

Illinois police officers track UFO near Scott AFB

By David B. Marler
Illinois State Director

During my ten years of investigating UFOs, I have never had a case like the one that occurred in the early morning hours of Jan. 5, 2000. The UFO incident involved multiple witnesses, which mainly consisted of police officers from a number of small Illinois towns.

The officers were able to track the unknown object and maintain radio contact with each other during the event. Adding to this, Scott Air Force Base was only two miles away from the flight path of the UFO. This episode became the focus of intense media coverage, which continued weeks after the actual event.



David Marler

The first person to notice anything unusual that early morning was Melvern Noll. Noll is the owner of a miniature golf course located in Highland, IL, which is approximately 24 miles from St. Louis, MO. During the off-season he is a truck driver making deliveries at all hours of the day and night.

Noll was returning from a delivery run he had just completed at approximately 4 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 5. Before returning home, he thought he would check his miniature golf course and make sure everything was in order. He parked his truck in the back of the building and began to exit the vehicle. While doing so, he noticed a "bright star" over in the northeast sky. He didn't give it much thought at the time and proceeded to enter the building. After checking things inside, he was returning to his truck when he again noticed the "bright star" in the northeast sky. This time he stopped and observed it more closely.

He noticed the light was, in fact, moving in his general direction. In just a few minutes, Noll noticed the bright white light was only part of a larger object. It appeared to be rectangular in shape and was comparable to the size of a football field. Noll added that the object was also very tall.

This object had a series of "windows" that ran down the side. He also noticed two "floors," each having two "windows." These were described as rectangular with an intense white light radiating out from them. The "windows" appeared to be located more toward the rear of the object. When the object was

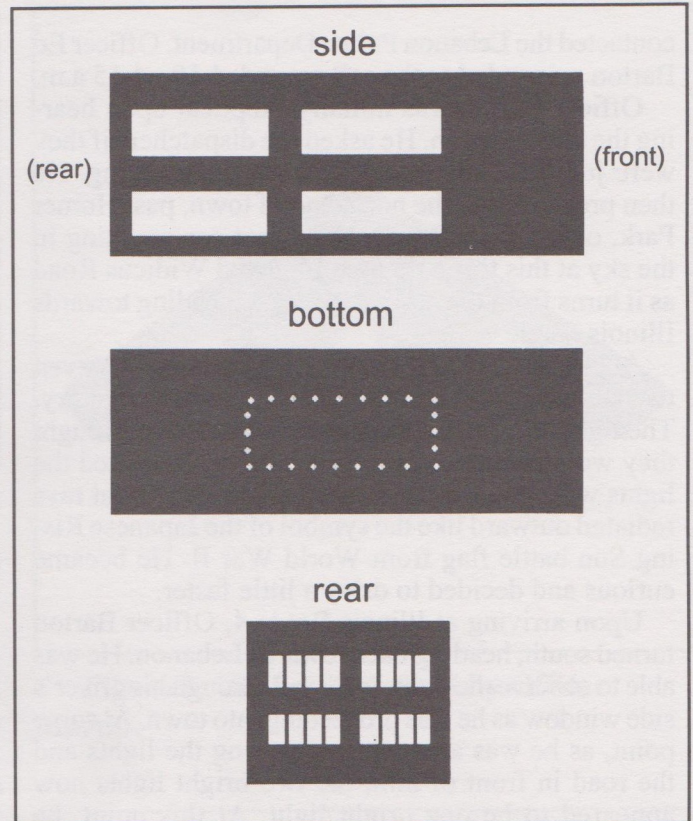


Figure 1: UFO as described by Melvern Noll.

very close, Noll stated he could see a large number of dim red lights on the bottom. He assumed the exterior color must have been black or dark gray (Figure 1).

The description he used to initially describe the object was "like a two-story house" in the sky. During this time, Noll did not notice any sound, odor, or emission coming from the object. As it moved away to the southwest he noticed "windows" on the back of the object. He added that these appeared to have a series of lines or bars in them that ran up and down.

The object appeared to move in a northeast to southwest direction. The speed was determined to be slow when compared to conventional aircraft. Noll said he recalls the object slowing down as it passed close to him before regaining speed as it moved away. Noll estimated the object was possibly a half-mile distant when it moved closest to his location. The altitude was estimated to be approximately 500 feet, and the duration of this sighting was estimated to be around 5 minutes.

Noll promptly drove his pickup truck to the Highland Police Station. He thought that nobody would believe him unless the Highland Police could contact a neighboring town's police officer who could verify that there was something strange in the sky.

The dispatcher at the Highland Police Department listened to Noll's account and determined that he was a rational individual, despite his unusual claim. She then

contacted the Lebanon Police Department. Officer Ed Barton responded to the call around 4:10 - 4:15 a.m.

Officer Barton was initially skeptical upon hearing the transmission. He asked the dispatchers if they were joking. They stated they were not joking. He then proceeded to the north end of town, past Homer Park, on Widicus Road. He did not see anything in the sky at this time. He then followed Widicus Road as it turns from the north to the east, heading towards Illinois Route 4.

About halfway to Route 4, Officer Barton observed two large brilliant white lights in the northeastern sky. The lights appeared so close together that he thought they were almost touching each other. He stated the lights were so brilliant in intensity that the light rays radiated outward like the symbol of the Japanese Rising Sun battle flag from World War II. He became curious and decided to drive a little faster.

Upon arriving at Illinois Route 4, Officer Barton turned south, heading back towards Lebanon. He was able to observe the lights to his left through his driver's side window as he was proceeding into town. At some point, as he was alternately watching the lights and the road in front of him, the two bright lights now appeared to be one bright light. At this point, he switched on his overhead lights, now believing this could possibly be an aircraft having problems.

Upon arriving in town, he made a left turn onto East Route 50 and proceeded east to a bridge at the bottom of the hill. At this point, while he was still driving, he noticed the one bright light appeared as an elongated cigar-shaped object. The object seemed to be stationary in the sky over the northeast end of the neighboring town of Summerfield.

Officer Barton stopped his vehicle on the side of the road, because he now noticed the object appeared to be heading in his direction. He stated it was not moving very fast, but not very slow either. Upon stopping the vehicle, he turned off all the lights and his squad car's radio in an attempt to hear any noise possibly coming from the object. No noise was evident.

As it approached, he noticed the distinct shape of the object. It appeared as a massive, elongated, narrow triangle, larger in length than width. The apparent size of the object was conservatively estimated to be approximately 75 ft in length and 40 ft in width. At each corner, Officer Barton observed a massive bright, white light.

These lights did not waver in intensity and appeared to be pointing straight down. He stated they did not light up the ground, but were very bright. In addition, there was one smaller flashing red light situated closer to the two rear white lights, yet in the midline of the object (Figure 2). He noticed that the object was blot-

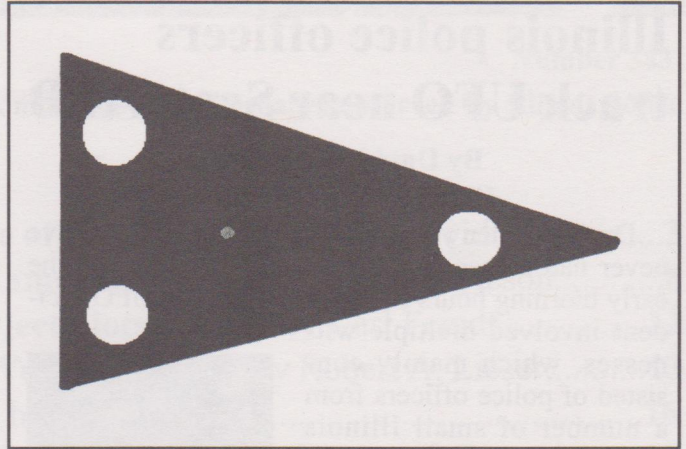


Figure 2: UFO as described by Officer Barton.

ting out the stars above it as it passed by him. He still could not discern any noise emanating from the object.

At this time, the object appeared to be closest to Officer Barton, and he estimated it was no more than 100 feet distant and approximately 1000 feet above the ground. Then he observed the object rotating in the sky from a southerly heading to that of a southwesterly direction. As it rotated, the object did not bank as is expected of conventional aircraft. Rather, the object pivoted in mid-air without tilting to one side or the other and remained completely level.

At this point, Officer Barton radioed Central Command to tell them what he was observing, as well as its current location. In between transmissions, he stopped for a moment as the craft dramatically increased speed. The object was moving at a relatively slow pace at the beginning of his transmission, but accelerated so fast he could barely track the movement with his eyes.

He was able to observe the rear of the object before this display of velocity, and his best analogy is in comparing it to the Millennium Falcon spacecraft from the motion picture "Star Wars." It appeared to be rectangular and illuminated by white light. Through the middle of the light, running lengthwise, was a band of multi-colored illumination. He stated that there were no individual colored lights visible. Rather, it appeared as a band of various colors, which blended into each other. He continued the transmission by informing Central Command that the object should now be around the town of Shiloh, approximately 8 miles to the Southwest.

Officer David Martin of the Shiloh Police Department radioed that he could now see something in the sky. Shortly thereafter, Officer Barton could no longer see the object from his location.

Officer Martin was driving on the southern end of Shiloh heading east when he observed the mysterious object, which appeared to be heading in a westerly direction. He was able to observe three brilliant white

lights, which were shining downward from the object. However, the light did not illuminate the ground or objects on the ground. In addition, small red and green lights were observed on the back end of the object. At this time, Officer Martin thought the object's altitude was approximately 1,000 feet. He estimated the distance from his car to the object to be about a quarter of a mile. He thought the object resembled the shape of an extra wide triangle or arrowhead. He estimated the apparent size to be 75-100 yards wide (Figure 3).

Officer Martin was driving slowly during his observations. He also rolled down his driver's side window to determine if the object was emitting any sound. No sound could be heard. He finally decided to pull over to the side of the road and exit the vehicle for a better observation. At this point, the object increased in speed and disappeared in a westerly direction.

Officer Martin estimated the object's initial speed to be 15 mph. When it increased in speed, he figured it to be at least 80-100 mph.

In the nearby town of Millstadt, IL, Officer Craig Stevens was on patrol and heard the radio traffic regarding the object. His curiosity was aroused, so he drove to the east end of Millstadt to see this mysterious thing in the sky. After not seeing anything, he proceeded to Liederkrantz Park on the north end of town.

While sitting in his car, he observed a very large object that was roughly triangular in shape. Officer Stevens estimated the object to be only 500-1000 feet in altitude. The flight speed was described as extremely slow. He also stated that there was no noise with the exception of a "low decibel buzzing sound" that he could barely discern. As he watched the object, it began moving to the north. It had a white light on the left side, right side, and center of the back end. In addition there was a single red light on the bottom. The back end also appeared to be slightly recessed (Figure 4).

At 4:29 a.m. Officer Stevens contacted his dispatcher to advise him that he could now see the object. Then he exited his vehicle and grabbed the Polaroid camera from his squad car's trunk. He aimed the camera at the object and took a picture, but the extreme cold temperatures of that morning (15-20 degrees Fahrenheit) caused the camera to work poorly. He was able to produce one photo, though poor in quality, before the object disappeared to the northwest (Figure 5).

The last police officer to report seeing the object that morning was from Dupo, IL. I interviewed him personally, but I do not have permission to use his name. This officer also heard the radio traffic that evening and decided to take a look for himself.

Approximately five minutes after Officer Stevens' radio transmission from Millstadt, the Dupo officer observed an array of lights. Contrary to the other officers, this individual stated the object was at a rela-

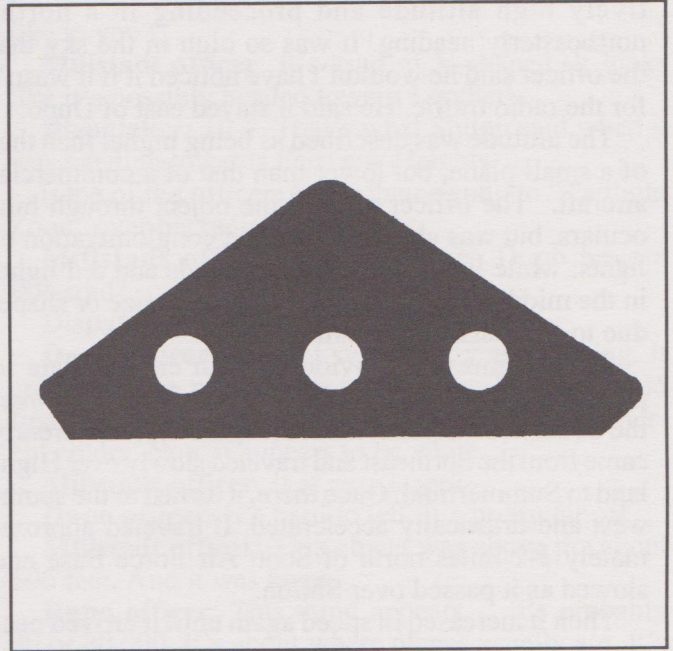


Figure 3: UFO as described by Officer Martin.

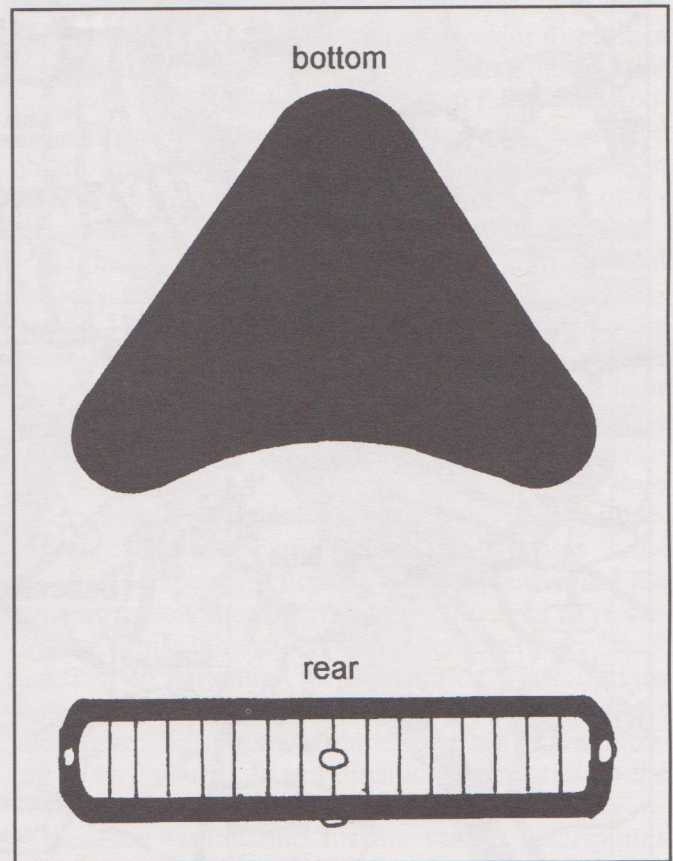


Figure 4: UFO as described Officer Stevens. UFO.

tively high altitude and proceeding in a north-northeasterly heading. It was so high in the sky that the officer said he wouldn't have noticed it if it wasn't for the radio traffic. He said it stayed east of Dupo.

The altitude was described as being higher than that of a small plane, but lower than that of a commercial aircraft. The officer viewed the object through binoculars, but was able to see only a conglomeration of lights: white lights at the extreme ends and red lights in the middle. He could not discern any size or shape, due to the distance and altitude.

These witnesses provide us with enough data to project the flight path of the object as it traveled over the Southwestern Illinois area (Figure 6). It apparently came from the northeast and traveled slowly over Highland to Summerfield. Once there, it turned to the southwest and drastically accelerated. It traveled approximately 1-2 miles north of Scott Air Force Base and slowed as it passed over Shiloh.

Then it increased in speed again until it arrived near



Figure 5: Polaroid photo by Officer Stevens.

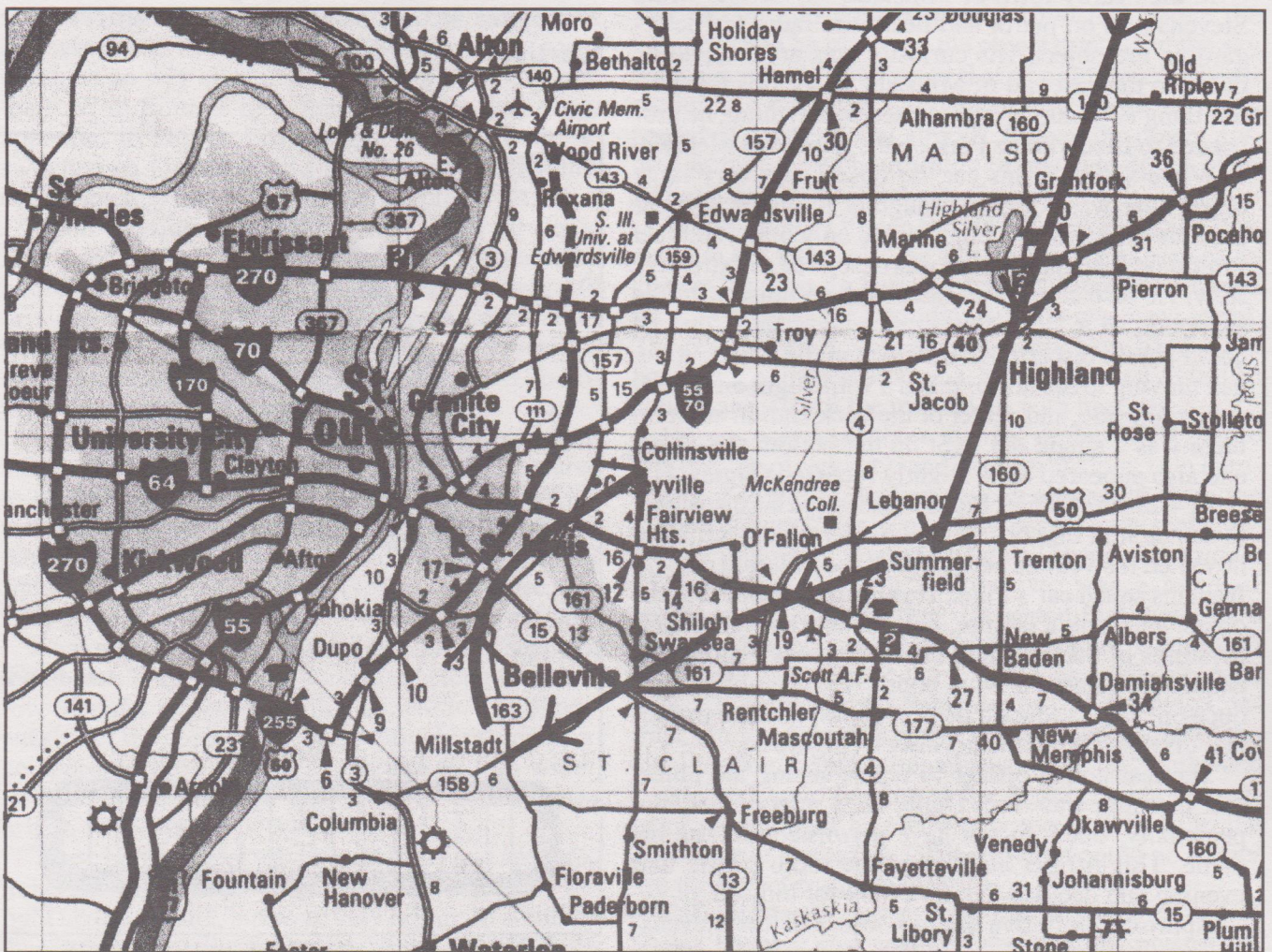


Figure 6: Flight path of object through Southwestern Illinois near Scott AFB.

the town of Millstadt. After slowing, it altered direction again and turned to the northwest. Shortly after that, the object then made a drastic turn to the northeast while also increasing in altitude, maintaining a low altitude until this final maneuver.

Due to the location of Scott Air Force Base in relation to the UFO sightings, I found it necessary to contact them. Although I was not optimistic, I felt I should pursue every possible source of information. I wrote a letter of introduction, requesting answers to four important questions concerning the recent UFO sighting.

I promptly received a courteous, albeit uninformative, letter of response indicating that (1) the only calls received at the base were from the media, (2) no ground observers at the base have come forward with reports, (3) the base did not track any objects on radar, since radar services are provided by the FAA at Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, and (4) the base was not operating any craft resembling the reports.

However, better information was provided by the St. Clair County Sheriff's Office. They released copies of the dispatch tapes for the morning of Jan. 5, 2000. What follows are the relevant transmissions:

Dispatcher. Lebanon, this is a call from Highland P.D. in reference to a truck driver who just stopped in. He said there was a flying object in the area of Lebanon. It looks like a two-story house. It had white lights and red blinking lights, and it was last seen southwest over Lebanon. Could you check the area?

Lebanon officer. Did they say the truck driver was DUI or anything? 10-4, I'm out.... Just a quick question. If I happened to find it, what am I supposed to do with it? If I see it, I'm not saying a word....

Also be advised the last thing that went over Lebanon—this was approximately five minutes ago—was a military cargo plane. It looked like a C-5.

...Be advised there is a very bright white light east of town. It looks like it's just east of Summerfield, and it keeps changing colors. I'll go over there and see if it looks like an aircraft. It doesn't look like an aircraft, though.... It's not the moon, and it's not a star.

If you would, will you contact Scott Air Force Base and see if they have anything flying in this area please?

Whether it's a plane or not, it's heading westbound now. It should be really close to Scott now.... As a matter of fact, if the Shiloh officer looks up, they can probably see it by now.

Shiloh officer: I see something, but I don't know what the heck it is.... It's probably heading to Lambert (Field).

Millstadt officer: I've got that object in sight also

Dispatcher: Are you serious?

Millstadt officer: It's huge.

Dispatcher: Does it look like a—What does it look

like to you?"

Millstadt officer: It's kind of V-shaped. It looks like it's possibly headed toward Lambert.

Dispatcher: 10-4. That's what Shiloh said when it was heading towards Fairview Heights.

(One of the officers hums theme song to "Twilight Zone" over his radio.)

Millstadt officer: Really. Does Dupo have a Polaroid?

Dispatcher: That, I don't know.

Dupo officer: I'm not sure what you're seeing. It appears to be pretty high in the area. When I could first see it with binoculars, you could see it was different colors. Now it appears to be white.

Millstadt officer. Is it very large?

Dupo officer: It's hard to tell. It's pretty far off.

Millstadt officer: This object was above me about 500 feet. And it was huge.

Dupo officer: This thing appears ... it's probably 20 or 30,000. It's about where planes usually are. It's not low at all.

I would now like to discuss some particular aspects of this case. The first concerns the obvious differences in the descriptions given by the witnesses. In examining the figures, we can see there are major disparities between them, the largest difference being the description provided by Noll as compared to those of the police officers. Noll describes a large rectangular-shaped object. Less than fifteen minutes later Officer Barton reports seeing an elongated triangle. The other officers report seeing objects that are roughly triangular.

Beyond differences in shape, we also have radical differences in the lighting configurations that were reported. I believe there are several possibilities for the inconsistencies. The first involves the most prosaic explanation. Namely, witnesses can be wrong in their interpretations of what they claim to have seen. This is a fact all objective UFO researchers must never forget. Is it possible the witnesses made errors in their observations? Of course that is a distinct possibility.

One of the major problems relating to this is the issue of perspective. From what perspective did the witnesses view the object? Some witnesses were stationary, while others were driving at the time of their sighting. In particular, Officer Barton's descriptions vary as he views the object from different distances and angles. To compound matters, the object was moving at various speeds and directions in relation to the observers.

Another explanation for the varied descriptions could be attributed to the notion that there were multiple objects of differing shapes in the sky that night. This would explain why different descriptions were

received. I tend to refute this idea due to a couple of facts. The terrain around Highland, Summerfield, and Shiloh is extremely flat. On a clear night, like on Jan. 5, you can see for miles in all directions. This is especially true between Highland and Summerfield. If multiple objects were in the sky illuminated by an array of lights, observers would have seen any that were there.

Also, the timing of the sightings would tend to coincide with the flight of a single object moving from town to town. There were only a few minutes between each sighting, which tends to suggest it was the same object being witnessed from various locations.

Yet a third possible explanation could involve the object actually changing shape in flight. This is one of the more questionable ideas proposed, but a review of the UFO literature will reveal a multitude of cases which involve objects that appear to change form. I only consider it as a possibility.

Another issue that needs to be discussed is Scott Air Force Base. I find it hard to imagine that a large unknown object with bright lights could fly under 1000 feet within two miles of the base without causing some concerns. I believe they may have more detailed information concerning this event. It is a distinct possibility that the object witnessed was a military craft of some type. Unfortunately, we do not have any evidence to support or refute this idea.

In closing, I would like to extend my thanks to Peter Davenport of the National UFO Reporting Center for his invaluable assistance in this case. Also, my thanks to the witnesses who were willing to come forward and share their experiences with us. Thanks, also to Forest Crawford who directly assisted me.

If anyone has any information or feedback relating to this case I can be reached by phone: (618) 346-2593 or email: dmarler@stlnet.com.

Ted Phillips updates physical trace catalog

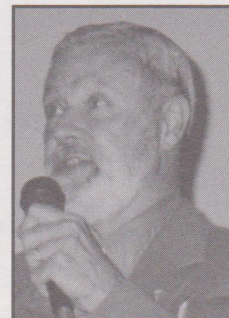
Ted Phillips reports that his updated catalog of physical traces associated with UFO sightings provides data from 2,240 events from 79 countries. "This is a revised and updated list of traces after taking out all events where no UFO was seen at the site, crop circles, and cases with little information to study," he notes.

There has been a considerable drop in the close encounter/trace events since the 70's. Preliminary statistics indicate an average of 106 such events per year between 1967 and 1979. The average per year drops to 15.7 between 1980 and 1999. Between 1990 and 1999 the yearly average is slightly higher at 17 events per year. Multiple witness events average 34.4% of the total events, and last year 31% of the events involved multiple witnesses.

Progress being made in deciphering Ramey letter

By Donald R. Burleson, Ph.D.

No problem in recent UFO studies can have been as intriguing, or indeed as promising, as the prospect of reading the now-famous Ramey Letter. I have produced and studied several hundred computer-enhanced images of the letter, and in attacking this problem I have at least two advantages going for me: I am the director of a computer lab with access to plenty of hardware and image-processing software, and I have a background in cryptanalysis, which means that I'm quite accustomed to reading things that I am not supposed to read.



Don Burleson

I have not worked on the Ramey problem alone by any means. Many others have tried, though frankly I must say that much of what I've seen in the press and on the Internet has been amateurish. Decipherment of the Ramey Letter is a computer process, necessarily, and while it helps from time to time to peer at a big glossy print of the letter with a magnifying glass, it can't be done by that means alone, which apparently some people have tried to do.

There is, however, some good work being done. Stanton Friedman has produced a CD with Ramey Letter image files. Don Schmitt and Tom Carey have worked on the Ramey Letter and have produced results that agree with my own on many important points, although inevitably there are some differences in a process as difficult as this. For everyone involved, of course, this is an ongoing research project. At this writing (December 1999), I have been working on the Ramey Letter for a little over a year, using a 2400-dpi scanned image cropped down to just the teletype memo, and often cropped down to single words.

While I have used several different software packages that have allowed me to do a variety of useful things, by far the most impressive package has been LUCIS, an extremely sophisticated program often used in such fields as electron microscopy for state-of-the-art image enhancement. LUCIS has clarified many points that other programs have left unclear, employing a unique but easy-to-use "double cursor" technique by which one may progressively manipulate a detail-enhancing function in concert with an image-smoothing function in an essentially unlimited number of different combinations and interactions, producing a sequence of numbered enhancement lev-