

---

# The Belgian sightings

by Auguste Meessen

■ ■ Auguste Meessen is professor of physics at the Catholic University of Louvain. This article, which first appeared in the November 1990 issue of *Inforespace*, is reprinted by permission. It was translated by Andrea Donderi, Mark Rodeghier, and W. D. Milner.

The sightings that occurred in Belgium between November 1989 and June 1990 have given us an impressive body of new data. We have even been able to study in detail material from both military and civilian ground radar screens. Moreover, an in-depth examination of on-board radar data from one of the F-16s sent up by the Belgian Air Force during the night of March 30-31, 1990, is currently under way. As far as I know, this is the first such opportunity in the world, but much remains to be done. I shall therefore only give an overview of this research. I shall outline what we are doing and briefly describe our methods.

I shall also include some remarks on the unwarranted generalizations that are still too frequently encountered (from skeptics) and on the reactions of eyewitnesses in the current socio-psychological climate in European ufology. Finally, I shall present a few reports of sightings made in Belgium and abroad. One case in particular, the enormous lozenge-shaped object that flew over the outskirts of the town of Eupen on December 1, 1989, is representative of the quality and importance of the new information. In assessing reports it is important to be aware of what has been happening in other countries, so I shall include a few foreign cases that suggest the wave of sightings may not be over.

## Ground investigations

At the beginning of December 1989 I joined the SOBEPS (Société Belge d'Etude des Phénomènes Spatiaux) investigation. It was vital to familiarize myself personally with the number and quality of the eyewitness reports. I concentrated almost exclusively on the Eupen region, of which I am a native. I hoped that my fluency in German and my profession as a physicist would help loosen people's tongues. I have noted that many eyewitnesses, and particularly the most reliable ones with important social responsibilities, are reluctant to discuss what they have seen because of irrational socio-psychological pressures.

The evening of November 29, 1989, was decisive, because two Eupen police officers had the courage to describe on television the UFO they had painstakingly observed. There were several other sightings that same day. I shall be compiling a list of them in the book that SOBEPS is planning to publish. I have discovered a series of eyewitness accounts that form a coherent sequence in time and space that day. The sightings made by Mr. J (more on which later) provide one example of what can be learned from these witnesses. In my opinion, data of these kinds, when taken together with the whole body of sightings worldwide, pose a challenge to the scientific community and to every thoughtful person.

Journalists have had an especially important role. Some of them have performed their work conscientiously, but others were simply seeking sensational stories. Yet more felt obliged to lead a personal crusade against the gathering of eyewitness reports. I will cite just one example whose immediate effects I observed.

A few days after December 18, 1989, a gendarme in the Eupen area refused to tell me what he had seen, probably because on that date a local daily paper had published an article which asserted that the "most plausible explanation" for UFO sightings was that the U. S. Air Force was secretly testing F-117A planes over Belgium. This article was preceded by the impressive headline "Explanation from Washington," and the sub-heading referred to a "hysteria" of UFO sightings. I was sent a copy of this paper the same day and immediately inquired into the matter, since these stories also form an aspect of the UFO phenomenon.

It turned out that the "explanation" was only speculation, put forward by the Flemish paper *Het Laatste Nieuws*. I phoned the journalist who wrote the article that triggered off a rumor which is still causing much ink to be spilt. He explained that he had just read an article on the F-117A and wished to pass on such information to his readers. To make his article more interesting, he had suggested (gratuitously, with no reference to the actual sightings) that there might be a possible connection with recent sightings in Belgium. In the meantime, I had learned from Lt. Col. De Brouwer, Chief of Operations of the Belgian Air Force, that the Air Force had sought information from the American Embassy to help them explain the reports. This should not have been necessary if the sightings were caused by secret exercises, as De Brouwer routinely would have been informed of any such

overflights. Instead, he took the trouble to secure accurate information about what the many Belgian eyewitnesses had really seen.

Learning that an official American disclaimer was to be published, I telephoned the Eupen journalist to tell him the news and to ask him to publish a correction as soon as possible. When I asked him why he had spoken of "an explanation from Washington" and characterized the eyewitness accounts of local people as "hysterical," he responded, "I am against all that." I appreciate his candor, but that does not square with the regard for objectivity one expects of journalists. Such attitudes constitute disinformation and serve to dissuade eyewitnesses; they make the search for truth more difficult.

## The search for more objective information

Having convinced myself of the reality and importance of the wave of UFO sightings in our country, I concluded that it would have been scientifically irresponsible to ignore this wave without trying to find out what had turned up on our country's radar screens. I did not know how to gain access to the data, but I felt that reason would eventually prevail. Since early December 1989 I had been in contact with Lt. Col. De Brouwer at the Headquarters of the Belgian Air Force, requesting that any radar documentation be preserved for a thorough scientific study. Shortly afterwards I sent a similar written request to Guy Coëme, Minister of National Defense.

I also met the head of the air traffic control at Zaventem, the Brussels airport. I learned that he and his associates preserve recordings of radar data for several weeks on magnetic tape in the event of any inquiries relating to air safety. I therefore addressed a written request to Mr. Vandenbroucke, the General Manager of the Airlines Administration, for permission to videotape certain excerpts. These would be restricted to sequences selected on the basis of the number of fairly close-range and reliable UFO sightings. The goal was to verify whether there had been any suspicious radar traces before or after the sighting times, given that the UFOs were doubtless below the radar coverage at the time of very low-altitude sightings.

Although the response was delayed, a call to Vandenbroucke brought immediate cooperation. I convey my warm thanks to him and to the Chief Engineer and the technical radar personnel of our national airport for their effective support, which proved useful. In consequence I have been able to film and analyze more than 180 hours of data from the Bertem radar installation, which serves Zaventem airport. In brief, two surprising and significant discoveries emerged from this material. I shall describe them later. One of these discoveries concerned the fact that echoes of unidentified origin often moved along linear trajectories of limited length. This perplexed me. I

continued to collect as many data as possible, refusing to adopt any particular hypothesis. Furthermore, it was vital to analyze these data quickly so that I could assimilate their essential characteristics and determine what was worth studying more closely. In fact, I was involved in a race against time, since the magnetic tapes were retained only for a few weeks. Any potentially important material that I failed to save would be lost forever.

I also hoped to gain access to the military radar documentation, although I knew this would be more difficult. An increasingly close and productive collaboration had developed with Lt. Col. De Brouwer and with Lt. Col. Billen, Chief of the Glons radar installation. They shared my profound conviction that an in-depth study was required, both to understand better the UFO phenomenon and to elucidate the mysterious phenomenon that I had discovered, probably of atmospheric origin.

During this stage of the investigation an important event occurred. I knew that the Belgian Air Force planned to scramble F-16 fighters in cases where UFO sightings were reported by reliable eyewitnesses with additional confirmation by other evidence. These conditions seemed to have been met during the night of March 30-31, 1990. Although I was notified at an early stage, I had to wait for the Air Force's preliminary evaluation of the data before learning anything more.

For my part, I kept Lt. Col. De Brouwer informed about my research on the data from the Bertem radar. He saw the benefit of checking these data against those from the military radar at Semmerzake. I was accordingly authorized to go there and obtain extracts from these tapes. The information regarding the events of the night of March 30-31 remained inaccessible since an Air Force investigation was underway, but we were making progress all the same. The Semmerzake data were more accurate and detailed than those I already had.

Consequently, I was able to compare the data from the Semmerzake military radar with those from the Bertem civil radar, whose echoes are instantaneously transmitted to Semmerzake. They are subject to even less filtering than on the air controllers' screens at Zaventem airport. I could thus establish the coordinates and other characteristics of each individual echo. The analysis was laborious but made it possible to decisively confirm the preliminary conclusions drawn from the video films taken at Zaventem.

After the release of the Air Force report in the summer of 1990, there were irrational reactions on the part of some French media. Lt. Col. De Brouwer responded by supplying more information, hoping to demonstrate that the situation was more complex and better documented than many supposed, and that it merited further analysis. He resolutely followed an open-minded policy. Some journalists had labeled the military "The Great Mute"; by contrast, Lt. Col. De Brouwer maintained that "we have nothing to hide in this matter." I can attest to his deep honesty and courage.

After talking with a reporter from *Paris Match* (July 5, 1990, issue), De Brouwer also allowed some members of SOBEPS to see an extract from the video film of the on-board radar from one of the F-16s. The series of photos we were authorized to take enabled me to make a preliminary assessment, and I realized then the extremely strange nature of these data. Having made considerable headway in interpreting some of the initial radar data, I could see that the same explanation would not work for these astonishing observations.

In order to go further, I needed the express permission of the Minister of National Defense. Since my written request had met with no response, probably because of bureaucratic inertia, I decided to telephone the Minister, Guy Coëme. His response was almost immediate: "I believe in openness." This was, I think, a historic attitude. In any event, it was an exemplary action, from which other countries will soon, I hope, draw inspiration.

After this everything went like clockwork, albeit one whose hands moved slowly. For instance, I received the data from the Glons radar for the main events of March 30-31, 1990, on November 2, fully seven months later. The appropriate permissions had all been granted, but other military missions (in particular, the Gulf crisis and the intervention in Rwanda) took precedence compared to UFO investigations. Still, there can be a real advantage to letting ideas settle for a while. At present thorough studies are being undertaken in complete collaboration with an officer-engineer of the Belgian Air Force. I do not wish to name him so as to prevent him from being besieged with inquiries. The conclusions of our study will be published but only when this can be done in a responsible manner.

## The fundamental results

Almost continually, radar screens show sporadic echoes not correlated with aircraft. Radar operators call these echoes "angels," as if they were pure spirits. For them the echoes constitute annoying "noise" and are ignored as much as possible. A priori they could just as easily be UFOs as natural phenomena. They appear only occasionally, all over the screen. An air traffic controller cannot afford to waste time and attention on them. When I systematically recorded the positions in which these "angels" appeared, however, I noted that they often moved in practically straight lines. I have labeled this the "flying angels effect."

The average speed of this movement is low relative to that of aircraft (about 50 km/h). There are random fluctuations, but the mean speed is well-defined. The lines of motion are of limited length, and their direction of motion is not correlated with the wind. Furthermore, they can appear (perhaps even more often) when the sky is clear. The Semmerzake radar could locate the physical position of the radar returns. As the data accumulated, it became evident that this phenomenon could not involve

UFOs. It had to be an atmospheric problem, albeit a fairly special one, since the radar operators whom I consulted had not noticed this effect. A comprehensive survey of the literature indicated that this phenomenon had not been described either. I have finally discovered an explanation based on known physical principles and on some independent data. It will be described elsewhere when I have had time to verify it further. The "flying angels effect" is undoubtedly of atmospheric origin.

My second main finding was that I found no reliable traces associated with eyewitness accounts of UFO sightings, even when I examined the traces over a wide range of times and places. I knew, however, that there had been previous cases of radar detection of UFOs. The evidence in these cases seems to be acceptable (and cannot be explained by the "flying angels" phenomenon). Given the lack of radar confirmation in Belgium, it would be easy to put forward one or the other of these two simplistic hypotheses: either the witnesses saw nothing of a material nature, or F-117 Stealth aircraft were involved. But neither one nor the other hypothesis takes into account the whole range of what was observed. The UFOs sighted in Belgium were usually described as platforms, either stationary or moving horizontally. This is sufficient to explain the low probability of detection by ground radars. The radar beams would be reflected back as if by a horizontal mirror. The same technique is used for the F-117A Stealth plane.

On several occasions the UFOs had been described as having a vertical edge and a dome on top. Seen laterally or from above, as from an aircraft, radar detection might therefore be easier. So an F-16 might possibly detect a UFO of this kind, if the surfaces were not made of radar-absorbent material. This presents new questions, since if UFOs are extraterrestrial, why are their shapes now different from previously reported objects? Could they have adapted their craft's shape in order to evade our detection systems, or is it just a coincidence, resulting from the fact that this batch of visitors come from somewhere else?

As for the data from the F-16 on-board radar, which operates differently from ground radars and can record different kinds of data, I can only say, for the time being, that they are astonishing. In particular, there are abrupt changes in speed as well as other strange features. This calls for a technical, far-reaching, and careful study. We have made a start. I don't know what conclusion we will reach, nor when we shall reach it.

## The views of *Science & Vie*

With a few rare exceptions, the French media's coverage of the Belgian UFO sightings has not been distinguished by its objectivity. Some writers did not hesitate to quite openly make fun of the "little Belgians" and their "tales," but we shall see who laughs last. What surprised me most was the fact that the magazine *Science & Vie* (*Science &*

*Life*) had launched a sort of anti-UFO crusade. I have often admired this magazine's articles of scientific popularization. It has, in the past, taken a clear responsibility for public's scientific education. It is all the more deplorable, then, that in this area it traffics in irrational, unscientific polemics. The only advantage may be to document the fact for future generations that at the end of the 20th Century people reacted in this fashion, in spite of the lessons that they could have drawn from the history of science.

When there is a conflict between a new kind of fact and the established conceptual framework, people tend to hang on to preconceived ideas. What does not fit in with the theories that are regarded as unshakable is filtered out or repressed. People refuse to face reality. So far as UFOs are concerned, the method consists of selecting some facts that can be explained, it is thought, in a conventional manner. Then it is believed that this result can be extrapolated, without any effort's being made to examine the rest of the data. This leads to what can be termed unwarranted generalizations.

In its January 1990 issue (No. 868), *Science & Vie* showed no hesitation in discrediting all the Belgian eyewitnesses on the basis of *just one photograph*. This photo, taken near Eupen, showed a big luminous dot. The photographers submitted the photo to SOBEPS, along with several others from the same event. Even though the photo had little to do with the many eyewitness sightings, it could have been given a detailed analysis. Instead, the editorial team of *Science & Vie* preferred an unsupported interpretation, strongly suggesting that all eyewitness reports smacked of "poetry" or optical illusions.

In the June issue (No. 873) the magazine provided information about the F-117A Stealth aircraft. This sort of information had just been made public by the U.S. Air Force. The title of the article—"The UFO: This Is It," showing an example of an F-117A—speaks volumes about the magazine's commercial rather than scientific intentions. Again, it insinuated that all the witnesses must have been mistaken, like the Belgian Air Force. The author of this article and everyone involved clearly felt no need to conduct on-the-spot inquiries in order to obtain more information and acquire an objective view of the facts.

The October issue (No. 877) of *Science & Vie* announced on its first page that it was "on the track of the Belgian UFOs." In fact, the author was concerned only with the events of March 30-31, 1990, and the involvement of the Belgian Air Force. Apparently he felt that this constituted the core of the matter, and that by debunking it he could dispose of the whole story. He considered only the initial reports, which contained raw, unanalyzed information. The author of the article is intelligent and able, but his method resembled more that of a lawyer defending a specific brief than that of a scientist representing the quest for truth. After the press conference given by Lt. Col. De Brouwer, the F-117A

hypothesis had been discredited, but that need be no obstacle; plenty of other hypotheses can be constructed.

Why not suggest the existence of another secret plane, with all the capabilities necessary to explain the apparent paradoxes? Perhaps the U.S. Air Force was testing this secret plane over Belgium *without notifying the Belgian Air Force*—a friendly nation which uses American F-16s. Does this seem practical or likely? Consider that testing new planes inevitably involves the risk of an accident or crash, in which case the Belgian authorities would have to be notified to help protect essential secrets.

Why not suggest that the Belgian police were so unaccustomed to seeing stars that they got all confused at the sight of some? Or, above all, that there is no supporting evidence to back up any of the Belgian sightings, even though there were more than a thousand reports and they went on for more than six months?

Following this line of reasoning, everything is for the best in the "best of all possible worlds" in which pro-founder questions must not be asked.

On the contrary, it seems to me that it's always a good idea to be guided by the facts, especially when they are unexpected. What thousands of witnesses have seen for many years throughout the world deserves serious study. I am not advocating a specific hypothesis, only asking people to open their eyes.

## The witnesses' reactions

Witnesses' reactions are diverse, as might be expected. In most cases people simply relate what has happened in a factual manner, being explicit about what they have been able to observe and confessing their perplexity. What now seems to me to be new and significant is that many witnesses are annoyed at not being taken seriously.

As regards the socio-psychological hypothesis, which explains UFO sightings by the desire to make contact with extraterrestrial beings, I do not believe that this is compatible with my experiences interviewing a fairly sizeable number of witnesses. Naturally there are pathological and even psychiatric cases, but let us again refrain from unwarranted extrapolations. I have noted, like other investigators, that at the outset of their strange sightings, witnesses practically always try to find a conventional explanation; as they take in more details, though, the conventional explanation no longer suffices. This reaction violates a basic assumption of some "socio-psychologists."

It is true that witnesses are quicker to think of a UFO after the media have told them other people have seen them, and they report sightings more readily once they know that organizations are studying UFO reports seriously. Some people have intentionally scanned the skies, but they have not necessarily seen anything.

It is absolutely normal for someone to filter and analyze sensory data on the basis of preexisting conceptual

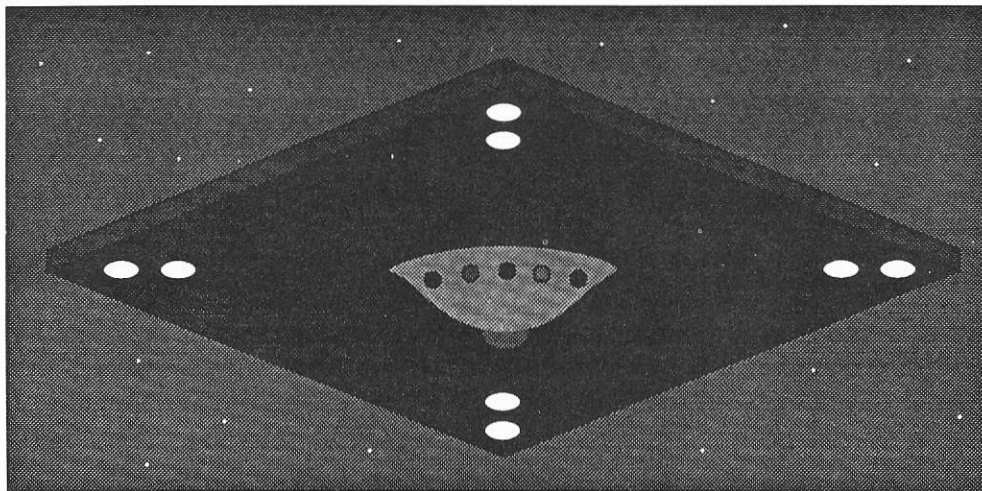


Figure 1

models. What happens when there is a discrepancy? Some witnesses describe extraordinary events, repeating that they do not believe in UFOs. Perhaps they're trying to reassure themselves, perhaps they're afraid of seeming insane to the interviewers. On several occasions I have met witnesses who, although accepting the ET hypothesis, are visibly upset about these "intruders." Humanity could be defenseless and dependent on the goodwill of an unknown, technologically very superior, external power. I have met only one witness who told me in a confiding manner: "I should very much like to meet them." He said this spontaneously when I asked him what he thought of his sighting.

Reality is far less clear-cut than the supporters of the socio-psychological hypothesis imagine. The collective unconscious does not, for the most part, desire contact with extraterrestrials. We cannot assume we are dealing with religious beliefs, either. On the contrary, it is clear that a fairly sizable number of witnesses have no wish at all to communicate what they have observed. We know this because of the cases discovered entirely by chance and long after the fact. The 1989-90 Belgian wave encouraged a number of people to tell investigators about much earlier sightings. One man wrote to me describing a sighting made during the mobilization before World War II, when he was all alone on a road. He was so excited and frightened by the experience that he told no one except his wife. A member of an embassy told me of a sighting made aboard an aircraft with many other people. Afterwards, he asked me not to say anything about it to the other embassy personnel, saying, "They'll think me crazy."

The fact that the UFOs reported here are generally of a different type from the traditional "saucer" is also significant. If the witnesses had invented their accounts, they would probably have tried to make them seem more believable by corresponding to the standard model. This is not what happened. One new feature is that the Belgian UFOs travel over cities at very low altitudes. Moreover,

there were no marked electromagnetic disturbances, as has often been reported in the past. These differences are worth considering with a view to understanding the technology rather than simply assuming that the witnesses can't relate accurately what they've seen.

## An enormous lozenge at Eupen

Mr. J observed the same type of object twice. I heard of his sightings indirectly, and when I telephoned him, he firmly insisted on anonymity: "I don't want anyone to tell my children that their father was out of his mind." He told me that the machine he had seen was "incredibly large." This assessment was based on his first sighting, which was on December 1, 1989. I visited him on January 15, five days after his second sighting. He is an amateur photographer and described the UFO with the precision of a careful observer.

On the evening of December 1, he was going to take his wife to a private exhibition organized by his club. At around 5 p.m. two of his five children, aged 14 and 15, had already told him about "strange planes in the sky." After school they had been playing on the street with a Moroccan boy who lived in one of the neighboring houses. It was already growing dark and one of the children said, "They're UFOs," using the German word for UFO. Mr. J had replied, "Of course not, they must be planes."

At 6:50 Mr. J was ready to leave. He was sitting in the living room in his usual chair near a window that looks out on a terrace at the rear. At that moment one of his children came rushing up all excited, saying, "Look, they're here again!" Struck by his child's insistence, Mr. J rose and went out onto the terrace. This forms, together with the garden, a large L-shaped open space behind a cluster of houses. Mr. J saw the young Moroccan, who was at the back garden of his house, in the other branch of L, pointing at the sky and stating, "See, one's just coming." Mr. J told me, "I don't understand how this

boy could say that so calmly, as if it was a commonplace remark, because I almost fell over backwards when I looked up. I tell you that if you have not seen one, you cannot believe it. It was enormous.”

Mr. J then spontaneously set about drawing the object, which was lozenge-shaped, with two white lights at each corner and, in the center, a kind of illuminated bell projecting from the platform (figure 1). The surface of the object was dark but clearly visible against the brighter sky. It had been a sunny day, and the sky was perfectly clear. Stars were visible around the object. It glided slowly from southwest to northeast, without the slightest sound. It could be followed at a comfortable walking pace. The large diagonal of the lozenge was perpendicular to the direction of movement and was at least 35 meters long. During my visit Mr. J went onto the terrace to show me his reference marks. The nearest end of the large diagonal had been directly above his house and the other end had passed above a large building 35-40 meters away. He was unable to determine the altitude of the object, but he noticed that he could see the sky between the object and the building opposite. As a result he felt that the object could have been even larger than the distance between his house and the building.

A little later on, Mr. J reported that the white lights flashed off and on regularly. I asked him whether they did this at the same time. He replied, “I don’t know. I couldn’t see the four corners simultaneously. I had to crane my neck.” These lights were circular and large. “The most extraordinary thing about them was their power,” he said. They illuminated the ground with a white light. In the center of the lozenge was an “inverted bell” which was wholly illuminated by an orange light. At the bell’s apex was a green light, darker than green traffic lights. The skirt of the bell was surrounded by a row of red lights, changing brightness sequentially. This gave a false impression of revolving lights. “These lights never completely went out, but they grew distinctly brighter at certain moments.”

The lights did not illuminate the underside of the object, which remained dark. The red lights “chased each other” with a slow, comfortable movement. “It wasn’t an alarming flash, like that from an ambulance or police car. It was even pleasant to watch.” Mr. J also remembered that “the luminous bell was strange, because you couldn’t tell whether the light came from its interior or the surface.” Since the witness was an amateur photographer, he considered going to find his camera but realized it was too big to capture adequately. Knowing that he had 100 ASA film loaded, he gauged that the mass of the object, which was almost black, would not be made out on film since the white lights were too dazzling.

He did what he could. “I tried to remember as much as possible. I also called my wife and daughter so that someone from my family could see it.” Mrs. J did not see the object. She heard her husband but was in the bath. His daughter arrived after the object was already some

way off, having passed over the roofs of the houses. Mr. J went with her to the front, where they stayed long enough to see the object leave, still at a fairly slow speed, passing over the Eupen cemetery.

Mr. J bitterly regrets not having taken photos. Since then he has been to Aix-la-Chapelle to buy infrared film, which he keeps in the refrigerator. The young Moroccan came over while Mr. J was drawing his picture for me. He said, unasked, “Yes, it’s like that.” The vertical edge (on figure 1) was not visible on December 1. Mr. J drew it based on his second sighting.

This second sighting took place on Wednesday, January 10, 1990, at about 7:35 p.m. It was dark. The witness, on his way to a photo club, had taken the E5 highway after reaching the Herbesthal road and was proceeding inland. He had gone only a few kilometers when he saw a stationary object in the sky. It was exactly “the same model.” Mr. J stopped his car on the side of the road. Other drivers seemed not to notice anything. Mr. J leaned on the hood of his car, watching the object with arms crossed. Everything was identical to the first sighting, but on this occasion the lozenge was oriented sideways, and he could see it had a constant and considerable height. It was about 500 meters away. Its lights seemed less bright this time, perhaps because of the highway illumination.

Mr. J was exasperated that he hadn’t brought his camera. There would probably be no point in returning home. After 10-15 minutes the object started to move off toward Fagnes. It left slowly and silently. Just as it was departing the luminosity increased. “It was as though the voltage of the lights had been intensified as it moved gently away.”

It may seem strange that Mr. J saw the same object twice. It should, however, not be forgotten that the events of December 1 had been deeply etched in his memory; as a consequence, his mental “filters” would have been adjusted in such a way that he would more easily notice a similar object in the sky at night. I have no reason to doubt this eyewitness report. His sincerity and spontaneity were evident. The witness had spoken with only a few people and had learned to be cautious. “I have seen many things in my life,” he said, “but when I talk about this, people look at me oddly.”

## A UFO flies over Aix-la-Chapelle

On December 5 or 12, 1989, Mr. and Mrs. O were driving northwards on the Triererstrasse in the town of Aix-la-Chapelle. It was about 9:50 p.m. when they suddenly saw a flying object cut across the road right in front of them. It moved steadily to the right. It had two headlights in front, emitting beams that slanted downwards. The light was white and intense without being blinding. In addition, there was an orange light on the underside, flashing at the same rate as an ambulance’s lights. Mr. O was driving and had to pay attention to traffic, but Mrs. O

continued to observe what they still thought was an aircraft flying exceptionally low. She kept it constantly in sight. When it had crossed the road, it extinguished its headlights, but the flashing orange light remained illuminated. This made it possible to see that the object was describing a half-turn on a tight curve, heading back in the opposite direction.

Mrs. O first saw it through the front righthand window. Then she turned around to look at it through the back rear window. The object approached again, passed over the car, and reappeared in the front lefthand window. It had cut across the road diagonally. At a certain distance from the car, its headlights came on again. Since the headlights were at the front of the object, they could no longer be seen directly, but the beams that they emitted were visible. Unlike an aircraft, there were no rear lights or flashing red and green side-lights. All that could be seen was the flashing orange light, which became fainter and fainter as the craft went away.

Mr. and Mrs. O returned to their home, near Aix-la-Chapelle. That same evening, at 11:15 p.m., Mr. O stepped outside to let the dog out and noticed exactly the same object. It was flying above their street, in the direction of Stollberg. Mr. O immediately called his wife. The headlight beams were less angled than they had been before, but the machine was flying lower. Its motion was linear and uniform, with a speed about that of a helicopter, but to the great astonishment of the witnesses it made no sound. Mrs. O was insistent about the absence of noise, for conditions were such that she and her husband ought to have heard it had the craft been equipped with a motor.

I asked them later about the apparent size of the object, suggesting that a thumb held at arm's length might cover it. The immediate response was, "No, it would have required a whole hand." The sighting occurred fairly late, so the sky was dark. The object stood out clearly against it, because it was somewhat brighter. The witnesses saw an elongated shape, less high than long, with curved edges. The outlines were different from those of an aircraft or helicopter. The hypothesis of night gliders or ultralights is not very credible, particularly in the case of the first sighting. The next day a police car passed down the street, its loud-speaker requesting those who had seen "anything abnormal" to report it to them. Mr. and Mrs. O did not do so. Were there other witnesses? They do not know, because they don't read the local paper. Mr. O, who is Japanese, subscribes to a Cologne daily paper and the *Financial Times*.

I was alerted to this case by Mrs. O's sister, who lives in Eupen. The German police habitually ridicule UFO witnesses, so it is not surprising that Mr. and Mrs. O didn't want to report their sighting. I also conducted an inquiry into a close encounter involving two German families living in Lontzen, in Belgium, on November 29. The children involved were frightened, so one of the mothers called various places, including the Aix-la-

Chapelle police. She told me that they laughed at her and that their derisive response had shocked her.

## A triangular UFO at Coblenz

The following case was described in the July-August 1990 issue of the *Journal für UFO-Forschung (Journal for UFO Research)* of the GEP group (Society for the Investigation of the UFO phenomenon), based in Ludenscheid, Germany. The investigation was carried out by W. Kelch. This case is interesting in itself, since it involves the sighting of a triangle in another country, but it also has interesting psychological aspects. The principal witness, a 33-year-old woman, works at a military base and seems to have a solid character.

The sighting took place on the evening of February 21, 1990, at 9:07 p.m., in Karthause, near Coblenz. The lady was returning home by car, accompanied by her mother (aged 69) and her son (aged 14), who had been to a judo lesson. They were driving through an attractive residential district on a fairly wide road. To the right was a continuous line of trees 15-18 meters in height, bordering a cemetery. The lefthand side of the road was fringed with houses 20-25 meters high on a small hill. Through traffic is virtually nil and, at this late stage of the evening, there was no residential traffic. In fact, no car went by during the episode. The weather was cool and it was dark. The sky was clear.

The mother was the first to see two lights beaming straight down at them at a 45-degree angle (figure 2a). The object bearing these lights slowed down, but the driver, fearing it might crash, pulled to the right side of the road. There she stopped, with the car at an angle. The object stopped above the road, almost directly overhead. The driver switched off the engine, lowered the window and looked out. She saw a large triangular object, absolutely stationary and noiseless, at rooftop height. From other reference points it was possible to determine that the sides of the triangle measured about 20 meters (figure 2b). The witnesses watched the object closely, but no one dared get out of the car.

Three milky, yellowish-white lights were at the corners of the triangle. They were bright but not blinding. In the center of the triangle was a much larger light. Its color was changing but the prevailing hue was grey-blue. These changes seemed to imply something revolving, reminding the witnesses of the mirror-globes in discos. The witnesses said that "this light shone in a strange way." They saw only the lower side of the triangular platform. The object had a metallic appearance. It was dark-gray and colorless, with solid and sharp outlines. The base was slightly illuminated by the lights on the object, allowing the witnesses to observe structures which they described as riveted plates (figure 2b).

The object stayed overhead for two or three minutes, then departed suddenly in the direction of the houses. The driver of the car felt a breeze through her rolled-down

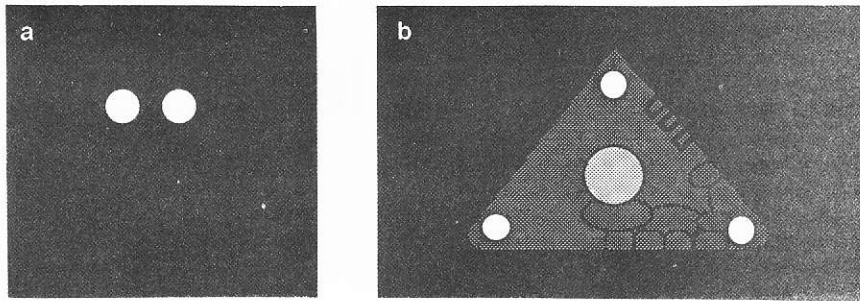


Figure 2

window. The object accelerated and disappeared from view in less than a second, behind the roofs of the houses. It had arrived from the west, but departed towards the southwest. Its departure was speedier than that of a jet aircraft.

The witnesses then went home, and the woman immediately informed her husband, who was on night-shift. At first he was unwilling to believe her story but finally, at her insistence, called the local police. Although the police had not received any other calls, they agreed to send a police squad to the area. Her husband also called the air-traffic sections at the Frankfurt and Cologne-Wahn airports. They responded that radar detection was not possible at so low an altitude. The three witnesses were unable to sleep that night. The mother, feeling afraid, stayed in her daughter's apartment.

Later on the wife tried to clear up the mystery on her own initiative. She found the address and telephone numbers of the GEP, who sent her a questionnaire which she completed and returned by mail. She succeeded in locating two other witnesses. Between 8:30 and 8:50 that same evening, a lady saw "something bright heading quite rapidly towards my car," near the intersection of the A61 and A48 highways. Frightened, she braked. Through the sunroof she saw a bus-shaped metallic object with fairly bright, bluish lights. The object went by noiselessly, disappearing finally in the dark. A UFO was also seen by a 30-year-old man, just before 9:07 p.m., near the same spot. When questioned, however, he distanced himself from the incident, saying, "Nobody's going to believe me anyway."

When the GEP investigator contacted the police, they asserted that they could not recall having received any telephone calls about UFOs and that they knew nothing of the matter. The lady and her husband were annoyed by this denial. The investigator had the impression that the wife was a down-to-earth sort of individual. He found no discrepancy between her account and the questionnaire she had completed. So far as the witness was concerned, she had seen an unidentified flying object.

The GEP tried to find a conventional explanation. A balloon was ruled out because there had been a light east wind and the object was first seen moving west to east.

And how could it have turned around and left so fast? The police use BO-105 helicopters to patrol the highways for trucks, but this too was ruled out. Could it have been a military plane? There is in actual fact a military exercise ground (Schmitenhohe) two kilometers away, where German and NATO forces run nocturnal infrared reconnaissance flights and other exercises. But that night here had been no exercises.

In Germany a CH-47 Chinook helicopter is often suggested as an explanation for UFO reports. Such aircraft are used between Mendig and Mainz, but the flights take place almost exclusively during the day at a height of 800-1000 meters. Taken as a whole, the evidence in this case renders that explanation unlikely. Nevertheless, the investigator thought it necessary to consider the possibility that the three witnesses were in shock and had perhaps not heard the noise, having been paralyzed by fear. The investigator thus concluded noncommittally that "the available data do not allow us to make an unambiguous identification as a known flying object." You can make what you like about this statement. Who is frightened? The witnesses by a somewhat hypothetical helicopter, or the investigator by social and psychological pressures?

## A recent sighting in Switzerland

This event occurred on Sunday, October 14, 1990. The Swiss sighting was relayed to me by the witness, Mrs. Wengere, who has authorized me to cite her name. She telephoned me from Switzerland and confirmed her account in writing. An editor by profession, she was clearly looking for people who would listen seriously to such reports. She wrote to a Zurich paper and personally collected various recent eyewitness reports, a copy of which she sent me.

On the evening of October 14 she and her husband were on their way to a hospital to visit a friend. It was about 7 p.m., already dark, with stars easily visible. The sky was clear and there was no wind. They were driving from Lostdorf, near Olten, toward Zurich. Mrs. Wengere spotted two bright white lights. They were motionless, a

*continued on page 22*



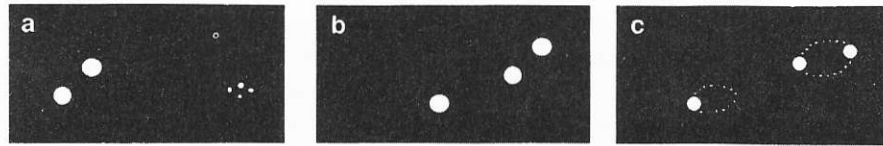


Figure 3

little to the left ahead of them, over a range of mountains. The couple could not see light beams but only two large, luminous, perfectly round disks, surrounded by a light atmospheric halo. The lefthand light was higher than the right.

Mrs. Wengere at first thought the lights must be on transmission towers on the mountaintops, although they would have to have been erected recently since she had never seen them before. There was still enough light in the sky for her to observe that there was nothing between the lights and the range of mountains. She thus deduced that the lights had to be supported by one or two flying-objects whose shape was not discernible. She told her husband, "There's a UFO over there!"

She asked him to stop. He saw the lights and could not explain them either, but he didn't stop because there was no parking space along the road and it would have been dangerous to stop in the dark. The bright lights must have been of excessive dimensions since the stars appeared minuscule and pale in comparison, as did the lights of an approaching aircraft. There was one approaching the UFO (figure 3a) at that very moment. If the lights were at the same distance as the plane, each of them ought to have been almost as large as the plane itself. Mrs. Wengere expected the object to react to the plane, but at that moment she and her husband were passing a village and lost sight of the object. They even had to wait for a red traffic light.

When they once more had a clear view, the lights had disappeared. Mrs. Wengere was annoyed that her husband had not stopped when she had asked him to. He exclaimed, "Look, there they are again!" The lights were hanging a little higher in the sky, above the mountains to the right of the road. The new position and the previous location formed an angle of about 100 degrees. Since the witnesses had not observed the shift, this could have been another object entirely. In fact, they now noted a third light, identical to the first two, a little to the left of the others. It was separated from them by a distance almost 10 times as large as the distance between the other two lights, which were still stationary.

The third light was at first motionless, but after some time it shifted slowly towards the others with a linear uniform speed. It stopped after having covered two-thirds of the distance that separated it from them (figure 3b).

The other two lights began to move together, as if they were joined, their diagonal alignment becoming horizontal. The pair became smaller and less intense, but at the same time two chains of red and green lights appeared joining the two. The distance between them grew greater and eventually the two lights disappeared, leaving only the red and green crown of light visible.

The third light also changed during this time. It became fainter and acquired its own oval crown of small red and green lights. The vertical axis of the ellipse thus formed grew gradually longer, but the second crown was smaller than the first (figure 3c). The two witnesses thought that the chains of light were fixed to the sides of objects that were changing their tilt, but neither of them could actually see the objects. Followed by other vehicles, they continued to drive on. Mr. Wengere had slowed down only slightly. The lights were lost once again behind some houses, this time for good.

The Wengeres were already aware of the UFO phenomenon as a result of a previous sighting. On July 20, 1989, at about 6:50 p.m., they had both been out in their garden. The sun was shining and the sky was cloudless. Mrs. Wengere noticed an elongated, silver-grey object. It moved like an aircraft, but she could see neither wings nor tail. It was simply cigar-shaped and completely silent. She pointed it out to her husband, who was equally surprised. Mrs. Wengere thought it so strange that ten minutes later she telephoned the air-traffic control at Zurich-Kloten airport. She learned that there had been no "official flight" at that time over her home and that nothing abnormal had been recorded on the radar screens.

Mrs. Wengere was unable to stop thinking about what she had seen on October 14. She remembered having read about a large number of sightings of UFOs in Belgium. On October 20 she decided to telephone the air-traffic center at Zurich-Kloten. They had seen nothing unusual on their radars during the evening of October 14, and no one else had reported a similar phenomenon. The man who answered the telephone said, "It must be an optical illusion due to some sort of reflection." He said this haughtily, adding that he received many telephone calls of this kind, but that they were almost always optical illusions. This indicates that there were other UFO

*continued on page 24*

## Belgian — continued from page 22

reports, although the explanation he offered was purely gratuitous.

I note that in the United States a photograph was taken on May 26, 1988, near Southbury of a beautiful crown of alternating red, yellow and green lights against a black background. This is documented by a magnificent slide that I have received from Philip Imbrogno, coauthor of the book *Night Siege*. This shows that one must not treat each case in isolation as if it were unique, but search for correlations as has to be done for any physical phenomenon. For this reason we must not focus our attention solely on the events of March 30-31, 1990, whatever their possible importance may eventually be.

As for the “flying angels effect,” which has led to some notable problems in atmospheric physics and useful knowledge for radar operators, this discovery was simply a by-product of rational study of the UFO problem. As such it underlines that it is worthwhile to look carefully at mysterious phenomena. I expect that the thoroughness and seriousness of our study of radar “noise” will help our credibility as we examine other aspects of the UFO phenomenon. ■

---

## Patterns — continued from page 19

weather is in January and February.

This shift in peaks and troughs was always confounding, and in addition to throwing a wrench into a skeptical explanation, ufologists were at a loss to explain it as well. This more recent analysis once again found a summer peak and a winter trough, though this time the summer peak seemed to have shifted to July. But it was remembered that a large number of reports in the MANUFO-CAT file came from the 1975 wave which had occurred in the summer.

As an experiment the 1975 and 1976 reports were subtracted from the file. This time the analysis showed *no* monthly variation in numbers of UFO reports. The proposed interpretation of this is that in general the number of UFO sightings is constant for any given area. It would be interesting to test this theory, using other data. What this really means is a matter that could be debated for years.

These are just some of the results that can be achieved on a low-power computing system and a lot of hard work. Are these results useful? Certainly the global impact is minimal, and we are no closer to identifying the nature of the UFO unknowns. But as has been pointed out by others, such computer analyses of UFO data should be performed and compared with other results worldwide. The result may be a better understanding of perceptual psychology. We may better understand observations of natural phenomena. And ufologists may get a deeper understanding of the UFO phenomenon they are dealing with. ■

## Crop circles — continued from page 16

My second point concerns the often-expressed view that “whirlwinds” cannot create circles because whirlwinds move and circles are clearly formed by something that isn’t moving. Forget for the moment that nobody is suggesting simple whirlwinds or tornadoes are to blame—but a rare and specific type of vortex, akin to both these things but also very different. Read the eyewitness testimony gathered in the past couple of years, and you immediately see something important.

Take a case from Blyth in Northumberland in September 1990 when two persons observed two circles a few yards apart under formation. They report a swirling column of air crossing a field, lightly brushing the tops of the crop, producing no damage and being largely invisible. Had they not been so close to see the air and its effects fleshed out by loose debris swirled around, the phenomenon probably would not have been spotted. Then this “force” descended very briefly and as it did so remained stationary for a few seconds. At this crucial stage the circle was formed. The vortex (if we accept this is what the witnesses describe—which seems to me more probable than an invisible spaceship) then began to rise again and moved laterally above the crops but at too great a height to leave a damage trail. Some way along the field it descended once more, was constrained into a static position, gouged out the circle, and dissipated upwards.

Think of a corkscrew sliding along the top of a piece of wood gently enough to leave almost no scratch. Then push harder downwards and rotate. A hole is formed. The wood resists lateral motion, so in order to continue moving sideways across the plane, you would raise the corkscrew a little and glide it across the surface again before pressing down at a second location and producing another hole. The analogy seems quite apt.

This is one of a number of things the eyewitness testimony is teaching us about the mechanics of crop-circle formation. At least teaching those of us bothering to listen to it.

The circles *are* the result of a moving vortex but are left when the vortex temporarily ceases its lateral motion and moves downwards for a brief period. This is one reason why formations of several circles in close proximity are not uncommon. They result from one event’s moving across a field at a height where ground damage is rarely (but still occasionally) left.

Those of us who favor the vortex theory came to this particular conclusion from a deep familiarity with the evidence. After having spent a decade following this subject, I would gladly embrace any theory that adequately explained the data. So far only the vortex fills the bill. ■