

UFO INVESTIGATOR



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Chief Warrant Officer Observes Unusually Shaped Object

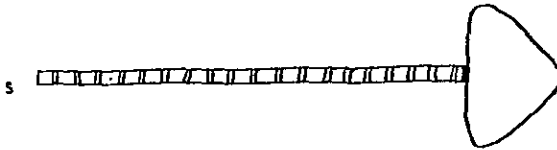
Francine Van Curen, a licensed pilot and experienced control tower operator, as well as Chief Warrant Officer for the USMC, submitted the following well documented sighting to NICAP on March 28, 1977. Although she had an extremely short amount of time to observe the unusually shaped object, she gives a carefully detailed analysis of the sighting.

"On the night of Friday, March 11, 1977, around 10:00 P.M. I was sitting in my living room in a highrise building,

down—high above the horizon. It appeared to be a long luminous arrow, with a long and thin shaft and a blunt and large tip. It appeared to have about fifteen or twenty segments, and there was a luminous strip between each segment. I have seen many, many airplanes, night and day, during my lifetime, but this was no airplane, and flashing or strobe lights should have been visible, had it been an airplane. Also, a jet could not have gone over that low without my hearing it."

the witnesses' view when it travelled behind the corner of the building in which the witness lives.

The area in which the object was observed is very heavily populated. Both the Pentagon and the Washington National Airport are only a few miles away. However, no other witnesses reported the sighting and the Radar Tower of National Airport did not report any unusual sky activity for that date. The witness does not know how to classify her observation, but because she did not hear any noise, either before, during or after the object passed overhead, and because she did not see any flashing lights, which are legally required, she knows she saw something highly unusual.



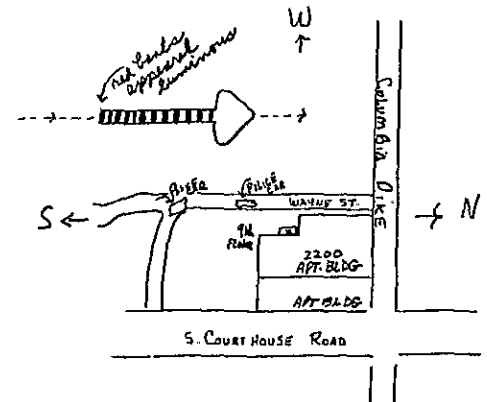
Witnesses' Sketch of Object

ninth floor, Arlington, Virginia, (my balcony faces west) when I heard some unusual street noise on the side of the building below me. I went out on the balcony to see what was going on and noted there were two police cars and several young men down on the street. At this point, I just happened to look up at the stars, which were all visible, and Jupiter was three-quarters of the way down in the western arc, and this large, strange something went over, traveling from south to north at what I estimated to be above 2,000 feet. There were no flashing lights visible; there was no noise; I saw no tow plane or blimp (as it came nearest to looking like a possible towed sign). I frankly could not identify the object in the possible 1-1/2 seconds that I had it in sight. I estimated it to be at least 100 feet long or larger, depending upon the altitude. In an arc from center sky, I would estimate that it was 30°

Ms. Van Curen also noted that there was no moon in the western quadrant of the sky. The night was very clear and windless. Against this background, the arrow-shaped object was clearly visible. The object itself was softly luminous and each segment of the shaft was easily seen. The luminous bands dividing the segments of the shaft were a glowing red color.

Although the witness could not accurately calculate the altitude of the object, due to the short observation period, she did estimate that from her position on the balcony, the length appeared to be about one foot. If the object were travelling at an altitude of 2,000 feet, as the witness judged it to be, the length would then be at least 100 feet.

The object was moving quickly with a speed comparable to that of a jet aircraft. It maintained a straight northerly path and consequently, it soon moved out of



Witnesses' Location

Multiple Witnesses Reveal Mercersburg Incident

NICAP is able to present the following sighting report due to the dedication of one of its members. Gregory Dovey, a Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, resident, volunteered his time to piece together the facts surrounding the event and to forward this information to NICAP Headquarters.

On the evening of March 8, 1977, Gregory was watching the news on WHAG TV, a Hagerstown, Maryland, station. He listened with interest as the weatherman-meteorologist described a UFO sighting that had occurred that evening in Mercersburg, a community near Chambersburg. After the news, Greg contacted John Holtz, the weathercaster, to obtain as much additional information as possible about the sighting.

The forecaster gave the witness' name, his background and his report. Based on this information, Greg concluded that the sighting warranted further investigation, and he subsequently wrote a letter to NICAP Headquarters.

The information that Greg received from John Holtz included the fact that the witness is a pilot, that four other people including another pilot were witnesses, and that the UFO was observed for fifteen minutes. During this fifteen minute period, the observers viewed the object, an extremely bright, white, self-luminous disk shape with "fuzzed-out" edges, with various optical instruments. They compared the object to familiar aircraft as well as to observable stars. To them, the light appeared to be about ten times brighter than the North Star.

Upon receiving Greg's letter, NICAP contacted the witness, Donnie L. Martin, for verification of the sighting and for an address in order to forward a standard report form. However, Greg had already sent his own copy of the form to the witness, and a few days later, we received the following report from the witness.

Donnie Martin's sighting spanned the time between 8:40 and 8:55 on the evening of March 8. His attention was directed to the strange light by his nineteen year old son, who had watched the light for twenty minutes while traveling home. After the son reached his house,

he notified his father and a visiting couple of the bright light. Donnie, his wife, and the visitors then proceeded to watch the light and discuss their observations.

The cool evening was clear, so that visual accuracy was increased. Many stars were visible, but the moon was not. Against this background of stars, the single white light was so intensely bright that the witness described it as looking like "burning magnesium" or "like a mercury vapor light."

All five of the witnesses remained perfectly calm during the sighting. They brought out and systematically looked through a 50X spotting scope, a 10 x 50 pair of binoculars, and 9X rifle scope. Through these optical instruments the observers discerned that the light was self-luminous and for the length of the observation, stationary. When the light did appear to move, it also appeared to change slightly in intensity. Greg described the object's almost imperceptible motion in the following manner:

This bright object gradually settled behind the mountain range three and a half miles to the west of our position. When the bright object disappeared, it lit up the mountain to the extent that we could see the trees and the top of the mountain between the trees, by using 10X glasses. Then it reappeared for approximately thirty seconds and descended once again. The second time the light went behind the mountain we could again see the trees by the light. This episode lasted for several minutes. We could look away and look back to find a 200-300 yard area still illuminated.

None of the witnesses could detect any speed or sound. They feel that the object either drifted down behind the ridge or that it simply moved farther away from the observers, thereby appearing to go behind the mountain.

Mr. Martin's home is fifteen miles northwest of the Hagerstown Airport. The object itself was west of the witness' home and about 20° above the horizon. The Airport did not report any unusual activity.

The consensus of the group of observers is that the light they were watching was a UFO. However, according to NICAP's investigation into the time of day as well as the time of year, the direction in which the light appeared to be traveling, and the low altitude of the object, the sighting seems not to be of a UFO, but of the planet, Venus.

Spinning Light Attracts Motorists Attention

On Sunday, May 1, 1977, an Arlington, Virginia, woman and her male companion were driving south on Route 270 from Frederick, Maryland, to the Washington, D.C. Beltway. It was between 8:30 and 9:00 P.M. During the half hour that it took them to travel the forty miles to the beltway, the two occupants watched a large, circular object as it drifted back and forth over the highway. According to the witnesses the object had a pinkish-red blinking light on top and a series of lights that appeared to be coming from a row of windows below the red light. The object seemed to be far away, apparently over the city of Washington, D.C., yet the observers could distinctly see that the lights in the windows were continuously rotating around the object so that the object appeared to be spinning. The two travelers also noticed that many other motorists were pulled off the road, seemingly to watch the strange light in the sky. The witnesses were hesitant about calling NICAP to report their sighting, but fortunately the woman did call our office. Her report is the first of dozens of similar reports NICAP expects to receive this summer. NICAP's analysis, in concurrence with the records in National Airport's Radar Control Tower log book, indicated that this was not a UFO, but an advertising plane. (See article on sky watching for explanation.)

TIPS FOR SUMMER EVENING SKY WATCHERS

The two previous reports represent a large percentage of NICAP's mistaken identity sightings, most of which occur in the spring and summer months when warm evenings lure people outside after dark. Lighted advertising planes and the planet, Venus, create bright and unusual nighttime distractions for any observer. However, sky-watchers can easily train their eyes to recognize these two objects for what they really are. The following descriptions of these two lights should help witnesses to accurately discriminate between identifiable and unidentifiable objects.

Advertising Planes

Advertising planes can be as easy to identify as regular airplanes and helicopters. In summer they are a common enough sight in many cities, especially in those along a beach or waterfront, to give observers ample experience in identifying them. The Gaithersburg, Maryland, area, for instance, has an advertising plane circling over it every weekend from early spring through late summer. This plane is no doubt what the witnesses observed over Maryland State Highway 270.

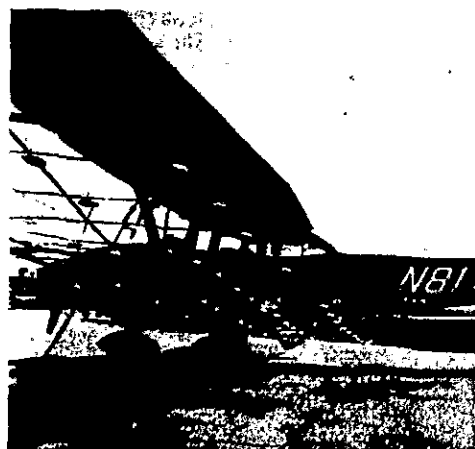
Appearance

UFO reports that contain descriptions of objects that move slowly or appear to drift, that move over populated areas, and that contain a revolving or spinning row of lights almost always depict advertising planes. The planes usually have a red light on top and an apparent row of windows below the light. The windows are illuminated by bright, white lights,

and these openings seem to either spin around the object on their own or are made to appear to spin by a bright light inside the object that revolves, shining out of first one window and then the next. Either description makes the object look as though the row of lights as well as the object itself are spinning. Noise may be heard or not heard, depending on the distance of the plane. Because these planes are designed to be noticeable, their brilliant lights can be seen for many miles. They may appear to be close and should, therefore, be accompanied by the sound of a motor or engine, when they are actually quite a distance away and their engine is outside of the range of hearing.

The illusion of the spinning row of lights is caused by the arrangement of lights placed directly on the plane or towed behind the plane on special mountings.

An example of such a plane, a Cessna 172, is pictured. The lights extend from wing tip to wing tip, passing under the fuselage. When the plane is in motion, the lights will go on and off in sequence to spell out the intended message. The arrangement is similar to that of the Allied Chemical Building in Times Square, with the letters moving horizontally across the row of lights. This effect, if seen from any angle other than from directly beneath the plane, creates the mirage of a spinning circular object simply because the lights are moving rhythmically and continuously across the mounting. The tail, nose, and wings of the plane are invisible to the observer due to the dark sky.



Appearance of Venus

The planet Venus is frequently reported as a UFO because it can be extremely bright against a nighttime sky, because it can appear to move and because it can appear to change color and intensity.

The intensity of its light is exemplified by the Mercersburg sighting. The witnesses in this case described the light as looking like "burning magnesium." In this sighting, which occurred on March 8, the extraordinarily brilliant light appeared to illuminate the side of a mountain ridge to the west of the witnesses' home. However, at this very time, from March 1 through March 15, Venus was at its height of brilliancy and its position was in the western sky.

The light also appeared to drift further away from the witnesses' position. Its movement was barely perceptible, yet it did appear to move toward the west. This optical illusion is caused by the fact that a single, stationary, bright light on a black background does appear to float. The illusion occurs partly because of a lack of reference points and partly because, like the "spinning" advertising planes, it is a mirage created by our eyes and our brains.

Along with its brilliant light and apparent motion, Venus can also seem to change its color and intensity. This is due to the amount of cosmic dust, atmospheric pollution, and other space debris. All of these particles interfere with the observation of the planet by giving the light varying hues and intensities.

The position of Venus as a morning or evening star can be easily checked by consulting a star gazer's chart, an almanac, or a similar relevant source.

Hopefully the preceding information will help sky watchers to be more knowledgeable and discriminating observers.

(Left) Pictured is a Cessna 172 with mounted lights.

UFO Follows Moroccan Coastline



Analyze A UFO Photograph

The scene pictured is of a Miami, Florida, apartment building. The photograph was taken at 8:00 p.m. on February 9, 1977. A NICAP member submitted the print to NICAP for analysis because of the unusual, roundshaped light in the upper left hand corner. NICAP has had the photograph analyzed and will print the results of the analysis in next month's

newsletter. Until then, NICAP welcomes all its members to try their investigating and analyzing skills. Study the photo for all possible clues before deciding whether it is a real UFO, a man-made hoax, or a camera flaw. Send your results to NICAP Headquarters before the June issue is mailed.

Early last fall, a series of UFO sightings occurred along the north east coast of Africa. NICAP only recently learned of these reports, and although the material is several months old, we feel that the number of witnesses and the detail of the reports makes the information worth presenting to our readers.

The object that aroused the witnesses' attention was described by varying observers as both disc shaped and tube shaped. It was consistently depicted as being large, silver colored, and luminous. No witnesses heard any sound coming from the silvery shape; however, many saw trails of sparks spraying out periodically from behind the object.

All of the sightings occurred in mid-September between the hours of midnight and dawn. The Royal Gendarmerie received reports from residents along the entire coastline of Morocco. Witnesses in Casablanca, Marrakech, and the Fez Region all agreed that the object traveled slowly in a north to northwest course, following the Atlantic coastline.

A major in the Gendarmerie was one of the many witnesses. According to his report, the object remained in view for many minutes. At first, while the object was some distance away, it appeared to be disc shaped. Then as the object traveled closer to the observer's position, it became more distinct in shape and looked like a tube or cylinder. This fact may clarify the discrepancies between the other witnesses' reports of the object's shape.

SIGHTING ADVISORY

Preliminary information on new reports. Details and evaluations will be published when available.

Vienna, Virginia—May 20—At approximately 9:45 P.M. thirty-one year old Doris Cuninghame and her nine year old son were proceeding toward their apartment building. The child suddenly motioned for his mother to look over the pool. Hovering no more than twelve stories above the ground was a large circular shaped object. The object had a glowing orange top and different colored twirling lights. Within seconds, the object sped off, leaving the frightened witnesses staring at an empty night sky.