

UFO ENCOUNTERS OF THE FIRST KIND—SIGHTINGS

What if you looked out the window one night and saw a huge, black triangular craft, floating silently overhead? About the size of a football field, it blocks the stars. You watch it for over ten minutes. I mean, what if you seriously, fair dinkum, really, really, truly did see it? Who would you tell?

You ring the military and they say no such thing appeared on the radar. 'Why don't you ring one of the UFO organisations?' they suggest politely, with barely a hint of a snigger.

This has happened to many people and they may well be the victims of a cover-up. The craft really did exist and it probably didn't show up on radar. The military did refuse to talk about it. But the cover-up isn't of extraterrestrial visits to our planet. There are many crafts in our skies which we, the general public, are not told about. Commercial and military secrecy abounds.

Although there are rational explanations for many of the UFO sightings, others are left as 'unexplained' and the ufologists claim this is evidence of the existence of alien craft in our skies. There is always the possibility that this is the case.

Before accepting an alien source as the explanation, however, it is essential to consider the more likely, less exciting, possibilities.

Many UFO sightings are the result of the inability or unwillingness of authorities to explain reports because this

would release information that is confidential for commercial or military reasons. In many cases, the report lacks sufficient detail to be identified, is totally imaginary or, frustratingly, is just another of the many hoaxes.

A UFO is an unidentified flying object. Unidentified does not mean alien. It means we haven't formally identified the source of the object or image.

Venus, strange weather patterns, clouds, balloons and high-altitude kites are all given as explanations. But what do they actually mean? How can Venus look like a UFO?

Are there aliens?

Given the several hundred billion stars in the Milky Way alone and then another hundred billion galaxies, give or take a few, and the possibility of planets around each one, there is a reasonable probability that we are not alone in this universe. And of the other life forms, there is a pretty good chance some are intelligent and able to communicate with us. It is one of my most sincere wishes that I am still alive when they do.

Encounters of the ordinal kinds

Let's start by getting the terminology under control. Dr J. Allen Hynek first categorised encounters according to three kinds, then the fourth and fifth were added by later investigators.

- An encounter of the first kind is a sighting of an alien craft. These sightings are explored in this chapter.
- The second kind involves physical evidence of the alien craft, such as a landing site, damage to plants or vehicles or frightened animals (see Chapter 20).
- An encounter of the third kind involves an actual sighting of, or contact with, the aliens (see Chapter 21).

- The fourth kind involves an abduction, where a human is taken aboard the spaceship and interacts with the aliens there (see Chapter 22).
- A fifth kind has been defined as the implantation of an alien–human hybrid (see Chapter 22).

Reality check

It is claimed that many governments are working overtime to keep knowledge of alien contacts from us. Given the way governments leak, especially at election times, and the huge numbers of people from all sides of politics who would have to agree to keep these secrets, it is difficult to believe. Any one of these people could sell the story for a fortune to the media. This is a conspiracy theory which is very hard to justify given the 50 or 60 years the secrecy would have had to be maintained.

Why are the governments so keen to keep it from us? The main reason given is the fear of mass panic. Think what happened, they say, when Orson Welles's radio dramatisation of H.G. Wells's *The Invasion From Mars* was played on Halloween night, 1938. Thousands panicked and fled their homes in terror.

That's a distortion of the facts. In reality very few panicked that night, but the film made of the panic showed the thousands. Governments do not maintain such monumental secrets because of the fear of a repeat of a fictionalised event.

A second common reason given for the cover-up is that the government is exchanging technology with the aliens and wants to maintain the secrecy to give a military advantage. Again, given the huge number of people who would need to know and have maintained the secret for so long, it is very hard to believe. More importantly, this secrecy is claimed to have begun in the middle of the last century and not a single device has emerged equipped with any technology which does not have a well-documented, Earth-bound

source. Given the rate of technological advance, 50 or 60 years indicates an inordinately sluggish research program. It is time to ask whether such justifications for a conspiracy can still be considered rational.

Close encounters of the first kind

By far the most common UFO reports are sightings of unidentified craft or lights in the sky. Many reports are generated by hoaxes, frauds and practical jokers, mentally unstable people or those willing to fabricate events due to a deep-felt desire to be part of the UFO phenomenon. If you want to create a fine UFO photograph, stick a coin to a window and photograph it, making sure the background is in focus, not the coin. It is unfortunate for those organisations sincerely interested in searching for the truth that they have to contend with so many reports before they can identify the few which justify their time and effort.

Genuine reports are those in which the individual involved could not explain something which they truly witnessed. These objects are 'unidentified' because the observer was unable to detect the source at the time. After many years of solid research by amateur, military and academic organisations, there has evolved a long list of explanations which need to be eliminated before an alien origin is worth considering.

The first flying saucer

The first case of a UFO creating media frenzy was that of Kenneth Arnold on 24 June 1947. A businessman and amateur pilot from Idaho, he was flying in unfamiliar territory in the Cascade Mountains, Washington State, USA. The goal was the reward of \$5000 for locating the crash site of a Marine Corps C-46, so Arnold was scanning the mountain-side from over 2000 metres up. On returning for a second

scan, he was blinded by light. In the clear sky, he counted nine bright objects flying very fast about 20 kilometres from him, beyond the peak of Mt Rainier. Each with a boomerang shape, they appeared to be performing complex manoeuvres in formation.

Arnold observed the objects for over two minutes and then landed at the Yakima airfield, reporting the sighting to the General Manager there, Al Baxter, thinking they were possibly secret testing of military aircraft. Returning to Oregon, Arnold was shocked to be confronted by a media throng eager for a story. In his response, he said the objects moved 'like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water'.

The name 'flying saucer' was born. Over the next few months an unprecedented number of flying saucer reports flooded the media.

So what does a reader do with Arnold's description? Would you think about the weather? There is no information about the weather conditions, and hence whether the sighting could be a mirage reflection of the cascade mountains in an inversion layer. Very few people have heard of inversion layers, let alone mirages created by them.

Would it occur to you to check out Mt Rainier? It is a dormant volcano which has associated cracks and fault lines. Pressure build-up beneath the Earth's surface can cause 'Earth lights'—bursts of energy which can appear as flashes of light.

Would you think to check out the nearby Moses Lake, only 120 kilometres away and the regular location for testing of missiles?

A widely accepted explanation is that it was a flock of birds, a surprisingly common source of UFO reports. Would you have considered an avian explanation? Flying in formation, manoeuvring as birds do and capturing the late sun, all in an unfamiliar setting for the pilot involved, this fits all the facts as given in Arnold's report.

It must also be remembered that pilots flying higher than usual without oxygen can become disoriented and see

images distorted by their brain. Again, the exact altitude and Arnold's own response to reduced oxygen would need to be known.

He may have seen alien craft, but the evidence is not there, nor is there sufficient data for us to ever know for sure.

Air Force involvement

The government bodies responsible for accepting UFO reports from the public are the Air Force in America and England. In Australia, the Air Force has now ceased involvement. Their official policy on UAS (Unidentified Aerial Sightings) as provided by their Community Relations section, states:

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) formerly had a responsibility for investigating and assessing the validity of UAS. After careful examination of the factual data and historical records that have been gathered over many years, it was determined that the collective evidence did not warrant the continued allocation of resources by the RAAF to investigate and report on UAS. Subsequently the RAAF ceased this function.

Current Defence policy on UAS where members of the public may have questions on, or seek to report sightings, is to direct them to their local police authorities or civil Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) research organisations, through the relevant state telephone directory.

The Ministry of Defence for the British government ran a UFO desk manned by public servants, such as Nick Pope, who recorded his conversion to believer status, despite the obvious displeasure of his senior staffers. His book *Open Skies, Closed Minds* documents his time on the job and subsequent rise to hero of the ufologists. It is a fascinating read.

The US government was responsible for investigations into UFO reports. In 1969 the US Air Force closed down the

Project Blue Book office which handled American sightings. The University of Colorado was commissioned by the US Air Force to perform a detailed investigation which is published, in all its technical detail, under the title of *The Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*, edited by Dr Edward U. Condon. This report concluded that there was no evidence of extraterrestrial sightings, visits or other extraordinary phenomena.

The existence of government facilities for investigating UFO sightings does not give government validation to the existence of extraterrestrial visitors. It merely gives validation to the existence of UFO reports.

Unidentified aircraft

Think about Boeing's Stealth Bomber, the B-2, with its deadly, huge triangular wing which is so famously difficult to detect by radar. Now think about all the prototypes constructed by Boeing in the development stages. The B-2 might now be familiar, but there's the Boeing Bird of Prey, a top secret development with first pictures officially released late in 2002. From underneath it looks like nothing you would have seen before. The prototypes flew out of the famous UFO-sighting Mecca, the US Air Force's highly secure Nevada test site: Area 51.

In fact, over 50 years there have been many 'Flying Wing' designs and prototypes which never made it into production and hence into general knowledge. German aircraft designers Reimar and Waltar Horten developed a flying wing for the Luftwaffe towards the end of World War II. Delta and other flying wing shapes were being tested in the USA from the 1930s.

Think of the number of necessary test flights since that time. Then think of the secrecy surrounding them. Are you still surprised there are thousands of sightings of large craft which cannot be identified and whose very existence is denied by authorities?

Lighter-than-air technologies

More surprising to most people would be the prevalence of lighter-than-air vehicles, including balloons and blimps. Lighter-than-air vehicles have been capable of large payloads and endurance feats from early in the twentieth century. The familiar zeppelin has been replaced by the much less familiar lighter-than-air surveillance platforms.

Lockheed Martin has been involved in the development of: 'an unmanned lighter-than-air vehicle that would operate above the jet stream and above severe weather in a geostationary position to serve as a telecommunications relay, a weather observer, or a peacekeeper from its over-the-horizon perch'. This thing can carry a '4000 lb. Payload' according to Lockheed Martin's website www.lockheed-martin.com. And it is the cigar shape so often described in UFO reports.

Now think about the development and testing of this craft. It must have been near ground initially. People must have seen it. This is not a recent development. The website says:

Lockheed Martin NE&SS-Akron received its first production contract for a lighter-than-air vehicle, the rigid USS Akron airship, in 1928 from the U.S. Navy. Since that time, the Lockheed Martin unit has built more than 300 airships and several thousand aerostats.

And they all needed testing—the failed designs as well as the successful ones. So did the craft from other companies testing hovercraft, aeroplanes, helicopters and a myriad other vessels which didn't make it into production. Model plane makers and aviation hobbyists are forever mucking about with flying shapes of all kinds. Someone in a neighbouring field will quite rightly claim: 'it's unlike any plane I've ever seen'.

A quick look at the Boeing and Lockheed Martin websites will show you aircraft most people have no idea exist.

Lockheed Martin, among other companies, are claimed to have taken great interest in stealth blimps—huge airships—thought to be triangular—which could carry troops and their tanks into war zones.

Advertising blimps often fly over cities and can catch the light in unusual ways. Silent, and sometimes adorned with lights, they are often responsible for UFO reports from frightened watchers.

They don't always look like planes

A plane or blimp viewed from the front, travelling towards the observer, will appear to be disc shaped and hovering. When it changes direction, the craft appears to have suddenly taken off from a hovering mode.

The early days of jumbo jets caused many UFO reports around airports. Even experienced pilots can be confused by an unusual angle of observation. There are many cases of observers refusing to believe such a simple explanation when confronted with irrefutable evidence of the reality of what they've seen.

In fact, the likeness to UFOs has been exploited by the US Air Force. In their own report about the famous Roswell incident, *The Roswell Report: Case Closed*, they wrote:

Modern polyethylene balloons, some as long as several football fields when on the ground, expand at altitude to volumes large enough to contain many jet airliners. Polyethylene balloons flown by the U.S. Air Force have reached altitudes of 170,000 feet and lifted payloads of 15,000 pounds.

During the late 1940's and 1950's, a characteristic associated with the large, newly invented, polyethylene balloons, was that they were often misidentified as flying saucers. During this period, polyethylene balloons launched from Holloman AFB, generated flying saucer reports on nearly every flight. There were so many reports that police, broadcast radio, and newspaper accounts of these sightings were used by Holloman

technicians to supplement early balloon tracking techniques. Balloons launched at Holloman AFB generated an especially high number of reports due to the excellent visibility in the New Mexico region. Also, the balloons, flown at altitudes of approximately 100,000 feet, were illuminated before the earth during the periods just after sunset and just before sunrise. In this instance, receiving sunlight before the earth, the plastic balloons appeared as large bright objects against a dark sky. Also, with the refractive and translucent qualities of polyethylene, the balloons appeared to change colour, size and shape.

(James McAndrew, 1997, *The Roswell Report: Case Closed*, pp. 40–1.)

Many top secret military exercises conducted at night have then been reported as alien landings. Harriers can hover and manoeuvre unlike any previous craft. It would be understandable that someone seeing these craft in the prototype stage could conclude they were beyond mere human creation.

It is impossible to imagine a more stereotypical flying saucer-like craft than the double-disk-shaped Viking Project space probes tested from Walker AFB. The drawings of a large triangular craft provided by UFO witnesses are identical to a sketch of the experimental tethered 'Vee' balloons. Not surprisingly, witness drawings of alien craft, such as those reproduced in the best-selling UFO book, *The Truth About the UFO Crash at Roswell*, look amazingly like these experimental balloons.

The majority of sightings seem to be, not surprisingly, clustered around military bases all over the world. Many witnesses will report the same sighting, but military sources will claim ignorance of it. Another conspiracy is born. Surely it suits the military to have anyone reporting the secret testing labelled as a 'UFO nutter'?

On 5 January 2000, for example, four police officers and more than a dozen others witnessed a large, silent, black triangular object flying low over Highland, Illinois, near the Scott Air Force Base. The multiple, reliable witnesses

indicate the sighting was real. The UFO interpretation, however, is much less likely than the probability that they were sighting a test vehicle being developed secretly for the army. There is a strong military advantage in ensuring the enemy don't know you can transport troops into a war zone in a newly developed silent blimp. If these are, as many suspect, stealth technology and nuclear powered, then there is even more reason for secrecy. The public aren't too keen on nuclear technology, in prototype, being flown overhead. And they won't appear on radar screens.

Commercial secrets are protected just as much as military ones. We have a 'cover-up' of huge proportions, a real conspiracy of silence, but not an alien in sight. With all these aircraft being tested and launched it is astounding there are so few UFO reports.

Weather balloons

There are many balloons in the atmosphere recording weather conditions. They are numerous, metallic and reflect light in peculiar ways. Most people are unaware of their existence. In unusual weather conditions, seen through mist, observed when being tested at ground level or crashing to earth, and in a myriad other situations, weather balloons are responsible for a significant proportion of UFO sightings.

Then there are other balloons up there: those for spying. And that gives a good case for a cover-up. A well known case is called the Roswell Incident. When reports of alien bodies were linked to the finding of a crashed balloon, a legend was born. The story is told in Chapter 21.

Weather conditions—mirages

We were driving along the road and this bright light appeared in the sky. It was silent and followed us. It was eerie. Definitely tracking us. Around the edges were flashing

colours. We watched it for many minutes. It wasn't a quick glimpse, and everyone in the car saw it. John is a policeman and Marylyn is a nurse. I am a scientist. So we are reliable witnesses. It followed us for ages, and hovered when we stopped to get a closer look. We took a photo. It is a bit blurred but you can clearly see the light in the sky. Then it suddenly disappeared. I've never seen anything like it in my whole life. I was skeptical until this, but now I have seen it for myself and I know what I saw.

The sky was clear, so it wasn't a reflection off clouds. There were planes flying in the area that day and none of them saw the UFO. It just hung there in a clear blue sky. We checked with the Air Traffic Controllers. So did the newspaper. Nothing had shown up on their radar.

We weren't imagining it. There's nothing else it could be—we really saw a UFO.

Confronting this hypothetical story, what is your response? Everything Jean said is exactly what happened and she is convincing because she is convinced. Everything is absolutely certain except the last sentence. What they saw was a UFI—an unidentified flying image.

Such lights were reported by a number of observers between 21 May and 24 May 1983 in the Bendigo area of Victoria, Australia. The media frenzy included newspapers, television and radio. A follow-up report from the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) received a small paragraph or two inside a few newspapers. Most people, bombarded with news of the event, would not have noticed the explanation from the RAAF discussing some obscure meteorological conditions. If they had, it would have meant little to them.

Very few people look at a bright disc in a clear sky with coloured lights around it and say: 'Hey, look! A total internal reflection from an inversion layer'.

The physics involved is taught at high school level and can be modelled using a clear bowl, some water and a coin.

Light refracts, that is, it bends when it goes from one medium to another. When you look at a coin at the bottom of a bowl of water it looks like it is nearer to the surface than it really is. The light has bent as it has gone from the water into air.

You 'see' the coin when you 'see' the beam of light coming from the coin. The light beam hits your eye and then a message goes to the brain for interpretation. The brain assumes the light beam has travelled in a straight line, hence the misinterpretation of the depth of the water.

If the light beam from the coin hits the surface of the water at a large enough angle, then the image of the coin will be reflected back to the bottom of the bowl. You will lose sight of the coin from above as you move to a more and more shallow angle. But crouch down and look through the side of the bowl and you will see the coin reflected from the surface of the water. It is floating up there—sort of like a flying saucer. In physics speak this is called 'total internal reflection'.

So how did the people of Bendigo end up on the bottom of a bowl of water? They were in an 'inversion layer'.

An inversion layer occurs when a cool layer of air is trapped beneath a warm layer. This can stay still for days and become quite stable. An inversion layer sometimes shows up as a flat mantle of pollution caught over a city.

Normally, the temperature of the atmosphere decreases as you go further from the ground. Occasionally, the reverse can be true and we get a temperature inversion. A cool layer gets trapped beneath a warmer layer of air. Cool air is more dense than warm air. The cool layer is the equivalent of the water in the bowl, trapped beneath the warmer, less dense, air. As the difference in air densities is much less than between the water and air, we need much greater angles before the total internal reflection occurs.

Wind will disturb the layer, so it is usually a feature of a still period of time with clear skies. In a real inversion layer, the light must hit the layer at two degrees or less to the horizontal to be reflected back towards the ground, so the source of the light will be quite distant.

The UFI sighting will be the result of a bright light source many kilometres away, perhaps the setting sun reflecting off a still lake, or, as was suspected in the Bendigo case, a set of search lights being used for advertising. As the inversion layer settled and became very stable in Bendigo, it is possible there was more than one light source being reflected.

Let's return to the coin in the clear bowl of water. Move your head towards and away from the coin. See how it moves with you? In a car, the light in the sky would follow you. It would be silent. It would not show up on radar. It would be present in a clear sky.

Because of the thickness and changes in density within the inversion layer, it is not like a simple mirror reflection as modelled with the bowl of water. Hence the image will be a distorted 'reflection' of the object, often enlarged and elongated.

Sometimes, the nature of the inversion layer will lead to multiple images. These will naturally travel together—in formation. Or one will be superimposed on another, giving the familiar double-disc flying saucer shape.

And the coloured lights around the edges? Inside the depth and variable density of an inversion layer there is a splitting of the white light into its component colours. Physics speak calls this 'dispersion'. Depending on the atmospheric conditions, this can cause the whole image to appear reddish or bluish (the two ends of the colour spectrum) or have various colours around the edges.

'Atmospheric scintillation' is caused by turbulence in the inversion layer causing rapid changes in the effects of the refraction and reflection. This means that the viewer sees rapid variations in the position, location, brightness, shimmer and colouring of the image. There can be a pulsating effect, or the image may disappear and suddenly reappear. Some of the sudden changes in position of the lights, interpreted as impossible speeds, are actually a result of scintillation.

Still not convinced? Think you have never seen such a reflection? The mirage formed on a hot day when the road

reflects objects that look like a reflection in a pool of water involves exactly the same physics. Just put that reflection up in the clear sky on a much bigger scale, and what would you think it was?

Venus and other celestial bodies

Venus can look very strange under rare conditions. Venus is our closest and brightest planet. When Venus is close to the horizon it can appear enlarged and bluish. The refraction of the atmosphere causes distortions. When a light source, in this case Venus, is straight above, the effects of refraction are minimal. As the light passes more and more obliquely through the atmosphere, the bending of the light causes greater distortions.

When Venus is refracted and then reflected from an inversion layer, you have a large light behaving in a most unplanet-like way. Double mirages of Venus have an eerily spaceship-like form.

In December 1978 a film crew in an aircraft near New Zealand filmed a UFO and their images were shown worldwide. The temperature inversion over the cold Southern Ocean had caused a mirage image of Venus.

The famous story of Captain Thomas Mantell in Kentucky, USA in January 1948 tells how he chased a UFO, with fatal results. The location of the sighting and weather conditions are completely consistent with a mirage of Jupiter. Following the mirage to the altitude he did, he would have entered a low-oxygen zone, a rational cause for plummeting to his death. We cannot know if this is the true explanation, however, because we can never be certain what he actually saw.

Pilots are not trained to identify such rare sights. Their inability to do so should not be a surprise.

Like Venus, the setting or rising sun, Mars and other celestial light sources can all be grossly distorted and so appear quite unlike themselves when close to the horizon.

You may be surprised to know that the moon is credited with responsibility for five per cent of all UFO reports. Nearness to trees and other land objects can enhance the effect and distort relative sizes and positions. Then there are the bodies that we humans have dumped up there. Satellites can also reflect light through atmospheric distortions to give pretty good reasons to claim a UFO sighting.

'But the object was following us!' Distant bodies, such as the moon and planets, do appear to be following. As you move, the direction of the very distant object does not change, as it does with nearby objects. Watch a low moon as you move—it will appear to follow. In fact, it is your own movement which is being witnessed relative to the buildings and trees.

Got enough to check out on that unidentified bright light? Not yet.

Meteors and space debris

Then there is the rapidly moving light. Just check out first if it is a meteor, another strong candidate from the outer reaches. Dust or rocks entering Earth's atmosphere burn up giving a flash of brilliant, fast-moving light. These are often reported by large numbers of witnesses, but tend to last only a few seconds.

Airforce tracking systems indicate that space is full of thousands of items of space debris which are most from satellites slowly decaying and falling back to Earth. A few of these will enter the earth's atmosphere every day giving rise to flashes and trails of light.

Hazy influences

Haze is a hassle. If the haze patch is localised, the observer may not be aware it exists between him and the light source. Bright light scattering in haze due to water particles in air

can make an object seem much larger. It also makes the judgement of distances very difficult. Small beams from torches have been reported as UFOs. The torch bearer moves about randomly and the UFO moves in unpredictable patterns—apparently searching for something. The torch bearer waves his arm and the UFO suddenly takes off at rapid speeds. These situations are rare, but fool even very experienced observers.

Lenticular clouds

There are photographs which look so like the traditional concept of a flying saucer it's astounding, but they are of a rare cloud formation called lenticular (lens-shaped) clouds. Upper and lower hemispheres around a central broad disc are a distinctive feature. A group of these clouds can look like the fleet leading an alien invasion. Quite a few famous UFO photographs have subsequently been identified as lenticular clouds. These rare formations tend to rise above hills and have a peculiar vapour concentration which gives them a reflective, metallic appearance.

But they are still just clouds.

More strange weather conditions

A rare weather condition which is said to be responsible for UFO reports is ball lightning. This forms a sphere of glowing light about 20 centimetres across, usually in stormy conditions. Judging distances and sizes in unusual conditions is notoriously difficult. Experienced observers have often been fooled when confronted with a rare light condition, so a small ball of glowing gas could be mistaken for a much larger alien vessel.

The sea or a large lake can cause a 'false horizon' in which something on the water appears to be in the sky. Boats' reflections have, on occasion, been mistaken for alien

craft. There are some reports which even describe the aliens aboard, but are later confirmed to be sightings of boats above a false horizon. Fishermen giving a friendly wave had no idea what they had just done.

Flocks of birds

Flocks of white birds in unusual lighting can be misidentified and are the cause of many UFO reports. Reflecting bright light from beneath, they can look most un-bird-like. Add a bit of haze or fog and you have an object which is very hard to identify. The rising or setting sun supplies a changing light source. In formation, often a triangular one, a flock of birds can be seen through the haze as a single object. Sometimes a group can be taken as the formation flight of an alien fleet.

At night, city lights can illuminate a nocturnal flock, creating a quite eerie effect against a black backdrop. It's hard to believe unless you have seen birds in these conditions, but many trained observers have been fooled this way.

Astronautical sightings

Much is made in the UFO literature of the sightings by astronauts. James Oberg, a Houston space specialist, painstakingly analysed these reports in an article in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall 1978.

The most quoted example is that of Gemini 4 astronaut James McDivitt, who stated he saw a UFO and photographed it. That is quite true. But McDivitt uses the term literally. He reported an 'unidentified flying object' as part of the regular feedback astronauts are asked to supply. It is most likely that he saw either a man-made satellite (there are lots of them up there) or Gemini's own booster rocket. The much republished photograph is, as McDivitt states and analysis confirms, a reflection from his co-pilot's window.

Other flares, lights and cigar-shaped objects have been analysed and confirmed as flakes of ice off the super-cold fuel tanks, lightning-lit clouds, man-made satellites, bags of garbage released from space craft, light reflections off the nose cone, parts of the booster rocket, reflections of the moon on the ocean, deliberate misquotations and complete forgeries.

And jokes. Apollo 12 astronauts joked with the ground control room about a piece of their booster rocket which was tumbling and flashing. Their joking reference, misunderstood and taken out of context, became part of the UFO folklore.

Conclusion

Thousands of UFO reports are made every year. Those investigated almost always have normal explanations. The few which can't be explained are used by ufologists as evidence for something from beyond our understanding. It is more reasonable, although far less exciting, to accept that they are not explained because insufficient information was available to be able to work out the source. A lack of explanation can never be taken as justification for a theory which defies proof.

The evidence to date offers no support for the theory that we have been visited by alien intelligence. It is disappointing, but science is about truth, not about the most exciting conclusion. The only valid deduction to be made from the reams of reports, investigations and analysis is that we have not yet made contact with aliens.

Let's hope that changes soon. What could be more exciting for the human race?

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