircraft's own radar system.

112

00:13:09,000 --> 00:13:14,000

Perhaps more importantly, it was finally recorded on television film.

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00:13:16,000 --> 00:13:22,000

Seeing no obvious threat to defense, the government are initially dismissive of the sightings.

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00:13:22,000 --> 00:13:28,000

But as global interest in the event grows, so does public pressure on the Prime Minister to respond.

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00:13:28,000 --> 00:13:34,000

Finally, on the 2nd of January 1979, the government launched an official investigation.

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00:13:34,000 --> 00:13:42,000

The country's top scientists put forward all sorts of earthly explanations for the sightings, from navigational beacons to city lights.

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00:13:42,000 --> 00:13:50,000

It turns out, extraordinarily, the most likely cause was to do with something thousands of feet below the surface, rather than above.

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00:13:55,000 --> 00:13:59,000

New Zealand squid exist at depths of up to 1600 feet.

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00:13:59,000 --> 00:14:04,000

But for reasons unknown to science, they are attracted to bright lights at night.

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00:14:05,000 --> 00:14:12,000

Squid fishermen have taken advantage of this behavioral quirk by decking out their boats with the biggest, brightest lights they can find.

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00:14:12,000 --> 00:14:16,000

The brighter the lights, the bigger the catch.

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00:14:16,000 --> 00:14:27,000

These squid fishing boats have a bank of 54,000 watt lights on them, raised on booms pointed down at the water.

123

00:14:28,000 --> 00:14:35,000

They can be seen from space. They're incredibly bright, and there were a whole fleet of them out there that night.

124

00:14:35,000 --> 00:14:43,000

On the night of the sightings, the New Zealand squid fleet was joined by 50 Japanese squid boats, making the fishing lights even brighter.

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00:14:43,000 --> 00:14:47,000

But John Cordy finds the suggestion of squid boats absurd.

126

00:14:48,000 --> 00:14:53,000

I've never seen a squid boat doing 140 knots at 14,000 feet.

127

00:14:53,000 --> 00:14:56,000

Earthquakes, earthquakes, but this is getting ridiculous.

128

00:14:56,000 --> 00:15:02,000

Another likely explanation put forward by the government was that the lights had come from an object in the night sky.

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00:15:02,000 --> 00:15:06,000

Astronomer Professor Nigel Hynbest agrees.

130

00:15:06,000 --> 00:15:09,000

The brilliant planet Venus is often mistaken for a UFO.

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00:15:09,000 --> 00:15:14,000

When it's low in the sky, it can look like an object that's flying close to the Earth.

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00:15:14,000 --> 00:15:19,000

So that is an obvious candidate for the UFO seen from New Zealand.

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00:15:19,000 --> 00:15:24,000

And in fact, on this particular night, it was visible in the early hours of the morning.

134

00:15:24,000 --> 00:15:31,000

As Venus' orbit brings it closer to Earth, it shines brighter than every star in the night sky.

135

00:15:31,000 --> 00:15:36,000

It turns out on these particular nights, Venus was super bright.

136

00:15:36,000 --> 00:15:41,000

It was about four times brighter than its normal brightness.

137

00:15:41,000 --> 00:15:49,000

Both Venus and the squid fishing boats were in the exact direction that the pilot was looking at these lights.

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00:15:51,000 --> 00:15:55,000

But on closer inspection, a hole opens up in the Venus theory.

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00:15:55,000 --> 00:16:00,000

On December 31st, the lights were first witnessed at 12.13 a.m.

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00:16:00,000 --> 00:16:04,000

But Venus didn't rise in the sky until 3.28 a.m.

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00:16:04,000 --> 00:16:09,000

How could Quentin and the pilots have seen a planet below the horizon?

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00:16:10,000 --> 00:16:14,000

James McGehey believes rare atmospheric conditions hold the answer.

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00:16:14,000 --> 00:16:20,000

Venus was either just on the horizon or slightly below the horizon.

144

00:16:20,000 --> 00:16:27,000

But even if it's below the horizon, you can actually still see it because of refraction effects.

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00:16:27,000 --> 00:16:31,000

Under certain atmospheric conditions, light can be bent or refracted.

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00:16:31,000 --> 00:16:39,000

When light is bent down below the horizon, objects that would normally be hidden by the curvature of the Earth are brought into view.

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00:16:40,000 --> 00:16:47,000

You have a situation where the atmosphere of the Earth actually sort of acts like a lens.

148

00:16:47,000 --> 00:16:52,000

You see this in the sun when it comes up and sets every day.

149

00:16:52,000 --> 00:17:00,000

You can actually see the sun above the horizon some amount of time before it actually is above the horizon

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00:17:00,000 --> 00:17:05,000

because the atmosphere is refracting the image of the sun above the horizon.

151

00:17:05,000 --> 00:17:11,000

Venus or squid lights are the most widely accepted explanations for the Kaikoura UFOs.

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00:17:11,000 --> 00:17:15,000

But they still only address half the story.

153

00:17:15,000 --> 00:17:21,000

There are, Franco, the strong target. Right in formation with you now.

154

00:17:21,000 --> 00:17:29,000

Nobody but nobody correlated the radar returns with the things that the airplanes had seen.

155

00:17:29,000 --> 00:17:32,000

Can we move it towards them?

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00:17:33,000 --> 00:17:40,000

Boat lights, or a planet millions of miles away, fail to account for the objects detected by multiple independent radars.

157

00:17:41,000 --> 00:17:46,000

For radar expert Chris Mooreshead, the evidence is hard to dismiss.

158

00:17:47,000 --> 00:17:55,000

Radars extremely reliable. If you get two radars plus an airborne radar all giving a response in the same location,

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00:17:55,000 --> 00:17:58,000

then you're fairly safe to assume that there is something there.

160

00:17:58,000 --> 00:18:01,000

What that object is, is up for grabs really.

161

00:18:01,000 --> 00:18:07,000

You know it's far too fast for a boat and birds and you know that or... I don't know what it is.

162

00:18:07,000 --> 00:18:13,000

The experience level of the radar operators also makes misidentification seem unlikely.

163

00:18:13,000 --> 00:18:18,000

I'm confident the radar was 100% online and working perfectly.

164

00:18:18,000 --> 00:18:24,000

Generally it's fairly obvious aircraft will be flying at fairly high speed.

165

00:18:24,000 --> 00:18:27,000

100 miles an hour, 200 miles an hour.

166

00:18:27,000 --> 00:18:31,000

Of course the ship would be just doing 10, 15 miles an hour.

167

00:18:31,000 --> 00:18:36,000

So very rapidly they'd be able to differentiate between the two.

168

00:18:36,000 --> 00:18:40,000

But the New Zealand radar was far from perfect.

169

00:18:40,000 --> 00:18:51,000

This radar scope was notorious for producing spurious targets, angels, noise.

170

00:18:51,000 --> 00:18:56,000

It had been known to pick up ships in the bay and other things.

171

00:18:57,000 --> 00:19:00,000

It's not just radar that can be unreliable.

172

00:19:00,000 --> 00:19:06,000

Some studies have shown that up to 70% of the time, eyewitness testimony is unreliable.

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00:19:10,000 --> 00:19:17,000

Despite the many explanations put forward by the government, the Kaikoura incident continues to be hotly debated.

174

00:19:17,000 --> 00:19:22,000

I've never seen a horrible light in Wellington move south at 140 knots

175

00:19:22,000 --> 00:19:25,000

and Jupiter or Venus has never appeared on my radar.

176

00:19:25,000 --> 00:19:28,000

No other sightings have been reported before or since.

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00:19:28,000 --> 00:19:32,000

So for Quentin there may never be an answer.

178

00:19:32,000 --> 00:19:38,000

Unless whatever these things were come and tell us what they were, if they're capable of it,

179

00:19:38,000 --> 00:19:42,000

I think this will always remain a bit of a mystery.

180

00:19:48,000 --> 00:19:55,000

The jungle of Vietnam is now a tranquil haven for wildlife.

181

00:19:55,000 --> 00:19:59,000

But not so long ago, this forest was a killing field.

182

00:20:05,000 --> 00:20:08,000

Southern Vietnam 1967.

183

00:20:11,000 --> 00:20:15,000

America enters its third year of active conflict.

184

00:20:16,000 --> 00:20:20,000

Over 450,000 troops are already on the ground

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00:20:20,000 --> 00:20:25,000

and the latest recruits from the 173rd Airborne Infantry have just arrived.

186

00:20:27,000 --> 00:20:30,000

Paratrooper John Leppleman is among them.

187

00:20:32,000 --> 00:20:35,000

I knew it was for real right away.

188

00:20:35,000 --> 00:20:42,000

The guys walking by, dirty fatigues, they're tired, their rifles were over their shoulders.

189

00:20:43,000 --> 00:20:48,000

They looked like they'd been through hell and a lot of them had.

190

00:20:48,000 --> 00:20:53,000

The paratroopers barely have time to unpack before the order comes to move out.

191

00:20:54,000 --> 00:21:00,000

As part of the defense of Saigon, they are to root out Viet Cong strongholds in the Mekong Delta.

192

00:21:03,000 --> 00:21:10,000

Oh my God, I've only been here a few days and I have to jump out of an aircraft into the jungle.

193

00:21:12,000 --> 00:21:19,000

In the early hours of February 22nd, Leppleman and his unit begin their long trek through the

jungle.

194

00:21:22,000 --> 00:21:27,000

Over the next couple of months, the brutal conditions will test them to the limit.

195

00:21:30,000 --> 00:21:37,000

Hot human clothes were rotting off of us. It wasn't easy. It wasn't like in the movies, trust me.

196

00:21:38,000 --> 00:21:45,000

The paratroopers are unfamiliar with the climate, the terrain and jungle warfare.

197

00:21:47,000 --> 00:21:53,000

Vietnamese historian Lien Heng Nguyen believes this gave the Viet Cong the upper hand.

198

00:21:53,000 --> 00:22:02,000

American soldiers, I'm sure, were terrified of not being able to see the enemy in the dense foliage and for the host of booby traps that awaited them.

199

00:22:03,000 --> 00:22:10,000

In contrast, the Viet Cong forces would have had a lot of local bandages because they were much more familiar with the terrain and climate.

200

00:22:13,000 --> 00:22:18,000

But after months in the jungle, the 173rd are closing in.

201

00:22:19,000 --> 00:22:26,000

They summit a hill near the village of Duc Hoa and receive intel the Viet Cong are camped on the hilltop opposite.

202

00:22:27,000 --> 00:22:37,000

Being so close to the enemy, everyone is on edge. The men arm themselves to the teeth, but nothing will prepare them for the strange encounter ahead.

203

00:22:38,000 --> 00:22:46,000

I was up about 2.30 in the morning, dark, really, really dark. And I couldn't hear any noise or anything.

204

00:22:46,000 --> 00:22:52,000

I saw this light down in the valley. And other guys did too. We're all looking at each other like, what the hell?

205

00:22:53,000 --> 00:23:01,000

Levelman watches the strange light between him and the Viet Cong growing brilliance until it is

blinding and the jungle is lit up as bright as day.

206

00:23:05,000 --> 00:23:10,000

It got brighter and it got brighter. And it went straight up out of the valley.

207

00:23:13,000 --> 00:23:18,000

I went over here and went from the back of my neck stood up. I thought, oh, look at that. What's going on here?

208

00:23:19,000 --> 00:23:25,000

He watches the lights silently rise up from the valley floor and zoom off into space.

209

00:23:27,000 --> 00:23:34,000

It disappeared. It was like, damn, you know, pretty scary, pretty scary stuff.

210

00:23:35,000 --> 00:23:38,000

Lien Heng believes the enemy would have been just as stunned.

211

00:23:39,000 --> 00:23:53,000

The Viet Cong would have been extremely terrified as well. Although the idea of extraterrestrials would have been uncommon in Vietnamese culture and society at the time, the concept of malevolent

spirits seeking to harm humans would not have been.

212

00:23:55,000 --> 00:24:02,000

Darkness returns and the jungle is eerily silent. John recalls the men's confusion.

213

00:24:03,000 --> 00:24:09,000

We've never seen anything like it. Some of the guys looked at me and said, it's probably a helicopter.

214

00:24:10,000 --> 00:24:13,000

I said, yeah, a helicopter that doesn't make noise. Show me one.

215

00:24:14,000 --> 00:24:20,000

The men are too scared to sleep, but sunrise will bring an even greater threat.

216

00:24:21,000 --> 00:24:41,000

Just before dawn in the Vietnamese jungle and the 173rd Airborne move out, still mystified by the strange light in the forest, they must now wage war on the Viet Cong.

217

00:24:42,000 --> 00:24:49,000

They approach warily, expecting a bloody fight, but the enemy camp is completely abandoned.

218

00:24:52,000 --> 00:24:58,000

Their gear was scattered everywhere, pots, pans, belts. They didn't know what it was and it took off.

219

00:25:00,000 --> 00:25:08,000

The Viet Cong probably abandoned the camp because they interpreted the light as some sort of revolutionary new American weapon or aircraft.

220

00:25:08,000 --> 00:25:15,000

We have to remember that the Viet Cong were fighting the biggest superpower in the world with advanced technology, so you can just imagine how terrified they would have been.

221

00:25:16,000 --> 00:25:20,000

According to John, the American soldiers are just as confused.

222

00:25:21,000 --> 00:25:25,000

Fellow paratrooper Steve Welch even wrote home about his inexplicable encounter.

223

00:25:27,000 --> 00:25:35,000

Last night I saw UFO. It came out from behind the mountain and I watched it until it went so high you couldn't see it. And no sound either.

224

00:25:39,000 --> 00:25:42,000

So what could have been the source of the mysterious light?

225

00:25:43,000 --> 00:25:47,000

Helicopter pilot David Higgins considers the possibility of a military aircraft.

226

00:25:49,000 --> 00:26:01,000

One of the comments from one of the witnesses was saying that the aircraft or the object then actually started moving vertically upwards, which could indicate to me the afterburner of a fast jet.

227

00:26:02,000 --> 00:26:10,000

Afterburners inject fuel into the turbine of a jet engine, giving it sufficient power to go supersonic.

228

00:26:11,000 --> 00:26:16,000

The application of afterburner would produce a flame effect or orange glow.

229

00:26:18,000 --> 00:26:26,000

And again on the application of afterburner that does produce speed, so the aircraft actually then would be flying away at a very fast speed indeed.

230

00:26:26,000 --> 00:26:30,000

But for Leppleman there is a major problem.

231

00:26:31,000 --> 00:26:38,000

No noise, not a sound. I saw all kinds of aircraft coming and going over the years. They're all noisy.

232

00:26:40,000 --> 00:26:49,000

Blindingly bright, yet totally silent, the object seems to defy explanation. But Higgins has another idea.

233

00:26:50,000 --> 00:27:04,000

The fact that eyewitnesses on the ground say that it almost turned like daylight. The fact that the whole area was lit points initially to the fact that it is some sort of illumination flare to actually illuminate an area of land beneath it.

234

00:27:05,000 --> 00:27:12,000

Burning at over 2000 degrees Fahrenheit, a magnesium flare emits an extraordinary amount of light and burns almost silently.

235

00:27:13,000 --> 00:27:22,000

During the Vietnam War we know that there were several types of military aircraft capable of deploying flares from fast jets to tactical military transport.

236

00:27:23,000 --> 00:27:36,000

It's very easy if you witness an object that you're not expecting and you haven't got that experience in your database to actually misidentify, possibly jump to conclusions to what you think it might be.

237

00:27:37,000 --> 00:27:40,000

Could the whole encounter have been nothing more than a flare?

238

00:27:41,000 --> 00:27:49,000

We knew what flares looked like. My god, we'd seen them months after months after months dropped out of aircraft or we'd fire them ourselves.

239

00:27:50,000 --> 00:27:54,000

No, no, no flare I guarantee it.

240

00:27:56,000 --> 00:27:59,000

Leppleman is convinced he saw something from another world.

241

00:28:00,000 --> 00:28:06,000

UFO, that's all it could be. Because with no sound and it was so bright.

242

00:28:06,000 --> 00:28:12,000

I mean our flares aren't that bright, our aircraft aren't that bright. I never saw anything like it.

243

00:28:13,000 --> 00:28:21,000

But experts believe fatigue, the unfamiliar terrain and the threat of a vietnam attack may have prevented a more logical interpretation.

244

00:28:22,000 --> 00:28:34,000

You have to remember that these guys had been in a jungle at night hiding on surveillance in complete darkness for quite a while when all of a sudden this object, this bright object appeared.

245

00:28:34,000 --> 00:28:41,000

And we're between, was it a flare, was it afterburner and we're really just going around the two options at the moment.

246

00:28:42,000 --> 00:28:45,000

The truth is we don't know what those guys on the ground saw.

247

00:28:46,000 --> 00:28:57,000

But there is one other plausible explanation. Bright, silent and capable of tracking rapidly across the sky, a military searchlight is a good fit for this UFO.

248

00:28:58,000 --> 00:29:07,000

The 100 million candle power M151 searchlight used in Vietnam can shine up to 10 miles and light up an entire platoon.

249

00:29:08,000 --> 00:29:14,000

Had them in mistake in a searchlight being for a UFO or had they encountered something truly unexplained.

250

00:29:15,000 --> 00:29:21,000

Whatever it was that flew out of the forest that night, it may have saved John Leppleman's life.

251

00:29:22,000 --> 00:29:27,000

Let no firefight thank God because the enemy took off running. We'd have taken casualties.

252

00:29:28,000 --> 00:29:31,000

Yeah, we were all going. Good deal.

253

00:29:31,000 --> 00:29:50,000

Deep within the walls of the Ministry of Defense or M.O.D., the British government investigated UFO sightings for over 50 years.

254

00:29:52,000 --> 00:29:57,000

Few know more about this secret research than former M.O.D. operative Nick Pope.

255

00:29:57,000 --> 00:30:13,000

I worked for the Ministry of Defense for 21 years. I had to investigate the two or 300 UFO sightings I received each year and determine was there any potential threat to the defense of the United Kingdom.

256

00:30:14,000 --> 00:30:21,000

After decades of UFO investigations, Nick thinks he's heard it all. But in 2008, a new mystery begins.

257

00:30:22,000 --> 00:30:33,000

The summers of 2008 and 2009 were incredibly busy for the M.O.D. in relation to UFO reports, many of which involved orange balls of light.

258

00:30:43,000 --> 00:30:47,000

One eyewitness is Liverpool-based news photographer Barry Mills.

259

00:30:48,000 --> 00:31:02,000

I had the lights off so the night sky was visible. I suddenly noticed a single kind of orange light outside just in the edge of my field of vision. So I was a bit perplexed.

260

00:31:03,000 --> 00:31:06,000

I genuinely wondered, is this a UFO? Have I finally seen one?

261

00:31:07,000 --> 00:31:13,000

Thinking he might be onto a news story, Barry grabs his camera and photographs the mysterious light.

262

00:31:13,000 --> 00:31:23,000

I used the washing line in the back garden as a kind of a sling to steady it because I didn't have a tripod available and filed off a couple of frames of the light.

263

00:31:24,000 --> 00:31:30,000

Moments later, the hovering phenomena disappears, leaving Barry with only this blurred image.

264

00:31:34,000 --> 00:31:41,000

The following morning, the Echo newspaper where Barry works is inundated with calls from people who have seen the same thing.

265

00:31:42,000 --> 00:31:50,000

I felt a lot more positive that other people had seen it, that I wasn't actually going mad and I had not been hallucinating or dreaming.

266

00:31:52,000 --> 00:31:58,000

The Echo runs the story and before Barry knows it, his photo is being shared around the world.

267

00:31:59,000 --> 00:32:10,000

That, believe it or not, is the picture I took and a couple of national papers in the UK picked it up and I was surprised to find it even on a Vietnamese news website about a day later.

268

00:32:11,000 --> 00:32:17,000

Global media interest in the incident continues to spread, but the British authorities remain silent.

269

00:32:19,000 --> 00:32:33,000

The government doesn't say much about the UFO phenomenon because the media and the public tend to get over excited about UFOs and the government doesn't want to encourage this kind of panic and hysteria.

270

00:32:34,000 --> 00:32:38,000

Whatever it was Barry and the others witnessed that night, they're not alone.

271

00:32:39,000 --> 00:32:44,000

Reports of glowing orbs are pouring into the MOD from around the country.

272

00:32:45,000 --> 00:32:50,000

Recently declassified files reveal the bizarre accounts being made.

273

00:32:51,000 --> 00:32:54,000

25 of these amber objects were seen flashing lights flowing from my house and out of somewhere.

274

00:32:55,000 --> 00:32:57,000

My wife and I recently witnessed six UFOs.

275

00:32:58,000 --> 00:33:03,000

One 2008 sighting had even been captured on video by a student on his way back from the pub.

276

00:33:04,000 --> 00:33:15,000

It was about coming up to 12 o'clock midnight and I looked into the sky and I saw these strange lights moving right across the sky and it was like they were on a route.

277

00:33:16,000 --> 00:33:19,000

They definitely were controlled by something.

278

00:33:21,000 --> 00:33:27,000

I just grabbed my camera and I just stood there and just filmed it. Disbelief really.

279

00:33:27,000 --> 00:33:34,000

Stephen watches the glowing spheres for over 10 minutes before they suddenly disappear completely.

280

00:33:35,000 --> 00:33:44,000

I didn't mention it to anyone. I just thought nothing of it until I heard these other sightings that were in the paper.

281

00:33:45,000 --> 00:33:48,000

Perplexed, Stephen turns to his video footage for clues.

282

00:33:49,000 --> 00:33:56,000

This is the footage I shot. As you can see there's two of the bright lights by there.

283

00:33:57,000 --> 00:34:02,000

I just saw these still images up as well. I found a red ring going around like a flying saucer.

284

00:34:03,000 --> 00:34:04,000

Very strange.

285

00:34:05,000 --> 00:34:10,000

So just what did Stephen film and was it the same object witnessed by others around the UK?

286

00:34:13,000 --> 00:34:19,000

Between 2007 and 2009 the number of UFO reports to the M.O.D. tripled.

287

00:34:19,000 --> 00:34:24,000

As around 20% of all UFO sightings can be explained by astronomical events,

288

00:34:25,000 --> 00:34:28,000

Professor Carolyn Crawford says the answer could be in the stars.

289

00:34:29,000 --> 00:34:35,000

There certainly are aspects that are very familiar to the idea of meteors or even fireballs streaking through the sky.

290

00:34:36,000 --> 00:34:40,000

The idea of the colours, the bright light, the larger the meteor, the more energy that's produced.

291

00:34:41,000 --> 00:34:47,000

It can glow incredibly bright and if that disintegrates it can perhaps create several objects

292

00:34:47,000 --> 00:34:50,000

each glowing following the same trajectory across the sky.

293

00:34:51,000 --> 00:34:57,000

The timing of Barry and Stephen's sightings also adds weight to the idea the unexplained objects were meteors.

294

00:34:58,000 --> 00:35:03,000

One way that you can get several moving lights in the sky at once is when we have a meteor shower.

295

00:35:04,000 --> 00:35:10,000

And these happen because there are trails of debris in space usually left behind in the wake of comets.

296

00:35:10,000 --> 00:35:14,000

The Earth passes through debris fields of rubble at the same time each year,

297

00:35:15,000 --> 00:35:18,000

giving rise to dramatic meteor showers on specific dates.

298

00:35:19,000 --> 00:35:24,000

The May sightings in the United Kingdom coincided perfectly with the Eta Aquarid meteor shower.

299

00:35:27,000 --> 00:35:32,000

You're much more likely to see a whole load of shooting stars during one of these meteor showers.

300

00:35:33,000 --> 00:35:36,000

It's possible you could mistake it for some kind of UFO activity.

301

00:35:37,000 --> 00:35:39,000

But the UFO witnesses are unconvinced.

302

00:35:40,000 --> 00:35:42,000

The meteor strike was straight to the ground.

303

00:35:43,000 --> 00:35:45,000

Well, I assume it is. It doesn't stay in the sky.

304

00:35:46,000 --> 00:35:51,000

I've seen quite a few meteor showers. That wasn't the case in what I saw at all.

305

00:35:52,000 --> 00:35:58,000

The police are still skeptical until another incident threatens the lives of their own men.

306

00:35:58,000 --> 00:36:13,000

In 2008, the UK is besieged by a series of strange lights. But the most dangerous is yet to come.

307

00:36:14,000 --> 00:36:20,000

Cardiff, Wales, June 8. A police helicopter returns from a routine night patrol.

308

00:36:22,000 --> 00:36:27,000

As the crew approach St. Athen Air Force Base, something extraordinary appears.

309

00:36:29,000 --> 00:36:36,000

An unidentified object flies toward them, narrowly avoiding a mid-air collision.

310

00:36:40,000 --> 00:36:46,000

Cardiff resident Amanda Berry claims to have witnessed the aftermath of this extraordinary encounter.

311

00:36:47,000 --> 00:36:55,000

When I saw these lights through the window, just traveling across the top of the rooftops, I thought, well, that's unusual.

312

00:36:55,000 --> 00:37:00,000

Meanwhile, this helicopter appeared and appeared to be chasing the lights.

313

00:37:02,000 --> 00:37:07,000

I could hear the buzz of the engine sort of straining to sort of keep up with whatever this thing was.

314

00:37:08,000 --> 00:37:11,000

The incident bears a striking similarity to the previous sightings.

315

00:37:12,000 --> 00:37:18,000

Although police do confirm there is an unidentified aircraft in the sky that night, they deny chasing it.

316

00:37:19,000 --> 00:37:27,000

South Wales police can confirm the South and East Wales Air Support Unit sighted an unusual aircraft on the 8th of June, 2008.

317

00:37:30,000 --> 00:37:37,000

The helicopter crew's encounter shocked the authorities. A meteor shower is the most likely explanation for the orange spheres,

318

00:37:38,000 --> 00:37:41,000

but the low altitude of the sighting poses a major problem for this theory.

319

00:37:42,000 --> 00:37:47,000

Where a meteor is burning up in the sky, it is a huge height above the ground.

320

00:37:48,000 --> 00:37:57,000

We're talking tens of kilometres, 18, 90, 100 kilometres up in altitude, and in a very different part of our atmosphere from where you get aircraft, for example.

321

00:37:58,000 --> 00:38:01,000

So what were the strange spheres of light hovering over England?

322

00:38:03,000 --> 00:38:07,000

One theory about some of these sightings was that we were dealing with military flares.

323

00:38:08,000 --> 00:38:15,000

Now the description on the face of it sounds quite promising. Military flares will appear as orange or red balls of light,

324

00:38:16,000 --> 00:38:21,000

and they will sometimes just appear to hang in the air, and then when they burn out, they'll vanish.

325

00:38:22,000 --> 00:38:27,000

Military flares have been responsible for UFO sightings in the past. Could this be the key?

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00:38:28,000 --> 00:38:35,000

What doesn't fit with the flare theory is the location. Many of these sightings were over built-up areas,

327

00:38:35,000 --> 00:38:43,000

and the military would be dropping flares exclusively in rural areas which are used for military flying training.

328

00:38:49,000 --> 00:38:55,000

The mysterious event continues to baffle the M-O-D, and to the couple come forward claiming to know the truth.

329

00:38:56,000 --> 00:39:03,000

Not for one minute did anybody that was involved in the wedding think that it was any relation to what we were doing.

330

00:39:05,000 --> 00:39:11,000

On the same night of the police helicopter UFO encounter, Lynn and Lucy Thomas are celebrating their wedding.

331

00:39:12,000 --> 00:39:19,000

We decided that year not to go to Glastonbury, we were going to spend the money on our wedding instead, so we wanted to have a festival vibe wedding.

332

00:39:20,000 --> 00:39:28,000

We had an outside stage, we had fire dancers, and we had an outside fire, and we'd also bought some lanterns.

333

00:39:28,000 --> 00:39:36,000

Lit as a symbol of good luck in ancient China, paper lanterns had become increasingly popular in the UK as a way of marking an occasion.

334

00:39:39,000 --> 00:39:44,000

We let a load off. It was really pretty just seeing them all floating away in the sky.

335

00:39:46,000 --> 00:39:53,000

They watch their lanterns drift away, oblivious to the fact that a police helicopter is heading straight for them.

336

00:39:54,000 --> 00:40:03,000

At one stage the bride maids are saying, look at that, there's the police helicopter, but it was just hovering there.

337

00:40:04,000 --> 00:40:09,000

It was a weekend, it was a Saturday night, and the police helicopter is hovering, it's doing something else.

338

00:40:10,000 --> 00:40:14,000

We didn't cross my mind at all actually, that it was a problem. It was in addition to the wedding

actually.

339

00:40:15,000 --> 00:40:18,000

We've got Skyland, we've got a police helicopter as well, that's nice.

340

00:40:19,000 --> 00:40:25,000

The happy couple head off on their honeymoon, unaware of the UFO frenzy unfolding back home.

341

00:40:26,000 --> 00:40:40,000

I can remember I flipped open the laptop and the news page came up and I could see that there was UFO sightings in south Wales, and I can remember originally just saying, oh, look at that.

342

00:40:41,000 --> 00:40:52,000

And then I'm reading through, the 7th of June, 11 o'clock, police helicopter over the Bristol Channel, and it was just, oh my goodness.

343

00:40:53,000 --> 00:40:54,000

That's a lantern.

344

00:40:55,000 --> 00:41:00,000

Its estimated 200,000 Chinese lanterns are released each summer in the UK.

345

00:41:01,000 --> 00:41:06,000

Had the Ministry of Defence finally solved the mystery of the spheres of fire.

346

00:41:06,000 --> 00:41:18,000

The summer months are very popular for Chinese lanterns. People are outside, for example, having barbecues, and very often that's the perfect place to let these things off.

347

00:41:20,000 --> 00:41:28,000

Lots of people are doing it in lots of different locations. You'll get reports of waves of UFO sightings over built up areas.

348

00:41:29,000 --> 00:41:32,000

Lynn and Lucy are sure they're responsible for the carnival sightings.

349

00:41:33,000 --> 00:41:37,000

I've got no doubt in my mind at all that that was our skylightings. Absolutely none.

350

00:41:38,000 --> 00:41:39,000

Yeah, guilty.

351

00:41:41,000 --> 00:41:44,000

But other eyewitnesses reject the lantern explanation.

352

00:41:45,000 --> 00:41:53,000

So what we're looking at here is a normal Chinese lantern. And as you can see, that, that, that colour is just orange or yellow.

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00:41:54,000 --> 00:42:01,000

But the footage I've got is all multi-different coloured lights and stuff. So that just proves again that it's definitely not a Chinese lantern.

354

00:42:02,000 --> 00:42:12,000

Chinese lantern or not, one thing is for sure. As the popularity of lanterns rose, the number of UFO reports to the MOD rose with it.

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00:42:13,000 --> 00:42:26,000

From about 2005 through to 2009, maybe 60, 70, 80% of UFO reports received and investigated by the Ministry of Defence turned out to be Chinese lanterns.

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00:42:27,000 --> 00:42:35,000

The number of these reports and requests for information proved too much for the MOD UFO project to handle.

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00:42:36,000 --> 00:42:41,000

In 2009, the government UFO desk was closed down.

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00:42:42,000 --> 00:42:46,000

Chinese lanterns killed the Ministry of Defence's UFO project.

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00:42:46,000 --> 00:42:55,000

With the government no longer watching the skies, it's up to others to find the answers to the unsolved UFO conspiracies.