

Arizonans say the truth about UFO is out there

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PHOENIX, Ariz. -- Something happened in the skies over Arizona the night of March 13. No one is sure what it was, but thousands saw it, dozens videotaped it and people all over the state are haunted by it still.

"I'll never be the same," Bill Greiner, 51, a cement truck driver, says. He was hauling a load down a mountain north of Phoenix when he saw two brilliantly lit orbs, shaped like spinning tops. "Before this, if anybody'd told me they saw a UFO, I would've said, 'Yeah, and I believe in the tooth fairy.'

"Now I've got a whole new view. I may be just a dumb truck driver, but I've seen something that don't belong here."

So what did Greiner and everybody else see? That question has rattled around this state for three months. Officials at Luke Air Force Base in nearby Glendale are bombarded with calls for an investigation, even though the U.S. government is officially out of the UFO business.

The subject surfaces constantly on talk shows. And the army of people demanding answers has grown to the point that a Phoenix city councilwoman has launched an inquiry.

It could have been a hoax. It could have been an illusion. It could have been almost anything. But the events of March 13 may add up to the most contentious and confounding UFO report since the so-called UFO age was launched 50 years ago by the legendary crash of a "spaceship" outside Roswell, N.M.

The sightings come at a time when interest in UFOs borders on a national obsession, saturating the movie industry, television and literature. A poll this month by CNN and Time magazine found that 22% of adult Americans believe intelligent beings from other planets have been in contact with human beings.

A Gallup poll last September found that 72% of Americans think there is life on other planets. And 71% said they think the U.S. government knows more about UFOs than it's telling.

“The fact is that more people are seriously interested in UFOs now than they ever have,” Don Ecker, research director and news editor at UFO Magazine, says. “Convincing the government may be an exercise in futility, but it's not hard to find believers on the streets.”

Huge, V-shaped object

Certainly, that's the case here these days.

“The incident over Arizona was the most dramatic I've seen,” says Peter Davenport of the National UFO Reporting Center in Seattle, Wash. He brands most UFO reports “hogwash,” but not this one. “What we have here,” he says with conviction, “is the real thing. They are here.”

Arizona authorities routinely refer UFO reports to Davenport's office. The first call that Thursday night came at 8:16 p.m. from a retired police officer in Paulden, 60 miles north of Phoenix. He reported a cluster of five red lights headed south.

Less than two minutes later, a call arrived from Prescott, 15 miles south of Paulden. The second report described one red and four white lights.

One minute after that, Davenport's phones exploded with calls from a succession of cities: Wickenburg, Glendale, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe. Police department phones were jammed. Callers flooded the lines to Luke Air Force Base and media outlets.

The event lasted 106 minutes. Some callers said they saw orbs in the sky. Others saw triangles. By far the most common description -- and the one captured on videotapes -- was that of a V-shaped object. It had seven lights -- three on each prong of the V and a seventh “trailing light” set apart from the others. Occasionally, some of the lights blinked out.

Witnesses generally agree on three things. First, it was enormous. The most conservative estimate describes it as three football fields long. Computer analysis of the tapes puts it at 6,000 feet, or more than a mile.

Second, it made no sound.

Third, it moved slowly over Phoenix, cruising at 30 mph. Several times it hovered in place in the sky.

Pilots in the region asked air traffic controllers to identify the lights, but the controllers couldn't help. Although controllers could see the lights, they say nothing showed up on their radar screens.

“Weird, inexplicable,” says Bill Grava, a pilot and a controller for 12 years who had tower duty that night at Sky Harbor International Airport here. “I still don't know what to think, and I have no idea what it was. Something military, I guess.”

Dana Valentine, 31, was sitting in his yard in Phoenix when the lights headed his way. The laser printer technician ran in and grabbed his father, an aeronautics engineer, and both gaped skyward as the lights passed 500 feet directly above them.

“We could see the outline of a mass behind the lights, but you couldn't actually see the mass,” Valentine says. “It was more like a gray distortion of the night sky, wavy. I don't know exactly what it was, but I know it's not a technology the public has heard of before.”

Down the road, Tim Ley had just come home and was climbing out of his car when he saw the lights. He ran in and snatched his wife, Roberta, in time to watch the formation slide silently above them.

“It was astonishing, and a little frightening,” Ley, 54, a management consultant, says. “It was so big and so strange. You couldn't actually see the object. All you could see was the outline, as though something was blotting out the stars.”

Like most witnesses, Ley found the lights extraordinary. “They weren't bulbs,” he says. “They looked like gas. There was a distortion on the surface. Also, the light didn't spill out or shine. I've never seen a light like that.”

Hundreds seek explanation

Neither has anybody else, according to Michael Tanner and Jim Dilettosa. They're two of four partners who own Village Labs, a Tempe, Ariz., firm that designs computerized special effects for Hollywood and supercomputers for the federal government. They moonlight as analysts of UFO tapes.

They ran a computer analysis of videos shot by amateur observers, comparing the mysterious lights to every other light on the Phoenix skyline videotaped that night. The lights overhead were dramatically unique, they say -- a perfectly uniform light with no variation from one edge to the other and no glow. They have ruled out lasers, flares, holograms and aircraft lights as sources.

“I have no idea what they were,” Dilettosa says.

For his part, Tanner has been videotaping witnesses and sorting out the

chronology. His present view: There were four objects, including the V formation, all arriving out of the north at about the same time and leaving the same way they came.

But neither man is a scientist by training. They're businessmen who rely on the sophisticated software of others. So while their work goes on, Phoenix Councilwoman Frances Barwood is leading the cry for an official probe.

She took on that role at a council meeting May 6 when she asked City Manager Frank Fairbanks whether anyone was investigating the incident. She was the first official to raise a question publicly, and local media jumped on it. Then the calls started pouring into her home and office from people who had seen it.

“There were 37 the first day,” Barwood says. “After that, it climbed into the hundreds. I got calls from doctors, lawyers, celebrities.

“A Little League coach called to say both teams and their families had seen this. Most wanted their names kept out of it, but they wanted answers. Heck, if I had seen it, I'd want answers, too.”

No official investigation

Barwood's path to an official answer, however, has gone the usual route of UFO investigations, which is a road to nowhere.

Phoenix officials say the city can't investigate because “we have no air force,” Scott Phelps, spokesman for Mayor Skip Rimsza says. “It's way beyond our resources to chase lights in the sky. We pick up trash. Call the governor.”

Gov. Fife Symington's office isn't involved, either. When a caller to his regular weekly radio program asked him about it, Symington said it was the first he'd heard of it. No official action is planned.

Barwood wrote U.S. Sen. John McCain, and he referred the matter to the U.S. Air Force in Washington, D.C. The Air Force closed the case last week by announcing that it would do nothing.

That's because the U.S. government hasn't officially been involved with UFOs since 1969, when the Air Force shut down Project Blue Book, the UFO investigative service created after the Roswell incident. “This is a matter for local jurisdictions,” Air Force spokeswoman Gloria Cales says.

In other words, the city says it's an Air Force matter, and the Air Force says it's a city matter. The upshot: No government agency is

investigating.

One private organization has investigated, however. Arizona's state director of the Mutual UFO Network, a band of 5,000 investigators around the country, has proclaimed it a UFO. That's unusual. Only about 5% of UFO sightings earn that distinction from this group.

"I can't vouch for it being extra-terrestrial," state director Tom Taylor says. "It could be military-related, although I find it difficult to believe the military would let it fly around like that."

At Luke Air Force Base, beleaguered Lt. Col. Mike Hauser says the calls keep coming. People are angry and demanding. They want an investigation. They allege a cover-up.

"They're calling us liars," he says. "I take great exception to that. I've answered every question. We have nothing to hide. But the fact is that we . . . don't investigate UFOs."

Hauser does acknowledge that F-16 fighter jets were in the air that night. He adds, however, that they had nothing to do with funny lights in the sky. The jets were on a routine training mission.

But Hauser will never convince the cement truck driver. The two brilliantly lit orbs that he saw were mostly white with orange perimeters and pulsating red centers.

Greiner's route took him within a mile of the base, and he says one of the orbs was over the base when three F-16s took off and veered right for it.

Then it shot straight up and disappeared "like a blink of an eye," Greiner says. "It was crazy. I know those pilots saw it. Hell, I'll take a lie detector test on national TV if that guy from the base does the same thing.

"I wish the government would just admit it. You know what it's like in this city right now? It's like having 50,000 people in a stadium watch a football game and then having someone tell us we weren't there."

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