

ARE THERE UFOs THAT MIMIC?

Part 1

Ann Druffel

Our contributor from California, a frequent and welcome reporter in the pages of *Flying Saucer Review*, is a researcher and writer for MUFON, and a member of the Center for UFO Studies.

ANY UFO researcher worth his salt has come across particularly puzzling cases, in which credible witnesses will report close encounters with UFOs of odd design and precise structural detail, performing impossible manoeuvres. These will seem at first to be first-class reports deserving of careful follow-up.

Checking out standard sources during the subsequent investigations, these puzzling sightings fall apart in the researcher's hands. An ordinary man-made object — a blimp, an advertising plane, etc. — will be proved to have been in the vicinity of the sighting at the time stated. The witnesses must have been mistaken; subconsciously they must have embellished details and invented manoeuvres that their "UFO" was supposed to have performed.

Go back to these witnesses, however, and present the evidence uncovered. Try to interpret what has happened. The witnesses continue to contend that "they have seen what they have seen."

Cases such as these occur from time to time in Southern California skies and have caused the author and other local researchers much puzzlement. Invariably, the sightings have been classified as IFOs or stuck out of sight into bulging files. No real use has been made of them over the years.

To illustrate briefly the kind of case which is the specific subject of this column, let us consider the Santa Ana, California, sighting of January 2, 1973. On this smogless evening, the visibility was fifteen miles on the ground, sixty miles one thousand feet above the earth. Unusually pure air imparted a brilliance and clarity to lights and objects rarely experienced in this polluted basin.

Between 6.30 and 7.00 p.m., seven witnesses in four different sections of the city viewed a startling, vividly lighted metallic craft. The domed vehicle was complete with jaunty antennae and a lighted door.¹ The author was, unfortunately, the investigator on this promising case. It was a dismal task indeed to have to inform the awed and frightened witnesses that they had mistaken the Goodyear blimp for a craft from another world.

The Goodyear blimp was cruising Orange County, including Santa Ana, that evening between 6.00 and 8.00 p.m. Three years before, it had been outfitted by its enterprising owners with 7,560 coloured light bulbs. Flashing in varied thirty-second patterns of green, red, yellow and blue, they called the world's attention to the next breathtaking advertisement which followed on words outlined with ordinary white lights.²

The brilliant colours and oval shape reported by the witnesses conformed closely to those of the blimp. The light patterns in most cases also were similar. But the structured details, antennae, door, dome, a sound "like an electric generator" — did not conform. Above all, the meteoric speeds, rapid decelerations, immense apparent size, and angled flight paths reported were not compatible with the clumsy airship, whose cruising speed is thirty-five mph, and which was carefully ambling along at minimum 1000-foot altitude. Perhaps the most eloquent statement regarding the Santa Ana misidentifications came from the blimp's pilot himself. "How could they mistake it?" he asked. "It has GOODYEAR written all over it, and anyone within a mile of it can read the ads unless they are blind or *can't* read!"

Sine functions and ratios applied to the apparent sizes and angles of sight showed impossible correlation, in most cases, with what the blimp should present at normal cruising height.

For the sake of objectivity, however, it was decided that all the witnesses were wrong. In spite of our tactful efforts, seven puzzled, angry witnesses were left stoutly maintaining that the object was not, and never could be, the blimp.³

The same thing happened three months later in Tarzana, California on April 10, 1973. In that San Fernando Valley community, not one but *three* startling craft whose colours and shape roughly resembled the blimp manoeuvred together before departing at a speed considerably above the blimp's best efforts. But the blimp was cruising the valley that night. Again, for the sake of objectivity, the case was put down as "misidentification of conventional object." But by this time the author had begun to wonder.⁴

Three years passed, during which whirling, lighted discs which circled larger lighted discs were identified tentatively as a new type of advertising helicopter. The witnesses were as puzzled as the investigator when she tried to tell them what they had seen.

On February 1, 1977, a sighting occurred which, lightly speaking, was the straw which broke the ufologist's back. On that evening at 8.40 p.m. above Glendale, California, two young professional men (RQ and RD) flying southbound in a helicopter at 1100 feet saw a bright yellowish light passing them, going northbound at an estimated 100 mph. It was about a thousand feet to their left and two hundred feet lower in altitude. Thinking that it was a fixed-

wing aircraft flying at an illegal height, the pilot of the chopper turned his ship toward the light in the hope of catching its number and reporting it to the FAA. The object immediately came up to the helicopter's altitude and copied its turn precisely. In less time than it takes to tell, the men in the helicopter found themselves performing a Luffberry circle manoeuvre with the strangest craft they had ever seen.⁵

The word "craft" as used here is not by author's choice. It was a carefully chosen word used by two exceptionally-qualified observers. Their own words speak more picturesquely than any paraphrasing could ever do.

"It was approximately 300 to 500 feet away, orbiting in a precise 180 orbit with us. We were in at least a 500-foot orbit and going 60 miles an hour. It was an unusual-looking light, really threw off a lot of light upward, illuminating an object above it to which it was attached. It appeared to be a cylinder-shaped deal (see Figures 1 & 2). This cylinder-shaped thing was approximately 10-15 feet high and 4-8 feet wide. It wasn't another aircraft, that's for sure. It was upright, you know... it couldn't fly that way. We were wondering what the heck it was. Couldn't see any wings. Couldn't figure it out. We were more or less astonished at what we were seeing. We circled with it in precision flight for five or ten orbits. We saw markings or struts or something going up into a triangle type of thing and sticking out at an angle from the sides. The cylinder and struts or markings were dark colour, or grey. We were seeing the struts or markings from the light reflecting up. As far as whether they were dimensional or not, it would be hard to determine.

"The light was right on the bottom. It was *bright!* It was a yellowish-white which resembled no aircraft navigational light we've ever seen. It didn't have distinct edges. We tried to get a closer look at the whole thing with our gyroscopic binoculars, but the gyros weren't turned on...the plug wasn't in, so there was a lot of vibration. When [the pilot]

took the binoculars the object suddenly turned into us. It appeared as though it was going to change course and come at us. [The pilot] quickly gave the binoculars back and took over the controls again, kind of veered to the right a little, to continue on a wider orbit. But it then stayed in the orbit, but a little higher than us now.

"It definitely was too controlled, too exact, to be any kind of even remote-controlled thing.

"We said, 'let's try to get a closer look. Let's go up after it'. We changed altitudes and were going a little higher. It went higher also, broke orbit and went off into the east-southeast at about 11 o'clock position and vanished, like it turned off the light. We were in the same area that it vanished, which was up another 1000 feet and there was no fog up there, no way it disappeared in any fog or went to the east or whatever. It evidently turned off its light and took off."⁶

This February 1, 1977, sighting should be a researcher's dream. It was comprised of well-qualified witnesses, exact details, precision manoeuvres and inexplicable manner of disappearance. Yet when massive efforts were made to locate ground witnesses, none could be located who had seen the circling object or the helicopter. What *did* turn up were a series of sightings, including one on February 1st, between 8.35 and 8.45 p.m. in the same area where the helicopter performed its Luffberry circle with the strange craft. These sightings were of unknown objects, later determined to be probable hoax balloons of an unfamiliar type.

In reading through the voluminous tape transcripts connected with this case, one is struck by the fact that the two witnesses in the helicopter qualified most of their statements. They were most careful in verbal and written description. The only thing they did *not* qualify was that they were sure the object was not a balloon of any kind. They "have seen what they have seen."

In this field of UFO research, where nothing is certain and where evidence often conflicts with "reality," it is probably acceptable to ask this

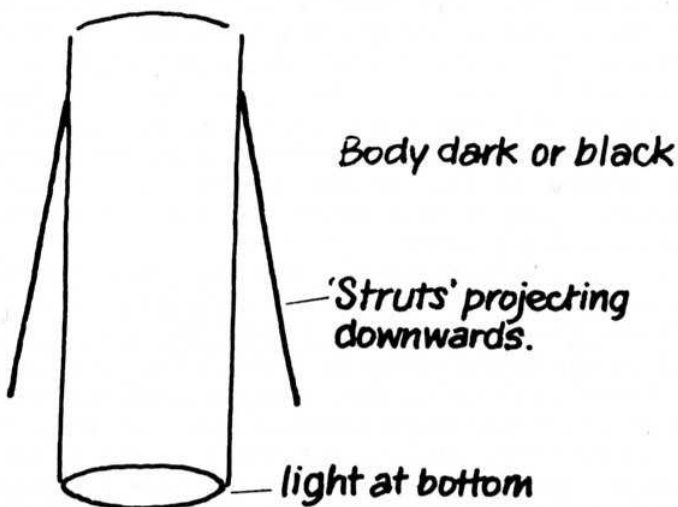


Figure 1 The sketch by R.Q.

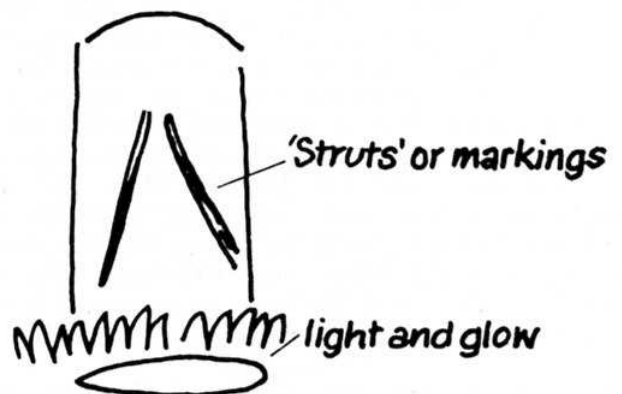


Figure 2 The sketch by R.D.

question: "Do UFOs sometimes mimic conventional objects?"

* * * * *

Serious researchers have endeavoured during the past thirty years to seek out conventional answers to UFO reports. It has been the author's experience that only about 2% to 3% of raw data sightings received turn out to be scientifically valuable "unknowns", *not* 20%, the commonly accepted figure. The case of the Glendale helicopter sighting of February 1, 1977, is recorded as a likely "unknown," or UFO.

The trouble with the Glendale helicopter case is that it happened at the same time and location as hoax balloon activity of an unfamiliar type. Are we, therefore, forced to come to the conclusion that the two professional and trained observers who were encountering a strange "craft" 1100 feet above the city of Glendale were, in fact, viewing an errant hoax balloon? In order to try to answer this knotty problem, let us consider the nature of the hoax balloon reports in Glendale on and around February 1st.

At about 8.00 p.m. on January 28, 1977, on Sparr Boulevard, which borders Glorietta Park, over which the helicopter sighting occurred, a 16-year-old girl, H.C., saw a bright yellowish light rising up in the south. As it went out of sight at the top of her window frame she ran outside to catch sight of it again, meanwhile calling to her mother. The two witnesses stood on their driveway while the light wandered eastward, then straight up again, clearing the tops of nearby trees. Above the bright, steady light was an indistinct black mass, on to which little or none of the light source reflected. It made another bend eastwards and then started drifting northerly at 12 degrees elevation, slowly rising higher. It now kept a straight path seemingly only at a couple of hundred feet, but its motion was "floating" rather than controlled. Apparent size of the light was about one-half the full moon. As it climbed, it diminished in size and slowly changed colour to orange. It disappeared from view in the NNE at 60 degrees elevation. Duration of the sighting was about ten minutes.

Rather awed by the occurrence, the younger witness was doubly startled the next two nights. From her room on these two subsequent evenings, she saw identical lights rise out of the south. On the 29th, the object remained below 20 degrees elevation, half-hidden behind trees and evidently travelling in a southerly direction. As before, the light was very bright and close. On January 30th, the light drifted towards the east, travelling upwards and disappearing behind a neighbour's house. The young girl's mother and brother were witnesses with her, and all three described the light as comparable to a car's headlights on high beams from a half-block away.

On February 1st, the night of the helicopter sighting, at about 8.35 p.m., H.C. and a 17-year-old friend, Kaye Brown, were in her room on Sparr Boulevard listening to records, when she saw the

fourth appearance of the strange light. The two girls dashed outside and watched the light, self-contained as before, manoeuvring in a lazy drifting pattern from east to west across the southern sky. At the same time, they heard neighbour boys laughing in a yard two doors down. They did not pay much attention as the boys, H.C. stated later, are "nocturnal" and always working and kidding around with friends in their garage.

As the light, with its dark mass above it, floated back and forth in the sky, Kaye phoned her mother. Mrs. Brown, who lives only a few blocks from the C. home, could not see the light, which indicated that the light was comparatively near the Sparr Boulevard location. H.C. continued to watch while Kaye was on the phone and saw the light continue an upward path into the southern sky, turn orange and fade out of sight into the distance about 8.50 p.m.⁷

Checking the wind directions later, it was determined that on all four nights of the Sparr Boulevard sightings, the winds were light. On all four nights, the wind direction was consistent with the directions of the object's travel, and on the evenings of variable winds, the drifting "manoeuvres" could be accounted for by shifts in wind direction. Therefore, it was decided that the Sparr Boulevard sightings were probably hoax balloons.

But of what type? They were certainly not ordinary hot-air or candle balloons. There were no lighted bags, flickering, or dropping of flaming particles, common to candle balloon sightings. They were not highway flares on helium-filled bags, as these have a typical sputtering effect entirely different from the steady, brilliant Sparr Boulevard objects. A valiant effort was made to track down the hoaxers, but all efforts were met with hostile silence from the suspected boys and their parents.

If any reader knows of a new type of hoax balloon which fits the above description, it would be very good to hear.

We are left with a dilemma. South of Glorietta Park, a few blocks from Sparr Boulevard, a helicopter with two hardheaded, professional observers, was circling with a precisely controlled "craft." The evidence of the hoax balloon activity was presented to these witnesses. Their answer again spoke eloquently: they unqualifiedly stated that they were certain, judging from their observation of reference points during the encounter, that they were orbiting *with* the object, not merely circling around it. No way, in their opinion, could it have been any kind of balloon drifting with the wind.

It is the author's opinion that the two helicopter observers did *not* see, and misidentify, a hoax balloon. There are points of similarity, to be sure, such as the bright yellowish light and the markings or "struts", not unlike those in some candle balloons. But there are four major points of difference between the object they encountered and the objects seen from the ground: 1. The objects of Sparr Boulevard acted like balloons, with drifting flight and lazy manoeuvres. The "craft" which the helicopter encountered manoeuvred precisely and in at least three crucial points during the observation seemed to

perform intelligent counter-reactions; 2. The dark, indistinct mass above the bright light seen from the ground reflected little or no light, whereas the object high in the air reflected light up on to two thirds of its cylindrical body. But still the reflected light is entirely dissimilar to that of any known type of hoax balloon; 3. Though carefully questioned, none of the Sparr Boulevard witnesses on February 1st saw or heard a helicopter or other aircraft near or circling around the light, even though the object that night was watched for 10–15 minutes *during* the time of the helicopter sighting. A glance at the map indicates that the major part of the helicopter encounter occurred several blocks south of Sparr Boulevard. Massive efforts have failed to find any witnesses who saw a helicopter circling with or around a light in the area involved; 4. The manner of disappearance of the helicopter's strange travelling companion was instantaneous, unlike the gradual disappearance of the objects seen from the ground.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that the helicopter observers were seeing a bird of quite a different feather – *not* a hoax balloon. Could it have been an “unknown” mimicking some of the

characteristics of the man-made object drifting below?

* * * * *

In Part II, next issue, some surprising correlations will be offered, comparing the Glendale object with a classic Brazilian UFO, which was involved in one of the strangest abduction cases ever recorded.

References

1. Documented 13-page report in MUFON files, (by Druffel).
2. Santa Ana Register, “Brilliantly Lighted UFO Sighted in Santa Ana,” by Bob Kirkpatrick, January 24, 1973.
3. Skylook, March 1973, “Brilliantly-Lit UFO in Santa Ana, California Probably a Blimp”.
4. Skylook, June 1973, “California Witness Says UFO is Not a Blimp”.
5. Documented 24-page report in MUFON, CUFOS and FSR files, by Druffel.
6. Witnesses’ statements edited from two 90-minute interviews, tape-recorded and transcribed.
7. From one-hour taped interview with helicopter witnesses (Druffel files), March 1, 1977.

1942 SIGHTING ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT

J. Burns BSc.

Our contributor, a BUFORA member, lives in Stonehouse, Lanarkshire, Scotland.

THIS report concerns an incident stated by the witness, a German infantryman fighting in a vast battle on the Russian front, in the Tula region. The soldier is now my father-in-law.

During this period, August 1942, the German Army was involved in a bitterly fought retreat, digging in in trenches and moving back every 7 to 10 days. The witness cannot recall the date, but the time of the incident was about 2.00 p.m. and there was broken cloud cover at a fairly high level. It was warm, and slightly misty with a light breeze.

My father-in-law writes:—

“During the Second World War, on the Russian front; I saw the most baffling object [*I have seen*] in my life. Out of a cloudy sky appeared slowly a huge cigar-shaped object, something like a Zeppelin, but much bulkier and rounder at the front. It was of a dull silvery colour. It remained stationary for at least a minute.

“There were no visible windows or any other sign of a gondola to be seen. What made it so amazing was the absence of any engine noise. It shot off at an upwards angle at terrific speed and within seconds was out of sight, again with no noise and no vapour trail.

“This thing was seen by quite a few

men. We talked about it but in the end shrugged it off as a mirage. It was reported to the commanding officer because it was thought it could have been a Russian secret weapon.”

I have ascertained that in the first instance the object moved out of the clouds slowly, snout pointing downwards and, after levelling out and remaining motionless for the minute as described it tilted its snout upwards through the clouds. The clouds were not disturbed by its passage through them.

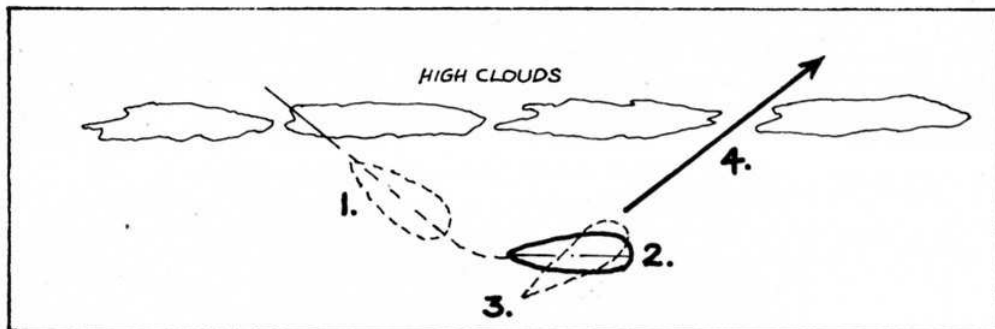
The UFO was approximately 300 yards long and 100 yards high at the thickest part (more than twice the size of the ill-fated *Hindenburg* airship). It was very smooth, had no markings,

and was of an aluminium-hued colour.

It was a daylight visitation, and the 20 or so men who saw it were quite alarmed – especially as they thought it might be a Russian secret weapon.

Based on information given by my father-in-law in a report form, and using simple triangulation and proportion, it would seem that the object was stationary at a height of 3,400 feet and was some 4,300 feet from the observer (the margin of error could be as high as 40% which in no way would make the figures insignificant).

The witness is a very practical man and does not show any interest in phenomena of this kind – other than the case just described.



1. Slow descent
2. Level, and motionless for one minute
3. Upwards tilt
4. UFO departs at “extreme speed”