



FLYING
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CASE HISTORIES

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Case Histories

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Witnesses at the landing site

REPORT FROM DELPHOS

see page 4

The Aldridge Case : Pc. Leek's Photographs

*J. Allen Hynek and
Julian Hennessey*

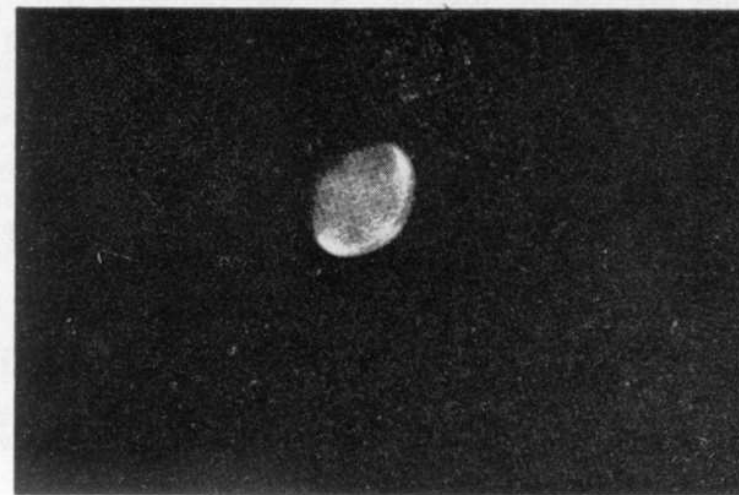
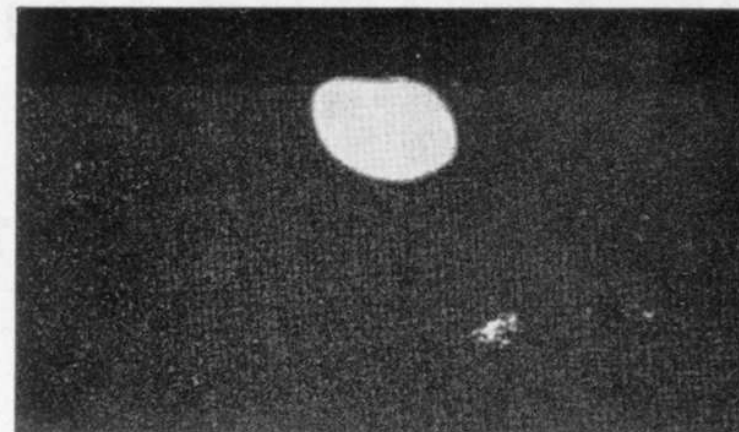
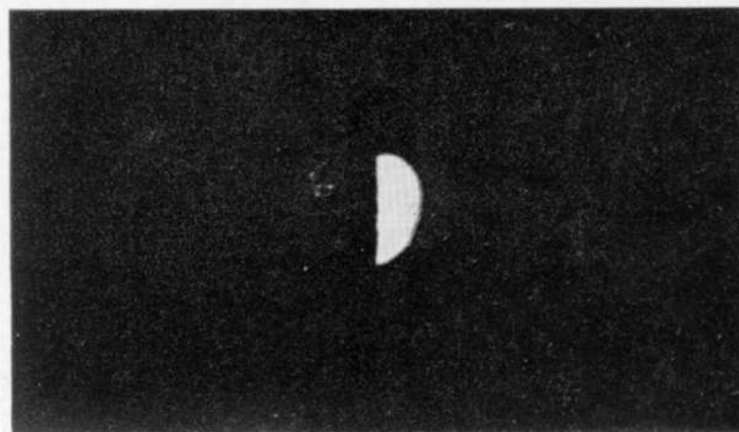
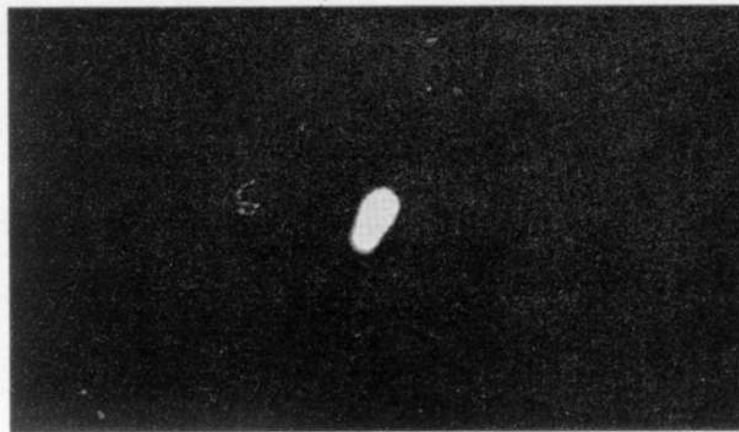
When Dr. Hynek visited England this past September to attend scientific meetings and to present an invited paper on UFOs at the Institute of Theoretical Astronomy at the University of Cambridge, I suggested that it might be a good idea to visit Aldridge and personally look into the UFO case that had been given a deal of publicity on the BBC and in the newspapers. Having always felt that investigating a case *in situ* was far better than armchair theorising, Dr. Hynek fully agreed, and we went to the Midlands as the guests of Mr. Roger Stanway (now Chairman of BUFORA) of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

J. HENNESSEY.

IT was fortunate that we did investigate this case, for it proved to be an excellent demonstration of what can be accomplished by "reconstructing the crime", and we arrived at the solution with a piece of detective work of which we are both rather proud. The fact that this "UFO" proved to be not one but two(!) natural objects does not detract in the least from the true (i.e. really unexplainable) cases, many of which we have both investigated and for which we have been unable to provide any natural answers. The Aldridge case is such a good example of what can happen when honest mistakes are made and when circumstances conspire to "fool" otherwise competent persons, that we feel readers of the FSR should know about it.

On Monday, August 16, 1971, at 2.25 a.m., Mr. Joseph Wilcox and his wife were driving towards Aldridge when they observed a "large and yellowish" coloured object in the sky. On arriving at his home in Walsall Road, Mr. Wilcox telephoned Aldridge Police Station reporting that the object was still visible to him. On stepping out from the Police Station, the constables answering the call immediately observed the bright object and proceeded to Walsall Road where they took pictures with a Minolta Hi-Matic 7 automatic camera set on "infinity". The constables and a sergeant then left in two patrol cars and viewed the object from different parts of the area before returning to the station.

Both authors took bearings from the police station, and "The Pantry" in Walsall Road (where they were quite exact), and all proved to be the same. Consultation with a nautical almanac (kindly provided by Dr. Maddison of Keele University) showed that the altitude



and azimuth of the "object" and of Mars coincided! But, the photographs surely were not of Mars. Furthermore, the constable taking the pictures had indicated that his exposure meter read "9" when he was taking them. Of what then were they a photograph? Now here probably no amount of armchair detective work could have given the answer. An actual on-the-scene reconstruction of the event was necessary.

We borrowed the very same camera that had been used that evening, and returned to the exact spot from which the original shots had been taken. One of us then aimed the camera in precisely the same direction (determined by prismatic compass bearing) it had been aimed on the night in question. Imagine our surprise when we noted in the very upper corner of the viewfinder a bright street light just "getting into the act." And the exposure meter reading was 9.

When we had examined the original dozen negatives, kept at the County Constabulary Headquarters, we were surprised to find that the mysterious object had appeared on only four of them (not in sequence). This is easily explained by the fact that the constable who took the pictures had moved the camera, so that sometimes the street light was in the field of view, but most of the time it was not.

In short, a most honest mistake had been made. The constable, who admittedly knew nothing of photography but had been instructed "to set it at infinity, on automatic, and shoot," was obviously aiming at Mars, which was then the brightest it had been since 1924. We can attest that on August 16 it looked bright indeed and one unfamiliar with astronomy would surely not have taken this bright light as a "planet." Nothing showed up in the centre of the field at any time. This was to be expected. Even at its brightest Mars cannot be photographed by a short exposure with a hand-held camera. So nothing appeared in the centre of the field, but on some shots an out-of-focus image of a nearby street light did!

Thus we feel this little episode was a sobering experience for us as UFO investigators, and holds a moral for all of us. Whenever possible, get to the original spot of the sighting, and preferably at the exact time of day or night as well. It is surprising how often "re-enacting the crime" will offer a solution.

But not always. Both authors have investigated cases at the very location and have come up with no solution. In such cases, the validity of the UFO report is immeasurably strengthened—in short, we have a "true UFO"—it remains unidentified!

Mystery Object seen from French Observatory

Translation by Gordon Creighton from a draft forwarded by Aimé Michel. A similar account has appeared recently in *Lumières dans la Nuit* No. 115 (December 1971).

THE incident occurred on September 16, 1971, at 8.45 p.m., and the approximate duration of the sighting was 5 minutes.

It all started with a series of some fifteen telephone calls, very close together, to the Haute-Provence Observatory (St. Michel l'Observatoire) by people in Manosque and vicinity, one of the calls being from an engineer at the Atomic Centre at Cadarache. These callers reported a strange bright object in the sky, roughly in the direction of St. Michel, which lies to the north-west from Manosque. These calls were transferred by the operator at the Observatory to the call-box in the great cupola of the 1.93m. telescope. They were taken by the two night assistants at the cupola, M. Gabelou and M. Rambaud, and by two technical workers from the Meudon Observatory who had gone to do a job at St. Michel.

The cupola of the large telescope is surrounded by a circular terrace which goes right round it at the level of the laboratories on the second storey, just below the telescope. From there, one has a view of the surrounding

countryside over a very long distance. The individuals mentioned above go out on to this terrace and immediately see, towards the E-SE (over Valensole), at 20° above the horizon, two bright points of light as luminous as Mars, very close together and appearing to be linked together (making the same movements). Around them is a diffused yellowish oval-shaped halo, within which they move about.* The shape formed by the two points of light and the halo moves from left to right in a continuous movement that is quite slow, but faster than the movement of the *Echo* satellites. The apparent trajectory lies over the hill that skirts the river Durance between the peak known as Le Rocher de Volx (in the direction of Valensole) and Manosque (further to the right, hidden by the hill in question).

The object is slowly climbing as it moves towards the right, i.e., southwards. There is total silence. One of the witnesses, M. Gabelou, dashes into one of the labs to get the Huet 10 × 50 binoculars kept there for the use of the astronomers working in the cupola, and comes back immediately on to the terrace. The