

1966: Richmond/Henrico, VA

Police car chase ends officer's career.

UFO Sighting Changed Stevens' Life

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I often stop and wonder if you're better off when you see something like that, to keep your mouth shut.

— William L. Stevens Jr.

By Bob Lindsey

At 3:30 on a dark but clear June morning, Patrolman Billy Stevens headed his Richmond police car north on Meadowbridge Road, just inside the city.

As he approached the Ladies Mile Road intersection, he noticed green and yellow lights in the air over the State Fairgrounds not far up the road and remembered that a carnival had set up there several days earlier.

But there was something strange about the lights, and when he drove past the city limits into the county to investigate, he saw it: an object shrouded in mist, encircled with lights and shaped like a blimp.

Stevens chased it, and his life hasn't been the same since that morning 11 years ago, June 24, 1966.

WHATEVER IT WAS, it was hovering about 200 feet over Richmond-Henrico Turnpike, near the service entrance to the fairgrounds, Stevens said.

"At the time I saw it, I picked my mike up. I went toward it and put my red light on, and my spotlight. My spotlight hit it and it was in its own cloud like a fog or a mist. It turned immediately, and when it did, it put the back toward me. It was shaped exactly like a dirigible, but it didn't have a gondola or anything under it.

"It took off and followed the road. It stayed right over the top of the road and I'm under it. It was right over top of the trees. At the time I saw it I [asked the dispatcher] to notify Byrd Field and get radar on, I got something.

"I look down at my speedometer. I'm running 50, it's running 50. I'm running 60, it's running 60.

"So we kept it up. It was just like it wanted me to follow him."

THE CHASE LASTED about five miles, and it was the last one for Patrolman Stevens. Several months later he was taken off the street and assigned to the police lockup, a

demotion, as Stevens saw it. And someone asked him if he saw any little green men with horns.

He had nothing but his word that he saw something, and it turned out that Byrd Field's radar didn't pick up anything.

Stevens' chase made national news at the time. He was visited by an Air Force representative and was questioned by the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), a private group.

Theories abounded. The UFO was, a California caller said, a lifeboat from a mother ship sent by a highly advanced civilization from a planet in another solar system. The planet was friendly toward earth and would help it win a war with a hostile planet in still another solar system. The war would start in 20 years.

Stevens never called it a flying saucer, he said, but wondered if the thing weren't an experimental craft being tested by the govern-

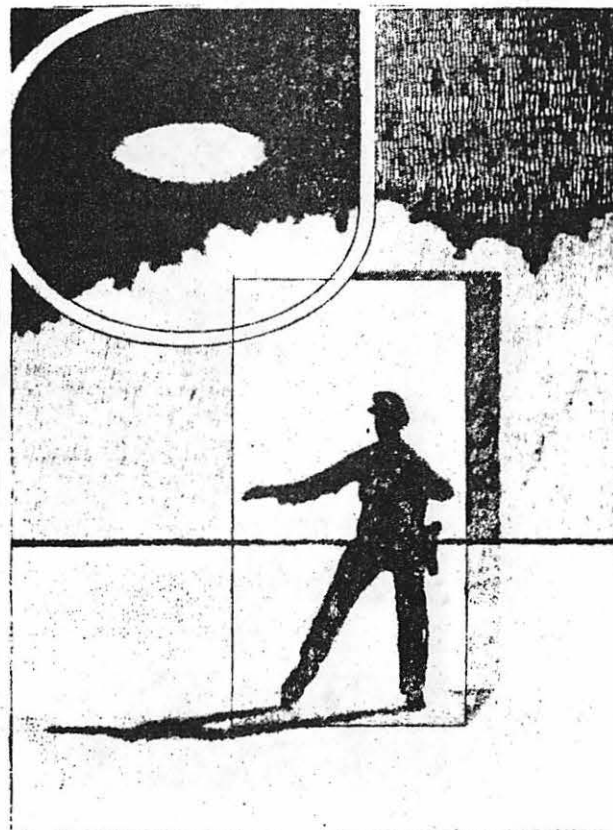
ment. The Air Force suggested it may have been swamp gas.

MANY, SAID STEVENS, questioned his credibility, but about a month after the chase, some help showed up.

While the chase was on, Henrico police were notified.

About an hour after the original sighting, two county policemen on Wilkinson Road, several miles from where the object Stevens was chasing disappeared, saw something they could not identify. They refused to give their names but said in a newspaper report at the time that they saw a bright point of light that moved through the sky, stopped, moved again and frequently changed directions.

"It appeared to be operating at a level lower than the 300-foot-tall radio transmission towers on Wilkinson Road, the officers said. One said the object projected a beam like an aircraft landing light.



Staff illustration by Martin Rhode.

Drawing Symbolizes Policeman's Sighting

Stevens pursued the object along the Richmond-Henrico Turnpike, running northeastward toward Hanover County. The turnpike eventually changes to Meadowbridge Road.

"I WASN'T SCARED until it was all over with," he recalled. "All of a sudden, it looked like I had to catch up with that damn thing. Tell me why; I don't know.

"It never made a sound. It just stayed up in the air in front of me." The chase escalated to 100 miles an hour as it moved through the Ellerson Farms area in Hanover County. At the intersection of Meadowbridge and Atlee Road, Stevens ran a stop sign.

"This thing was still moving along comfortably in the air. I was just so intense about trying to find out about this thing, you know, what it was and why it was playing this cat and mouse game, you know, tag. I came through the intersection about 100 miles an hour and by the grace of God nothing was coming. It never dawned on me that I'd run this stop sign until after it was all over with."

The UFO generally stayed about 200 feet overhead, and with his spotlight Stevens could see "a dull, gray ship." There were no markings on it. It was "100, maybe 200 feet long and 35 feet high," he said.

At a cemetery on Meadowbridge, beyond its intersection with Shady Grove Road, the object "just picked up and went out of sight and left me. When it left me it went from a hundred miles an hour to thou... well, it had to be thousands of miles an hour. In seconds it was out of sight."

TODAY STEVENS is a police dispatcher, but he wants to be a policeman, and he thinks he would be if it weren't for the UFO.

"Sometimes I think my best bet would have been to turn the car back, come on back to Richmond and forget the whole thing. Because people still don't want to believe it; they want to joke about it, and it's nothing to joke about.

"I can't convince you what's up there. But I'll tell you this: If you see what I have seen, then you will believe it... I had read articles on it before I saw it... I wasn't a UFO buff but now I am because I've seen it.

"And I know what I saw."



T-D Photo

W.L. Stevens Jr. Where UFO Vanished