

1981

# The Investigator's Dilemma

**TYPE:** CE-I  
**DATE:** August 10, 1981  
**TIME:** 3 A.M.  
**DURATION:** 4 ½ (EST)  
**WITNESSES:** 1 + (1+)  
**PLACE:** Apple Valley, MN.

*[Ed. Note: Here is a text-book example of the dilemma an investigator of UFO reports finds himself in all too often. It contains much that is instructive for it demonstrates the ever present need for critical caution in UFO investigations, and for an open (but not empty) mind. For these reasons we include this case. We should like to entertain comments from readers on this case... or on any of the others in this issue. Undoubtedly many of you would point out in this case that what was needed was a check with the local airport (too late), a series of character references and psychological tests of the witnesses (no time or funds!). Wouldn't it be nice if we had the funds of the FBI for our investigations!]*

"Remember, in the movie, 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind,' when the big object first came over the mountain...before it landed?" Russell Matson told me over the phone. "Well, that's what it reminded me of when it came right over my car."

It was 3 A.M. and Matson had started on his regular early morning trip to work (at the Northstar Concrete Co.) having stopped only to pick up a pack of cigarettes. When just under two miles from his destination he saw a light ahead of him and to the left, about 15 degrees above the horizon, thinking "That's an awfully bright star!" He continued for another mile as the light came slowly closer; he now escalated his hypothesis to "probably a helicopter," as it lowered itself over a cornfield. It was now about 1000 feet away, some 500 feet away from the road and about 150 feet up in the air, Matson estimates.

He stopped his car, turned off the motor, ran his window down and turned off his radio better to listen for any noise from the object. He heard nothing. As he put his head out of the window to listen, the helicopter hypothesis was rapidly going out the window, too. Matson had been a helicopter mechanic in the army!

When he stopped his car, the object also stopped, and pivoted (Matson was emphatic about this...it pivoted, making a right-angle turn while stationary and not tipping or banking, which he said a helicopter would have to do) and now came directly toward, and over, his car. It moved slowly, only about 10 miles an hour.

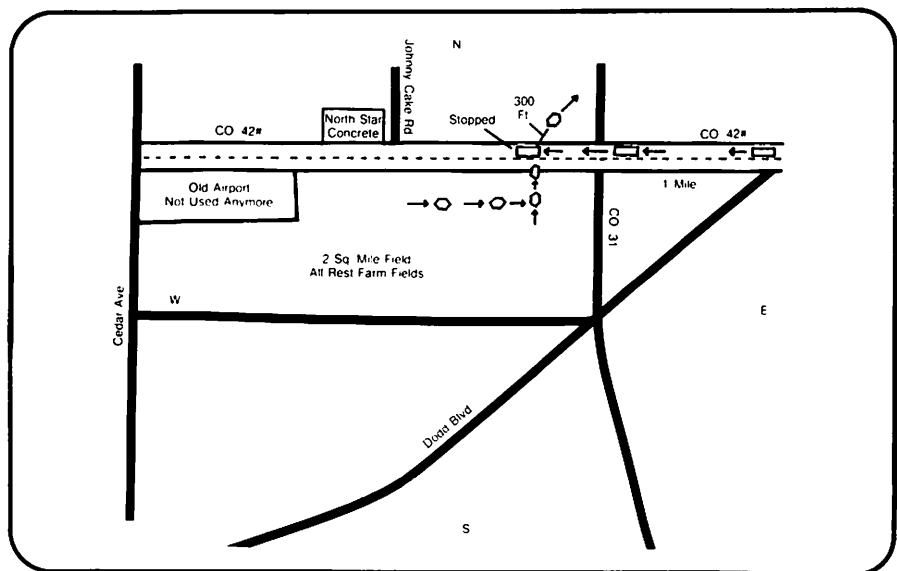
At this point, a semi (truck) pulled up behind Matson. "I pointed up and he looked up, got out of the truck onto his running board and looked directly up at the object." At this point, instead of talking to the driver, getting his name and address (which, of course, every good witness would do!) "I became scared and jumped into the car and sped off to work!" (¾ mile). He wanted to get someone else to see the object. It was moving slowly enough for this to be possible. As Matson pulled up

to the Concrete Co., his boss was just arriving and, according to Matson, he confirmed the object, in the distance. Matson did not call the police, fearing ridicule, but he did call radio station WCCO in Minneapolis, which immediately put him on the air.

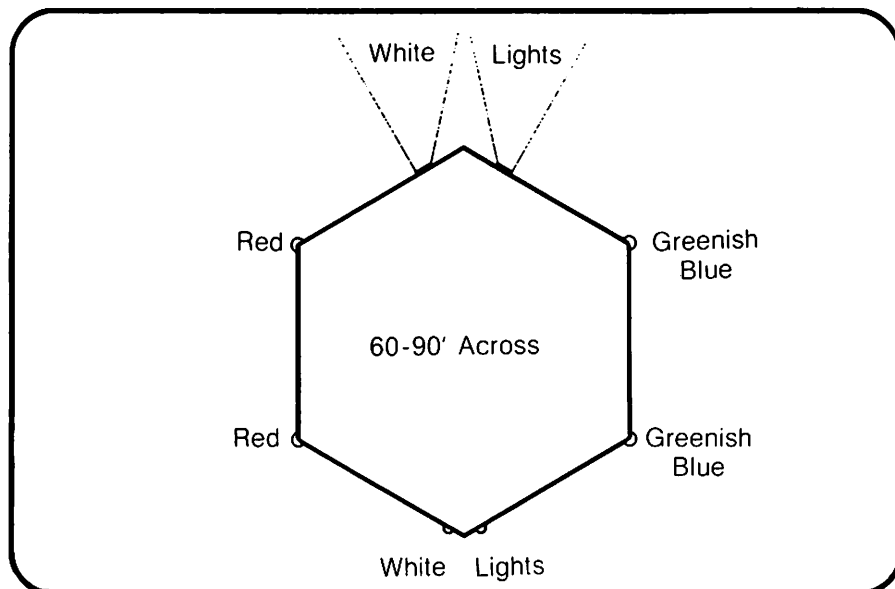
In the accompanying figures we have a map of Matson's location and movements, and a sketch of the object as he perceived it.

Matson was adamant during my questioning that it couldn't have been a helicopter. "It was a perfect hexagon, 60-90 feet across, with lights at each joint (apex). It cut out a very large part of the sky. I really got shaken."

This case is indeed a good one for study; it has its ample share of pros and cons. As so often happens, the report was made much too late to ascertain whether there was a helicopter there at the time. That would clinched things, one way or the other. The object actually didn't do anything that a helicopter couldn't do, although Matson contests this (the "perfect pivot without tipping"), but it was unlike a helicopter in that it had two sets of red and green lights, it was hexagonal,



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was much larger than helicopters are, blocking out a sizeable portion of the sky as it moved along, and, until it passed directly over him (Matson maintains less than 150 feet above him), he could hear no noise. As it passed over, however, he heard a soft "whoosh," like gas escaping from a propane tank.

The truck driver has not been located and Matson's boss viewed it from too great a distance. To him it looked as though it might have been a helicopter.

So, then, we have here a classic example of the primary and basic problem in all ufology: was what the witness reported actual fact? Did what the witness said happened really happen that way?

Here we have Matson, a former helicopter mechanic, maintaining, in a long telephone interview, that what he experienced could not have been a helicopter, although that was his second hypothesis; it was too big, it was hexagonal, it was close, and what little noise it did have was unlike that of a helicopter. Yet, the helicopter explanation appeals to common sense...any other explanation smacks of science fiction, a fantastic secret device, a remarkable

hallucination, or...a UFO! (Of course, it *was* a UFO...it was unidentified!)

Certainly, this case wouldn't be one to take to the National Academy of Sciences or to NASA as proof of true UFOs! It lacks the basic criterion for a "good" case: independent witnesses. What a different situation we would have if the truck driver...or two or more other witnesses, unknown to each other, could be interrogated separately and their accounts intercompared!

For the defense we could argue that we have here a case of a man who travels this route routinely, was on his way to work, with nothing special about the night or his immediate preceding activities, a man with some technical training, judged sane and normal by commonly accepted standards, who would have no reason whatever for perceiving an ordinary helicopter and transforming it into a noiseless, grossly oversize, hexagonal craft that blocked out the stars as it moved close overhead?

But, if it wasn't a helicopter, what in (or out of) this world was it? □

## BOOK REVIEW

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION:  
The First Scientific Field Study  
of UFO Phenomena  
Harley D. Rutledge,  
Prentice-Hall, 1981  
265 pages

One often hears of a "long-awaited" book or report, and this is actually the case with Harley Rutledge's report of his team's field investigation into UFO sightings in southeast Missouri. The serious student has been quite curious as to its results; owing to Dr. Rutledge's reluctance to publicize his group's efforts there have been many rumors circulating as to what those results might be. Alas, in many respects, the anticipation that here at last we had solid hard data has not been justified: Dr. Rutledge has produced a curious book which is more sizzle than steak.

Rutledge entitled his work PROJECT INVESTIGATION: The First Scientific Field Study of UFO Phenomenon. It cannot be denied that the second half of the title is in large measure true. [Ed Note: On a smaller scale there have been, in this and other countries, investigations in the field that could be characterized as scientific.] With various cameras, special film, binoculars and telescopes, and a spectrum analyzer, Rutledge's group was well-equipped to investigate the UFO mystery. One must admire their dedication and energy, as night after night was spent in the field, mainly during the years 1973 and 1974. The project team took 32 photographs of possible UFOs, most under known conditions. Such a number far surpasses any previous efforts. (Ed. Note: Mr. Dave Akers obtained nearly a dozen 'nocturnal light' photographs in the Yakima Indian Reservation when camped out in the field.) They even managed to triangulate the position and velocity (about 325 mph) of at least one UFO.