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Bizarre UFO tale no worse than other Clinton stories

By Steve Wilson  
The Arizona Republic  
March 18, 1998

Speaking with people around the country last week about UFOs and the first anniversary of the "Phoenix Lights," I was told a remarkable story that didn't make my column.

I omitted it because the account came from only one source, because it had no corroboration, and because it seemed preposterous. It simply didn't have enough credibility to be published.

But thinking it over, and reflecting on coverage of the Clinton sex scandal, I've reconsidered. The standards for what constitutes a news story have fallen so significantly in recent weeks that the UFO account can now qualify as newsworthy. Since the story involves the president, I'm even more sure it merits public disclosure.

Plus, if I don't get it in print now, Internet ace Matt Drudge might scoop me.

Here's the skinny:

The strange lights over Phoenix were only one unusual happening on the night of March 13, 1997. A U.S. reconnaissance satellite, which presumably could have picked up the source of the lights, went dead for no apparent reason. About the same time, the Pentagon increased the country's military preparedness to DEFCON 3 (the highest state of readiness for peacetime conditions).

You may recall that on the same evening, President Clinton was staying at the Florida estate of golfer Greg Norman. The White House said that after talking with Norman late into the night, Clinton tripped on a step and seriously injured his knee.

What really occurred, my source reports, is that the commander in chief was notified of the UFO activity and had to be moved quickly to a more secure location where he could oversee U.S. defense activities. In the

rush by the Secret Service to hustle him away, he tripped and damaged the knee.

My source, who asked to remain anonymous, is a nationally known UFO expert. His account isn't much less reliable than multiple stories reported in recent weeks about Clinton's personal life. I'm not talking about the likes of Hard Copy or the tabloids or Drudge, the rumormonger correctly described by one critic as "the troll under the bridge of Internet journalism." I'm talking about respected mainstream media.

ABC News reporter Jackie Judd reported that a source said Monica Lewinsky said she had saved a dress with the president's semen stain on it. That disclosure was picked up and repeated by most other media. "This could provide physical evidence of what really happened," Judd said. One problem: No stain was never found.

The Dallas Morning News wrote that a Secret Service agent had seen Clinton and Lewinsky in a "compromising situation" in the White House, a report quickly spread nationally by the Associated Press. But after its first edition, the paper pulled the story, and it remains unconfirmed.

The Wall Street Journal reported that a White House steward told a grand jury that he saw Clinton and Lewinsky alone in a study next to the Oval Office. A few days later, the paper said the story was false.

Such sloppy work follows the article that started the Clinton sex scandal, David Brock's "Troopergate" in the American Spectator. That piece led to Paula Jones' lawsuit and now to allegations by Lewinsky and Kathleen Willey. Brock apologized for the story last week, saying he was "more wrong than right" in "ransacking" Clinton's personal life.

"The troopers were greedy and had slimy motives, and I knew it," he said in his letter of apology. "But that wasn't going to stand in my way."

Brock was ahead of his time, a man far more interested in hot copy than cold facts. The behavior he now regrets is no longer limited to malicious ideologues on a mission; it has infected mainstream media.

Third-rate reporting like Brock's is thriving. In fact, passing along the bizarre UFO tale in this column is just mildly irresponsible by comparison. To keep up with today's headlines, it needs more juice. If only my source had gone a step further and told me that aliens years ago had abducted Clinton and jacked up his libido, I might have made the network news.

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