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# THE SELDON UFO

BY TED BLOECHER AND SYLVIA MEAGHER

*Editors Note:* Today triangular or boomerang-shaped UFOs are common, but back in the Golden Age of UFO sightings, they were more unusual, though they did make an appearance now and then. In this report from the CUFOS files (originally a case from the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena), we present a close encounter sighting from 1972 of a triangular/wedge-shaped UFO with an odd superstructure (another version of this report was originally published in the NICAP *UFO Investigator*, February 1973). We also print this report as a bit of further homage to Ted Bloecher, who was one of the investigators.

**T**his account concerns a sighting that occurred on October 9, 1972, near Seldon, Long Island. It was reported shortly afterwards to NICAP by one of the two witnesses, Mrs. Grace Clapp. We did our on-site investigation on November 19 of that year. This included retracing the route taken by the witnesses on the evening of their sighting, using their own vehicle. This allowed us to see what was visible from the car, estimate a sighting timetable, and also examine the point of closest observation, where Mrs. Clapp and her husband, Ralph, stopped to watch the UFO pass close by. Our conclusion was that the Clapps had a rather close encounter—on the order of several hundred feet—with an unidentified aerial object, origin unknown.

## THE SIGHTING

Following supper on the evening of Monday, October 9, sometime close to 7:30 p.m., Ralph and Grace Clapp left

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*Ted Bloecher became interested in UFOs during the 1952 wave and was a cofounder of Civilian Saucer Intelligence in New York City. He was also associated with the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena. In the 1980s he retired from ufology and donated his files to CUFOS. Sylvia Meagher was a research analyst at the World Health Organization in New York and became an expert on the John F. Kennedy assassination.*

their home in Smithtown, Long Island, to drive to the Coram Rug Works in Coram to return a carpet sample. They drove the approximately 10 miles in their 1969 Volkswagen bus. The night was clear and almost fully dark when they set out. To get to Coram, they picked up Route 25 (Middle Country Road) south of their home, which would take them directly to their destination.

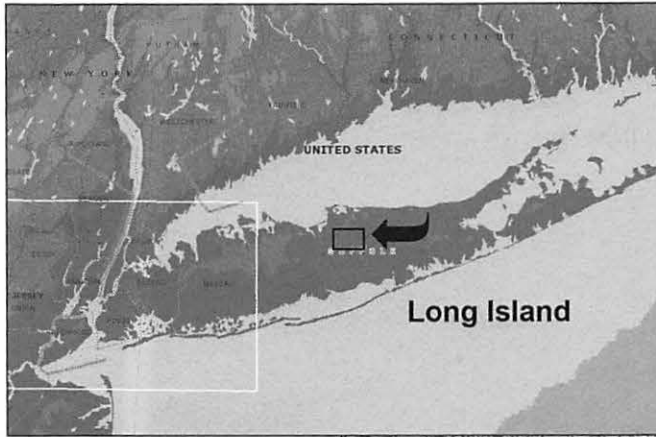
About a mile and a half east of the town of Centerreach, they both noticed a bright, white light low in the sky to the northeast (they were driving just north of due east at this point). It was similar to the bright landing light of an airplane. Neither immediately mentioned it to the other. While waiting at the next stoplight, the couple noticed that, unlike a plane, the light did not appear to be moving. Ralph asked Grace if she had noticed the light, and when she said she had, he suggested they keep it in sight.

The light was occasionally obscured by trees and buildings along Route 25, but was not difficult to spot as they kept driving east. A mile beyond where they had first spotted the light, following a short stretch of trees that hid it, Grace exclaimed, "The darn thing is moving!" Its apparent direction was toward them. "Suddenly, it was closer to us, and then we could see it was moving."

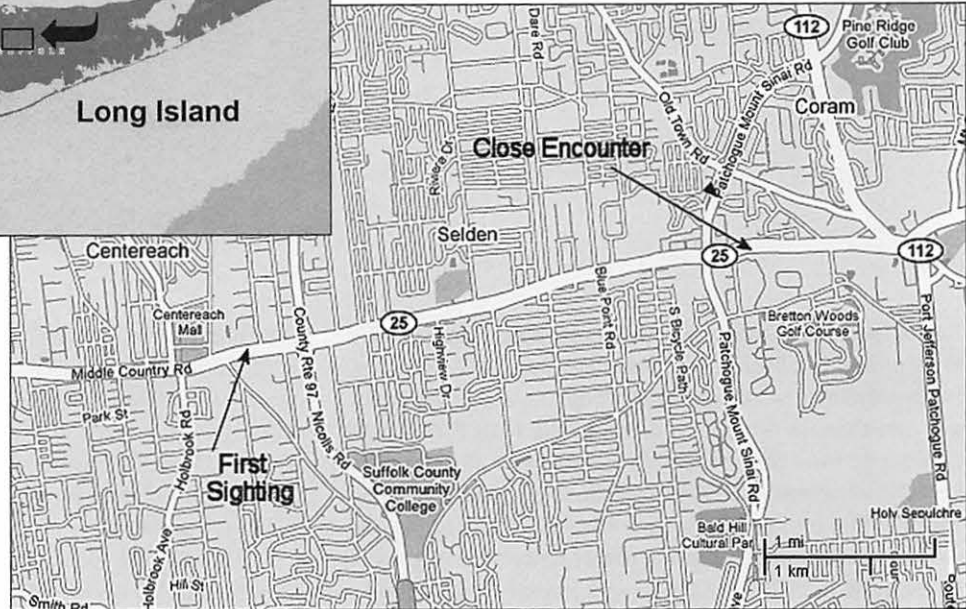
A few blocks after this, Grace noticed something else. In her words: "I said, 'Oh, now I see a red light,' and he said, 'I don't.' Then he looked up again and he says, 'Oh, yeah, now I see it too.' . . . Of course, he's driving while I'm watching this thing steadily," she added. Moderately heavy traffic along this route forced Ralph to keep his attention on the road. "And then," Grace continued, "a couple of seconds later, I saw a green light on the other side of it."

Elaborating on this detail, she said the red light was to the right of the bright, white light, and the green to the left. Both of them now noticed that the white light was pulsating noticeably; "like a heartbeat," as Grace put it, opening and closing her fist.

When they saw the red and green lights, both of them thought that it must be an airplane, but they kept on watching because the white light was so brilliant. Then, as they kept driving, Grace told her husband that "You know, I see



Map showing the general area of the Clapps' sighting, between Centereach and Coram, Long Island, New York.



a ring, the shape of a ring, or an outform.” She gestured to us (TB/SM) indicating an arc that appeared laterally around the while light. Although it was indistinct at first, she finally said to her husband that she was sure she saw something with shape.

By this time they had passed the traffic light at Selden and were approaching a small hill that lies between Selden and Coram, their destination. As they came up to the hill, the lights were lost to view.

At the top of this hill there is a level stretch of highway somewhat less than a thousand feet in length, bordered on the north by trees and to the right by open fields extending a quarter mile or more to the south. There were also some abandoned buildings, but generally it is a relatively isolated, unsettled portion of the highway (most of the roads near this spot visible on the map of the sighting were not there in 1972).

## THE CLOSE ENCOUNTER

The Clapps anticipated the reappearance of the light as they reached the top of the hill, but the trees along the north side blocked the view. Oddly (or not so much, if you’ve read enough UFO reports), while traffic had been fairly heavy up to now, there wasn’t another car in sight when they got to the top.

At a point somewhat short of the halfway point along this hilltop segment of highway, the path of the light and that of the Clapps suddenly converged. They simultaneously saw the light as it hove into view above the treetops at an angle high overhead, a little forward and still to their left. Only now,

there was a dramatic change of appearance. Grace yelled to Ralph, “Pull off the road, that’s no airplane!”

She noticed windows, with lights, but no wings. As she pressed her face against the windshield, her impression of the windows was that they were rectangular shaped. They were roughly spaced in a way that conformed to the object’s shape. She was uncertain about how many windows she saw—five to ten—but she was certain that they were located on the bottom of the object, not the sides. The windows were white in color, and Grace compared them in brightness to a neighbor’s window: “it was as if you were sitting here and looked over to the next block and the lady had her lights on in her room.”

Having seen the windows himself, Ralph did stop the car, pulling over on a very narrow shoulder. The Volkswagen was partially over the edge of the road at a curve and was in a dangerous position, so he didn’t get out. Instead, he opened his window and leaned his head out and craned his neck upward. He saw an elongated ellipse of lights, with a dark mass in between, and the bright, front light. He couldn’t make out the exact shape of the object, but had the impression of a “dark body, curving backward.”

He described the “windows” as two rows of five or six lights, “a row on either side forming an elongated ellipse,” with the curved end forward. They were shaped like an elongated rectangle. He didn’t see the red or green lights as it passed overhead. He estimated it was in view about 6 seconds, and that it subtended 8 to 10 inches at arm’s length.

Meanwhile, Grace immediately got out of the vehicle to watch the object. From the embankment she could see several

Grace based her estimate on the telephone poles along the road and believed it was several hundred feet in altitude, but no more (in her original letter to NICAP, she estimated the height at 200 to 300 feet).

One additional feature—or its absence—impressed Mrs. Clapp. As she watched the object, she was suddenly aware that she heard no motor sounds, as with a plane. Impressed by this, she strained to hear some evidence of noise, and said she did perceive a faint humming sound, just audible.

By this time a car was approaching from the east, and Ralph, concerned about the way the car was parked, summoned his wife into the VW, and they proceeded toward Coram, just a short distance farther along Route 25. Altogether, about 10 minutes had elapsed from the moment when they first saw the bright white light.

It took about two or three minutes to drive to the Coram Rug Works. After they parked, Grace immediately looked back toward the southwest to see if the object could still be seen. Weirdly, though, only the big white light could be seen. When we questioned her closely, she admitted that she couldn't swear what she saw then wasn't a bright star or planet. Jupiter set about three hours after the sun on October 9, 1972, and it would have been in approximately the right position to be confused for the light. And we know from long experience that witnesses, after their main sighting, often mistake other lights for a distant view of what they had seen up close.

Fortunately, the Clapps didn't much discuss the sighting on the drive home, and they were separated at the rug store (only Grace went into the store), so when they returned home they wrote down independent accounts of what they had observed. The drawings in this article were done by Mr. Clapp, who worked as the deputy town engineer for the township of Smithtown, and also as a landscape architect, and so was skilled at drawing. They spent a great deal of time getting accurate renditions of what each saw, so we can have confidence in the verisimilitude of these drawings.

## DISCUSSION

We visited the Clapps at their home, and then redrove the route in their VW bus. The distance from first sighting the light to the top of the small hill is about three and one half miles. It took about 8 minutes to travel this distance, which was consistent with the couple's estimate of duration. Given the time they left home, and the time to get to the spot where the sighting began, the estimate of Mr. Clapp that they stopped about 7:55 p.m. to watch the object go overhead appears accurate.

The object was large, even using conservative estimates. If we use Ralph's estimate of about 10 inches in width at an arm length's distance of 30 inches, then if the object was 200 feet high, it would have been about 67 feet in width. At 500 feet, about 167 feet in width, and at 1,000 feet, the outer estimate of altitude, about 333 feet in width. Grace's estimate of apparent width would triple these size estimates at the same height.

We did contact local airports on Long Island, and found no advertising planes that operated out of them on this date, and no flights that would correspond to the time and direction of what the Clapps observed.

Thus this sighting remains unexplained by any conventional device without disregarding certain key details in their descriptions. As Mrs. Clapp said, in her very distinctive way, "If that thing was an advertising plane, it sure wasn't getting the message across."

## IUR EDITOR'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

This little report has many features that make it interesting and are consonant with other sightings of large wedge- or triangular-shaped UFOs. This includes how it moved, the time of its appearance, its size, and the noise it emitted,

First, it was large, probably at least 100 feet across, much larger than your standard disc-shaped UFO. The boomerang-shaped UFOs seen less than a decade later nearby in Westchester County, New York, and western Connecticut were at least this size.

Second, the UFO moved steadily and fairly slowly, and it moved continuously across the sky, in a trajectory that a terrestrial vehicle could emulate. Most large triangular UFOs are seen for several minutes, if not longer (as was the Tinley Park Triangle in the southern Chicago suburbs in 2004–2005), and don't engage in the extremely rapid motions and right-angle turns reported for other UFOs.

Third, the Clapps saw their UFO when it was dark. Essentially no sightings of large triangular-shaped UFOs occur in daylight, for whatever reason.

Fourth, these large UFOs do make noise, but not enough to keep them afloat by conventional means. Instead, the faint hum reported by Mrs. Clapp is typical.

The weird superstructure on the back upper surface of the UFO is intriguing. We are especially taken by Mrs. Clapp's remark that "it looks like someone made it in their garage." While witnesses don't always make that colorful an observation, in some cases (and not just triangular UFOs), the objects do have odd protrusions and protuberances that don't fit our image of a sleek aerial vehicle. In this instance, the two vertical and one horizontal pole remind one of the masts used on naval vehicles for radio communication, or some radar arrays. But could this be their purpose?

And then there are the red and green lights, which are reminiscent of aircraft anticollision lights. They were placed on the correct sides of the UFO. And yet, why would a UFO display lights in the same pattern as standard aircraft? Was this whole thing a display, as many would contend, to catch the attention of the witnesses but offer only confusing clues and odd details? Notice how the UFO, at first several miles distant, went eventually almost directly over the Clapps vehicle, affording them a close view so that it was completely obvious that it wasn't a plane. Coincidence or part of the plan? But, what is the plan? ♦

things that her husband could not. She could see the whole object more clearly, which was “bat-shaped” or roughly triangular, with a rounded leading point and a straight trailing edge. Then, as the object continued to move to the southwest, she saw that on the object’s rear were two vertical antenna-like structures rising from the back top surface. They were at least as tall as the object was wide, and stretching across the top from one to the other was a thinner “pole” or some other structure. In Mrs. Clapp’s words:

There were these two great big antennas, or poles, sticking up, with what would be a considerably narrower one going across the top. . . . That gave it a very home-made appearance, in the rear, with the poles, because I said to myself, it looks like someone made it in their garage.

Grace kept yelling to her husband, describing what she could see, and couldn’t believe that he never got out of the car. As she said, “He looks back [now] and bangs his head against the wall every day!”

We asked Grace whether there was enough ambient light to see all this detail, and she explained, “Whatever the body was made out of was very dark. . . . It was either a very, very dark grey or black, and the poles were the same color. . . . It was darker than the sky.” But, she thought that there was some light reflected from the white light on the front of the object, and there was also a glow from the red and green lights, which she could now see again. After the object had passed to the west, the red light was on the left and the green on the right. These two lights were on the side edges of the object, toward the rear.

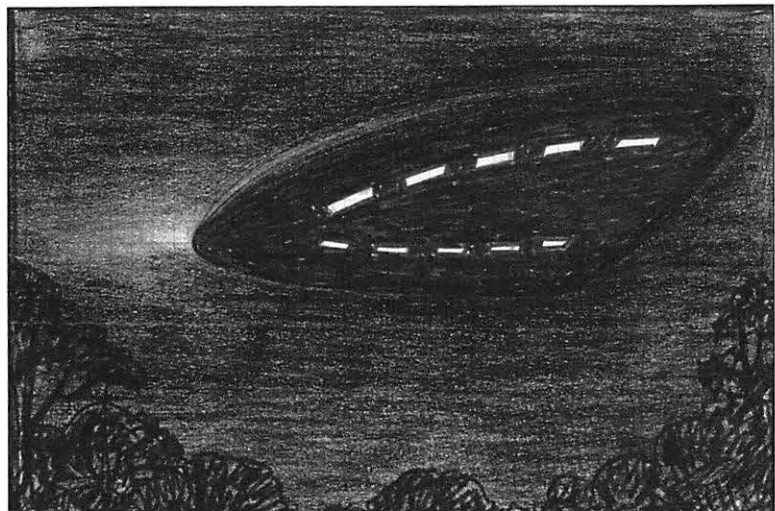
Regarding the object’s shape, Grace emphasized that, unlike a plane, this object was flat. “The thing . . . was as if you put two saucers together; naturally, you’re not going to have any sides.” Except that, unlike a saucer, this object was a triangular shape, with a rounded, leading point.

We asked Grace about the object’s apparent size at its closest point overhead. She gave an estimate of 26 to 30 inches in width at arm’s length when we visited the observation site with her. That is roughly three times that of her husband. Even if her husband’s estimate is closer to the actual size, the angle subtended was considerable (we calculate possible sizes below).

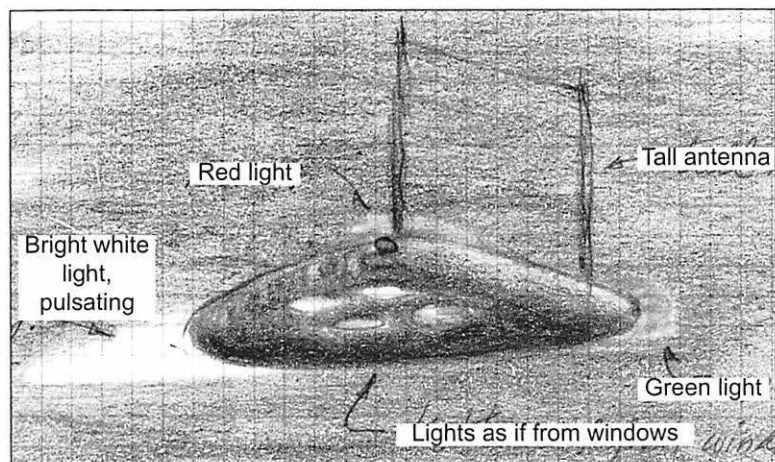
The couple could not accurately guess the object’s altitude without knowing its size. Ralph guessed based on several visual clues that it was somewhere between 200 and 1,000 feet high.



*Light as first seen through front car windshield, heading east.*



*Object as seen by Ralph Clapp, almost directly overhead and slightly to one side. To be strictly accurate, the outside edge of the object was not seen as clearly by Mr. Clapp as depicted in this drawing, but that detail was added to make the position of the windows clear.*



*Object as seen by Grace Clapp as it was leaving to the west-southwest.*