

## **Fighting The Fear Factor**

### **Local scientists are quietly working to give UFO sightings a measured look and lend legitimacy to those who spot them**

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It was a routine flight from San Francisco to Boston. The DC-10 was on autopilot, with World War II combat veteran Neil Daniels in the captain's seat.

Suddenly, the jumbo jet veered to the left. Daniels looked out the window and saw something odd over the winter cloud tops.

He -didn't recognize it, and 25 years later, the Los Altos resident still -can't figure out what it was.

"There was this brilliant, brilliant light, the intensity of a flashbulb," Daniels said.

It was round, like a quarter held at arm's length. As ground control asked for a report on the unplanned swerve, Daniels' first officer took the controls. The plane resumed course and the floater shot away at a slight upward angle.

"It upset the compasses on the airplane, so it was a magnetic force of some intensity," Daniels said.

It was, by any other name, a UFO.

Few pilots in those days dared say they saw one. That unidentified flying objects were unmentionable was all but national policy. The attitude came out of America's Cold War fears and deep-down pragmatism: If it's not square, it must be kooky.

Daniels' boss discouraged him from reporting the bogie. The two other members of the flight crew clammed up.

Daniels had survived 29 bombing missions over Germany and would log 30,000 hours in his flying career. He'd seen a lot, but nothing like this. He soon found he -wasn't alone.

Other pilots tipped him that they, too, had crossed paths with a UFO. There were so many stories like his that Daniels wondered who was hiding what - and why. "There's been an enormous coverup," he said.

Now the retired pilot is playing a small role in a national effort to end America's UFO-phobia.

The story of his 1977 encounter south of Syracuse, N.Y., has made its way into the case files of a sober-sided research panel called the National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena.

Headed by former NASA scientist Richard Haines of Los Altos, the year-old group is one of several private organizations saying that UFOs deserve a measured, scientific look. With research helpers around the country, it's a confidential sounding board for professionals in the taboo-bound aviation field.

Haines' focus is on helping flight and ground crews safely handle something many have experienced but few have talked about. "Everybody's so God-darned afraid of everything," Daniels said.

Wingless, noiseless, metallic-looking or luminous curiosities have been reported to interact with aircraft since Daniels flew B-17s over Germany. In their 60-year modern career, they've paced planes in level flight and in turns and dives, hovering, zigzagging, bouncing, pulsing, zooming and otherwise upending the rules of flying. Haines has clocked the average length of plane-oddity contact at nearly six minutes.

"How does science rationally deal with a phenomenon that stays with an airliner at high altitude (and) at high speed for 20 minutes?" he asked. "It automatically eliminates a long list of mundane phenomena."

Haines' group has collected 1,300 pilot reports and is gathering more from government and private sources in many countries. "This is kind of snowballing," said Ted Roe of Vallejo, the group's executive director. "First off, we're learning that the phenomenon is distributed globally."

Witnesses, often quite shaken up, note the unknowns' outlandish speed and agility in solo and formation flight. Something with the reflexes of a bird of prey double-swiped a French Mirage fighter at right angles over Dijon in 1977. During the encounter, the pilot felt he was being "watched."

Observers also are impressed by UFOs' geometric shapes, which are unlike any known airfoil. And their lighting schemes make no aviation

sense: blinding whites, glowing greens and oranges, multicolored flashers like haywire Christmas trees.

"During the day, they are solid, three-dimensional surfaces that reflect sunlight," Haines said. "Eighty percent of the nighttime sightings are self-luminous. My personal belief is they are the same set of phenomena."

They act as if they're looking for something, but -don't communicate. They intimidate, but only in the movies do they annihilate. "When shot at," Haines said, "the phenomenon -doesn't shoot back."

They are so furtive as to appear self-disguising behind all manner of plasmoid morphings, vanishings and high-speed acrobatics.

It would appear they -don't want any trouble. But for science, they've been nothing but.

Opening the scientific mind

It's all a magic show of the mind, most scientists tend to think. Few have ventured in. But Haines is attracted because he believes a conservative approach can gain on the mystery.

A former NASA behavioral scientist who worked on manned moon missions and later helped design aircraft cockpit displays, he has published more than 70 journal articles in his specialty. He prides himself on his caution.

Haines is interested in mundane meteorological, geological and astronomical origins, apart from the more far-out possibilities popularly associated with UFOs. Opinion polls show that almost half the American public believes they're from outer space.

Haines and allied researchers are investigating the elusive and possibly electrical "blue sprites" pilots see in the upper atmosphere, the links between floating lights and sacred sites and whether incoming meteors can be seen on radar.

Haines stands apart from the UFO culture and even from the acronym itself. He instead likes UAP, for unidentified aerial phenomenon. The coinage is picking up currency: Scientists and aviation experts adopted the acronym for a November conference at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., on aerial mysteries and interstellar travel.

"(Haines') approach is an end-run," said Minneapolis documentary filmmaker Tom Tulien, whose Project Sign gathers oral histories of pilots and military servicemen who have encountered UFOs.

"It defuses the issue as most people understand it," he said. "We're not interested in proving UFOs are real - we're interested in the implications of the phenomenon."

Haines is among the elves in a worldwide circle of aerial mystery puzzlers that stretches as far away as public research groups in Chile, Norway and Turkey, and as close as America's zipper-mouthed government and science establishments. Part of what keeps the effort going is its silent partnership with insiders who want to help science without hurting their good names.

"Science is so close-minded that they're unwilling to look at the evidence," said Haines, relaxed in retirement in his Sunset magazineÑneat Peninsula ranch house.

Some have the same complaint about UFO believers, who tend to focus more on theories than on evidence.

"The battle lines are drawn," said UFO historian Jan Aldrich of Canterbury, Conn., whose Project 1947 is archiving the UFO story in America. "It's E.T., or it's stupid."

Despite strange marks and burns on the ground, radiation traces, skyfalls of magnesium, tin and tungsten carbide, and a handful of genuine photos of unknown metallic-looking flying objects, physical proof of UFOs as non-human handiwork -doesn't exist. This is a given, except to those who hold that the government has the story and is sitting on it.

But stripping out more than 99.9 percent of the reported cases still leaves a richly bizarre one every few years. Studies in other fields have gone on less. With UFOs, researchers say, there is more.

"The fact of the matter is, there does exist a vast amount of high quality, albeit enigmatic, data," Redwood City astronomer Bernard Haisch states in introducing himself to visitors to a Web site he has created, [Ufoskeptic.org](http://Ufoskeptic.org). He is also one of Haines' top associates in the aerial mystery group.

Much of the data rests on witness reports, and that presents a problem: The senses are easily fooled. The stranger the sensation, the harder the brain tries to make sense of it.

But there are at least a few dozen records with enough witness credibility and narrative detail to impress Haines and his league that some fraction of the UFO mystery is physically real. A 1999 French think-tank study put the number of "remarkable, that is to say, credible, well-documented cases" worldwide in recent decades in the hundreds.

"Underneath it all, the truth is there," Roe said, "but you have to be very discriminating."

Making it clear for the everyman

UFOs -aren't just a problem for hard science. The mystery, it seems, is too complicated for it to be understood from any one angle to see it whole.

"I'd be willing to entertain the possibility that the UFO phenomenon is real and may be a manifestation of something more profound than visits from another planet," Haisch said.

Society should take a long look from many sides without being in a hurry for answers - "in the same way astronomical observations were made for centuries without being able to make sense of things," he said.

One of today's more patient sky watchers is scientist Erling P. Strand. He works with Norway's Project Hessdalen, which observes strange, varied lights that glide about the Hessdalen Valley.

He said there are so many shapes and varieties that it's hard to believe only one source is involved: species of round, oval, bullet-shaped and cylindrical lights, some lasting microseconds, others staying for hours.

"The cylinders are sometimes horizontal, sometimes vertical," Strand said. "These cigar-shaped lights do not always have light all over the surface. Sometimes they are described as with a black area in the middle.

"This black phenomena has mostly a yellow light in both ends," he said, "but they can also be seen with two yellow lights in one end and a red in front. The shape then is more triangular."

There are blue lights, too. "And sometimes," Strand said, "there are several different colors at the same time."

Some researchers say what's needed is not only good evidence but also a different way to look at reality. Space -isn't empty, it's made of energy. Mass, motion, gravity - all side effects. What seems solid, -isn't. Then it would be the universe that's strange, not any form that fizzles in and out of the narrow band of human perception.

Hindu tradition says reality is multi-layered. It's an idea obsessed over by popularizers like "Twilight Zone" TV series creator Rod Serling and author Philip K. Dick, who spent part of his career in Berkeley. Now, science says this could well describe the way things really are.

Science also speculates that the light-speed limit can be evaded by distorting space-time, and a NASA group in Cleveland is looking at whether the theory makes sense.

One physicist says the technology needed to capture the power to achieve "warp" speed is up to a million years off, if it ever happens. But today's technology is getting its hands on power sources considered exotic not long ago.

For example, the U.S. military is reportedly ready to unleash microwave beam weapons in the next war. Microwaves, detected in some observations of UFOs, can disrupt electronic gear and some say they may do the same to human perception.

More powerful electromagnetic weapons are under study. Some would agitate the air enough to create a ray-gun glow that would vary in color with the amount of power used.

"I think there is incontrovertible proof that such high energy is involved" in unidentified aerial phenomena, Haines said. "The next question is whether or not it is directly related to the objects' propulsion system or whether it's a secondary effect."

Encouraging reporting

Haines -doesn't have to know the answers to know that the phenomenon affects people in a real way.

He wants to see international aviation reporting standards, because he says encounters not only upset crews but also instruments and could, in rare cases, cause accidents. The 1999 French study offered similar advice.

Haines has found 57 cases, including Daniels', where aircraft instruments were affected during an encounter. Pilots have experienced spinning compasses and dead radios in addition to intense light and heat in the cockpit.

"The authorities could acknowledge that they -don't know everything," he said. "The second thing is, let's at least be open-minded enough about it to encourage pilots to report what they are seeing. They're not even doing that."

Case in point: the 757 and the flying cigar.

"It's that Roswell crap again," is what the ground controller told a nearby Air Force base after the pilot of a commercial flight spotted a UFO over New Mexico in March 1995.

Silhouetted by lightning against distant clouds, it was a spindle at least 300 feet long. It had strobing lights in an unfamiliar pattern.

The operator called the military's air-defense network: "It's right out of 'The X-Files.' I mean, it's definitely a UFO or something like that. But. I mean É"

Told of the object's size, the air-defense spotter said, "Holy smokes!" And the flashing cigar sailed off into the night, the watchers none the wiser.

The sighting took place over an area known for its secret military reservations and Native American mysticism. It's also a historic UFO hotspot, with two reputed crashes and a landing on the books.

For Roe, the cigar remains on record as a classic UFO in its appearance and in the human response it provoked: an unknown solid, wingless object that transfixed a half-dozen people, all trained professionals.

"You watch that mouse freeze when it looks at a hawk - it's that's same vibe," he said. "I have a lot of empathy for humans who are dealing with this."

Roe, in a written analysis of the event, did not lay blame but concluded that the stigma surrounding the subject created a barrier to communication.

"It is remarkable," he wrote. Roe concluded "that a radar/visual observation of a flying object lacking a transponder code and larger than any known fixed-wing aircraft, twice the length of a 747 and hurtling through controlled U.S. air space at 390 knots, would be managed so casually."

Back to the beginning

The modern UFO era began in 1943 with pilot sightings of aircraft-pacing lights over Europe during World War II. It broke open in 1947 with the first civilian reports of "flying saucers."

The last major outbreak was in the early 1970s, but enough activity still goes on to keep private reporting organizations busy. The National UFO

Reporting Center lists more than 50 cases from Northern California in the last year, which go on top of a worldwide stack of tens of thousands since 1947.

In May 2001, a music teacher in Fair Oaks, outside Sacramento, and three students were driving home from an outing when they saw something metallic and triangular over a tree, according to an unverified NUFORC report. It took off in a frightful manner.

"One of the kids started to cry and become hysterical, yelling out, 'Go, go!'" the teacher reported. "I turned my eyes and hit the throttle. All three cried out, almost shrieking, because the craft had shot straight up in the sky and disappeared."

Long before aliens, abductions and Area 51, there were airships and "aeronauts." In pre-aviation 1896 and 1897, sightings of one or more Jules Verne-like flying vehicles made news from coast to coast. They played brilliant white lights over Sacramento on Nov. 18, 1896, and over Oakland five days later. Some said they whizzed around at an amazing 60 mph.

UFO apparitions have changed over the ages. In biblical and medieval times, people wrote of aerial dragons, shields, swords and crosses. In Victorian days, they saw mechanical contraptions. Fifty years ago, the skies were full of saucers. In the present age of stealth, the archetypal form is, like the latest high-tech military planes, triangular.

But one thing about the mystery -hasn't changed: the tendency to belittle witnesses.

"Policemen Ring for the Wagon" ... "Probably Due to Liquor" ... "Invented by Unsuccessful Candidate for Lieutenant Governor," Northern California newspapers hooted amid the aerial excitement of 1896.

Today, the scoffers are more sour than ever. They're put off by a ballooning culture of government conspiracies, various races of extraterrestrials and - Steven Spielberg's latest big-budget entertainment subject - human "abductions."

Their godfather is Francis Bacon, the Renaissance scholar who used deductive reasoning to crush superstition. Three hundred years ago, he retold the Greek fable of Ixion to underline his point.

Ixion wants Juno, the goddess of power, but copulates instead with a cloud, begetting centaurs and chimera.

"Whosoever shall entertain high and vaporous imaginations, instead of laborious and sober inquiry of truth," he said, "shall beget hopes and beliefs of strange and impossible shapes."

In 2003, the ominous Planet X, sunken cities, Martian monuments, surgery to remove alien implants, portents from the Mayan calendar, what Neil Armstrong saw in a crater on the moon in 1969 are just some of the topics whirling about. Any and all could fill out the program of a weekend at a UFO conference, and the tickets -aren't cheap.

Jim Giglio says the phenomenon is best understood by looking at its reflection in the culture.

"I -don't think there's anything to it," said Giglio, a former science teacher who belongs to a skeptics' group in the Washington, D.C., area. "And this is from a guy who's seen a UFO."

He was visiting his grandpa's turkey ranch in the South when the gobblers for some strange reason looked skyward. Giglio looked up, too, and saw strange lights that moved overhead for several minutes. He noticed that the turkeys tracked the lights by turning their heads in unison. This was odd, but it never occurred to Giglio that they and he had seen a flying saucer.

Because the term -hadn't been invented yet.

It's commonly believed not only that UFOs are vehicles from space but also that their secrets have been known to establishment information-controllers for decades. The gatekeepers have locked away the truth, motivated by a desire to keep the power structure intact or by a twisted patriotism: The public -couldn't handle the shock.

Congress must investigate, say groups such as the Disclosure Project and the Extraterrestrial Political Action Committee, both based in Maryland but with followings in California. They are taking up a cause championed in the 1960s by a University of Arizona astronomer who challenged the establishment.

It's possible Earth is being watched by aliens, a University of Arizona at Tucson scholar, James E. McDonald, told a congressional subcommittee in 1968. He also charged that "the scientific community has been seriously misinformed for 20 years."

That same year, the government-sanctioned Condon Report found only a relative handful of UFO encounters to be unexplained and none of the 701 worth more bother. Case closed, said the skeptics.

McDonald, who had looked into 300 cases on his own, lost his fight to change the system from the inside. But his disciples would partially vindicate him.

They got declassified records showing that the government maintained a low-key watch on UFOs long after officially closing the book. They said the authorities had good reason to be keenly interested, if there was anything to the reports of such witnesses as Robert Salas.

Salas, a former Air Force captain, told of strange predawn events on March 17, 1967, in his underground nuclear missile post at Montana's Malmstrom Air Force Base.

A topside guard, "practically screaming," phoned Salas with strange news: a glowing red object was hovering over the main gate.

Salas called the command post. "As I was talking, the missiles starting shutting down," the Los Angeles resident said in an interview.

Salas, sworn to secrecy and knowing the ICBMs were designed so that a serial crash was all but impossible, could only speculate. "The thing wanted to shut us down to show that it could," said Salas, a prime witness in the Disclosure Project's push for congressional hearings.

Salas' opinion is controversial. His credibility -isn't.

"Bob Salas is solid as solid can be," filmmaker Tulien said.

Salas said he is prepared to round up multiple witnesses to back him up. He "defies anybody" to shoot down his story. But he -hasn't been invited to put his account on the official record, and most people think the politics of UFOs probably -won't allow that to happen.

The government's official silence could mean only that the authorities are as much in the dark as anyone, though few Americans believe this. It could mean they -don't know enough to end the debate. But one thing is clear: the rare U.S. and British official inquiries over the years haven't solved a thing.

More sightings to ponder

What Graham Bethune saw was flying. It was a saucer.

And it was headed straight for him.

In 1951, he was a Navy flier on a mission off Newfoundland when he saw a yellowish light hovering over the North Atlantic. It looked like the glow of a city. Then it rose.

In a split second it closed 15 miles to become a 300-foot-wide oval on a crash course with his patrol plane.

"It made this run at us," said Bethune, 80, who lives in Toms River, N.J.

Bethune plunged the plane as the oval went over his wing. Compass needles spun. The crew hit the deck.

"The navigator busted his head," he said. "There was quite a lot of excitement, I can tell you that."

Then the oval suddenly braked and reversed like a rebounding ball.

UFOs have performed some of their most striking displays around military aircraft.

In 1973, a National Guard pilot plunged his helicopter over Ohio to avoid a streaking object he felt was "coming to take us out." It stopped dead in front of the chopper, a gray metallic submarine shape with a dome and weird, bright lights, reminding a crewman of something out of a cartoon.

In Belgium in 1990, a flying triangle accelerated from 174 to 1,118 mph and dropped nearly a mile in altitude when pursuing F-16s made radar contact with it. The time of the maneuver was one second.

A brilliantly lit cylinder north of Tehran discharged a smaller object at a pursuing fighter in 1976. The pilot tried to shoot but the weapons controls of his American-made F-4 went dead, a detail that concerned the U.S. military. The pilot banked to get away. The object tagged along on the inside of his turn. Then it broke off and rejoined the cylinder.

The Tehran tube was so bright that the pilot had to delay his landing because he was temporarily blinded. It also strobed all colors at a phenomenal rate.

Photos of such close encounters are rare. But in 1988, the pilot of a private plane pacing a glider over Palm Springs chanced to click his shutter the moment a fast-moving metallic sphere sliced through the sky beyond the sailplane. Haines has studied the image in detail.

The pilot described the object as a "shiny ball bearing." In the photo, it's concealed in mist. The image shows a white contrail behind a round but indistinct head.

The trail -doesn't reflect sunlight as a stream of water vapor would. The head sports tiny tendrils of white light at right angles to the direction of travel. Both details are odd, but conclusive of nothing.

"It does not appear to be a lifting body, like an airplane," Haines said. "The reason being, it was a sphere. I had to do some research on the aerodynamics of spheres. But the problem with spheres is there's as much lift on the top as there is on the bottom, so the net effect is gravity.

"This did not come down," he said. "It continued to fly out of sight with a straight contrail."

Haines estimated the chrome globe's speed at from 857 to 4,000 mph. No one reported hearing a sonic boom.

Haines has taken his investigation as far as he can. "I -don't know if science could take it any further," he said.

Kenju Terauchi was sure he had met up with an advanced technology high in the sky.

Piloting a Japan Air Lines 747 cargo flight near Fairbanks in November 1986, he saw two unknown objects the size of smaller airliners but with structural details, lights and maneuvers he -didn't recognize.

In the middle distance of a clear night, he also saw the outline of a ringed orb he described as the size of two aircraft carriers. The sight worried him.

Radar in the plane and on the ground saw something in the area of the strange outline, which paced the 747 at a fixed distance.

Terauchi circled. The object stayed in formation. After another airliner pulled up to take a look, Terauchi signaled with his landing lights and saw the object blink out.

The FAA announced that the radar blips were shadows from the 747. But the explanation was inconsistent with the data, said John Callahan, the FAA accident investigator who led the analysis of the radar records.

Callahan, now retired, recalled that the blips indicated the presence of an unknown object that was too fast for radar to get a steady fix on it. "It was something moving 2,000 to 3,000 miles an hour, or faster," he said.

He said the military radar records in the case were recycled before FAA investigators could review them, and the CIA took over the investigation.

"The CIA guy says, 'OK, you're all sworn to secrecy. This event never happened, we were never here, and we're confiscating all the data,' " Callahan said.

He said he asked the agent what he thought the pilot saw.

"It's a UFO. We -can't tell the American public we're being visited by UFOs. It would scare the hell of out 'em.' "

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