

1986

A giant triangle

by John P. Timmerman

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As is often the case, the investigation of one sighting report can trigger the discovery of other unreported sightings. Because people seldom know to whom they can report their experiences, it is likely that many high-strangeness close encounters remain hidden in the memories of witnesses.

In this instance, the investigation of one sighting led directly to the discovery of a second that had occurred only one mile in distance and four days in time after the first. Beyond these similarities of time and distance, I find no reason to connect the two events, even though the reported UFOs were quite large (as big as a house) in both cases. But both events were Close Encounters of the First Kind, rather uncommon in the 1980s, and so interesting in their own right.

The first, or triggering, case occurred on a Saturday evening, February 8, 1986, as two young persons were approaching Lima, Ohio, from the west on State Route 117. It was just after dusk, at about 7:00 P.M. They were crossing a concrete bridge, heading for nearby Seriff Road to turn north toward the home of the driver, 16-year-old Matthew Woodard.

His companion, 17-year-old Melinda Hays, spotted the UFO first, and they both watched it for several seconds as they drove closer. They described it as a "large, dark object hovering just above several large trees" just behind a two-story white frame residence. The house was near the south side of the road and the trees are roughly 175 feet from the edge of the highway.

Matthew had to concentrate on his driving, so only Melinda was able to watch the object as they drove past it and turned left on Seriff Road. After turning Matthew slowed the car down and both looked back to see that the object had moved across State Route 117

northward and was moving on a path parallel to Seriff Road, just above a long row of trees to the west. Matthew did not stop the car, but the couple tried to keep the UFO in sight as they drove north. The object eventually disappeared in the distance behind the trees and houses along Seriff Road.

The couple had the UFO in view for two to three minutes. Melinda, unlike Matthew, was able to observe it at close range (he had to watch the road). She described it as having a rectangular upper section with a single steady white light on top and sloping sides with a red and blue light at the lower left and right corners, respectively. As it moved north, the lower lights disappeared from view. Neither witness heard any unusual sound.

The object was quite large. Matthew used the word "humungous" when I asked about size. Both witnesses agreed that it appeared to be as large as or larger than the nearby house, which means it might have been 50 to 60 feet in its longest dimension. The couple could estimate the shape and size of the UFO because it was clearly visible as a very black hulk outlined by the glow in the sky from the Standard Oil Refinery lights several miles to the southeast.

This sighting was reported to me by telephone on Monday, February 10, by Matthew's father, Rev. Mel Woddard, a long-time acquaintance. I interviewed the two witnesses that evening, and in an effort to locate other possible witnesses, I placed a small ad in the "personal" classified ad section of *The Lima News*. The ad ran for three days and first appeared on February 11. The direct result was the discovery of the second event, which did not occur until the very early morning of February 12, after the ad had first run.

The sole witness in the second case is a 48-year-old wife and mother, Mrs. L (name on file). She lives with her husband and family in

an attractive ranch-style brick residence at the northwest edge of Lima. The family was asleep when the events of the second case began.

Mrs. L was awakened from her sleep by a sound at about 12:33 A.M. She is unable to give a description of the sound except to note that it was loud enough to cause her to awaken. Thinking something might be wrong with their daughter, Mrs. L got out of bed and went to her daughter's room. She found her daughter sleeping peacefully, so she went to the front of her home and looked through the glass upper window in the front door, facing west. Seeing lights of an unusual nature over a nearby residence, she became a little frightened, yet curious, and she opened the door for a better view.

Mrs. L observed a "strange dark object" hovering in the southeast sky visible across the top edge of her garage (see cover). The UFO was in the shape of a tall triangle, with three lights on the object. There were a white light at each of the two lower corners and a red light at the top corner. The lights were not blinking, nor were they of blinding brilliance.

Mrs. L thought that the object might have been a block away or less, perhaps hovering over a house that is about 250 feet from her front door. Of course, distances at night are difficult to determine, but if the object was in the spot Mrs. L guessed, it would have been about the same size as the houses. That would make the height of the UFO somewhere between 50 and 60 feet and the width around 15 to 20 feet. Any further away and the UFO's size would become very large, indeed.

As with the first sightings, the shape and size of the UFO could be estimated because it was silhouetted against the glow from the same Standard Oil Refinery mentioned above. The weather during both sightings was clear and cold, so visibility was excellent.

After a few moments observing the UFO, Mrs. L decided to wake her husband to get another witness. It took about 30 seconds or so to bring Mr. L to the door, but when he arrived, the object was gone. Mr. L stepped outside and looked in every direction but saw

no object and no strange lights as described by his wife.

The total duration of Mrs. L's sighting was only one to two minutes. This was sufficient for her to get a good look at the object and it is worthwhile to quote her comments at some length: "I want to emphasize that this appeared to be a very large object with a very dark central exterior and a slightly lighter perimeter. I could see the shape and body of the object against the slight glow in the lighter background sky. 'Big, massive and heavy' describe what I saw."

Despite the large size and close proximity of the object, Mrs. L heard no sound she could associate with the object. Her fright was due mostly to the apparent startling size of the object.

This case came to my attention because Mrs. L went to work on February 12 and told a co-worker about her experience. That individual had read the ad in the newspaper and told Mrs. L about it. Mrs. L called me that evening, less than 24 hours after her sighting, and I interviewed her the next day. We thus have the rather rare instance of two close encounter cases occurring about the same time and being reported and investigated within a day or so after their occurrence.

I checked with the Lima Police Department, the Allen County Sheriff's office, the Ohio State Highway Patrol and the Allen County Airport concerning possible mundane explanations for either sighting. No likely explanation for either report could be discovered. I received no phone calls from other witnesses who might have read the newspaper ad, and a check with some of Mrs. L's neighbors turned up no additional witnesses. At this time, both sighting reports remain unexplained.

Mrs. L says she has not read any books on UFOs and "had no special interest in the subject before now." She is well-educated, holding a Master's degree in Social Agency Counseling, and works as activities coordinator for a Lima area nursing home. Her comments were clear and her sketch of what she saw was quite detailed. She is familiar

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reveals not only that there is no demonstrable connection between the two but that Klass, though aware of this research, chose not to mention it.

(2) His argument that the crashed-saucer claim is totally destroyed by the contents of the July 9, 1947, press interview with rancher Mac Brazel is disconfirmed by the testimonies of eight firsthand witnesses who have stated that the Brazel interview was conducted under duress. Klass knew this but, once again, elected to ignore it.

(3) Klass offers no evidence whatever to support his allegation that the memories of Roswell witnesses are unreliable. Indeed, how could he, never having talked with any of them?

(4) His statements about the Twining letter have been exposed as baseless claims resulting from shoddy, superficial research.

(5) His reliance on statements in three other government documents to the effect that no crashed-saucer wreckage exists is weakened by his failure to establish that the writers of those documents had a valid need-to-know about so sensitive and highly secret a matter.

(6) His remarks about my alleged statements concerning Eisenhower come to nothing when the misinformation in the *Roswell* book is set forth for what it is.

Phil Klass, alas, never changes. His arguments against the Roswell case are essentially the same as they were five years ago, even though he knows of the additional research and new facts on the matter. Klass simply does not permit any of this to threaten what he wants to believe. And he wants very much to believe that UFOs do not exist.

So, if his pronouncements on any UFO-related topic are to be considered seriously in the future, his basic credibility as a reporter must be carefully assessed. After all, he is the skeptical community's leading anti-UFO spokesman. Klass' *Skeptical Inquirer* article becomes an excellent case study -- an opportunity for those on both sides of the UFO debate to determine whether he merits his position. A critical comparison of his allegations about the Roswell incident as set forth in his article, against the material recounted above (all of it gathered in the course of investigation, a practice in which Klass has not indulged), should tell us much about the relative merits of our respective cases. For my part, I think that, if Phil Klass is the best the skeptics can come up with, it is not the UFO movement that has the problem.

Notes

(1) *The Roswell Incident*, page 40; "The Roswell Incident: Update & Conclusions" monograph, 1981, page 18; "The Roswell

Incident: New Evidence in the Search for a Crashed UFO," 1982, page 8; and "The Roswell Incident: Evidence in the Search for Proof," 1985, page 40. Copies available from the author at 4219 West Olive Street, Suite 247, Burbank, California 91505.

(2) In case Klass remains unconvinced about the address situation here, I have numerous documents in my files from the same time period using this same address format and intended for quite a wide variety of command-level personnel from the lieutenant-colonel level on up. The "Commanding General, Army Air Forces" address was essentially a Pentagon mail-room designator, nothing more.

(3) Letter from Twining to J. E. Schaefer of Boeing Airplane Co. dated July 17, 1947.

Editor's note: IUR readers who wish to see the Klass article to which this is a response may order the Spring 1986 issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* for \$5.00 from the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, Box 229, Central Park Station, Buffalo, New York 14215.

A giant triangle

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with the lighting, shape and performance characteristics of both conventional and military aircraft because she lived with her husband at Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington when he worked as a radar navigator on B-52 bombers.

Although it is tempting, I cannot make any connection between these two UFO cases. The objects had different shapes and different light configurations, though both were noiseless and of roughly the same size. No conventional explanation is readily at hand, although the appearance of a large, lighted object near a small city could, one supposes, hardly occur without its being seen by several persons. The lack of additional witnesses to either sighting can be explained perhaps because the sightings occurred during cold weather at night when few persons were up and about. That explanation doesn't prove these objects were not conventional, but it does suggest why only three persons reported the two UFOs. I am still hoping, however, that other witnesses to the sightings will surface soon.

An interesting memo indeed, especially so since the final version of it omitted the "interplanetary" suggestion as well as the very curious construction references to "metallic foils, plastics and perhaps balsa wood or similar material" (which coincides very closely with the description of the wreckage found at Roswell) and "tripod landing gear."

Naturally this memorandum could be (and no doubt will be) used as the basis for all sorts of arguments both pro and anti crashed disc, but the question remains: If there was no crashed disc at Roswell, then where so early in the UFO era was Schulgen's office getting such specific information about the technical nature of flying-disc-like craft? There seems no question that at the very least some of the information therein came from Gen. Twining's office because of the strong similarities in language between parts of the Twining letter and portions of this memo -- particularly in the "Commonly Reported Features" section. Given this, Twining's sudden trip to New Mexico at just the right time to have a firsthand look at whatever it was that crashed there becomes all the more interesting.

Could the crashed object not have been an extraterrestrial craft at all but, rather, a highly classified experimental domestic device of some sort -- perhaps a disc-shaped plane or maybe some sort of then-new airborne radar dish? We have taken this possibility into account during our extensive interviews with witnesses and our exhaustive (and continuing) search to uncover pertinent government documents and records. So far, however, we have uncovered nothing that lends support to this hypothesis.

Although several skeptics have expressed the belief that a highly classified domestic device was involved, none has offered any evidence whatever to support his speculation. Of course debunkers, for whom consistency has never been the soul of virtue, also argue that there couldn't possibly be a cover-up of extraterrestrial hardware because the government can't keep secrets!

While Klass and others continue to cite documents denying the existence of crashed-UFO debris, such documents are open to question on at least two levels. First, only one of these documents bears a classification higher than Secret (a 1948 Air Intelligence Report, which doesn't mention crashed discs at all but part of which is classified Top Secret because it discusses Soviet technological capabilities with respect to disc-shaped aircraft). Second, the writers of these reports may not have possessed the necessary need-to-know about such things. Official disinformation must be considered as a third possibility.

As for Klass' point about the "intentional" omission of certain "critically important" information from the text of *The Roswell Incident*, I can only repeat what I have said before on the

subject. Regrettably, the book contains numerous errors both of commission and of omission. The unfortunate inclusion of a couple of pages of dubious astronaut UFO sightings in the first chapter is one such example. The omission of a critical phrase in the text of an FBI teletype (pages 133-134) is another.

There are many such -- virtually all of which are attributable to the publisher's haste to get the book on the market and its apparent desire to make the book as sensationalistic as possible. When such things happen, truth takes a back seat.

Stan Friedman and I did the bulk of the research for the book. Berlitz was largely responsible for creating the text and format. By the time I received galleys and realized what was going on, it was too late to make changes. The book had already gone to press. If, however, there is any blame to be taken for the disgraceful hodgepodge of fact and fiction to be found in *The Roswell Incident*, then I am willing to accept it. But I do consider it a very cheap shot for Klass to continue to exploit this situation, long after I had explained the circumstances to him.

Another unfortunate instance of sensationalism in the book is the business about President Eisenhower's not having been informed of the crashed saucer because "he did not possess the necessary clearances" (for specifics, see Klass' allegations in *Skeptical Inquirer*). Klass repeatedly has used this against me as he has sought to discredit both the Roswell case and me personally.

He does not mention that the comment about Eisenhower's alleged lack of property security clearances comes from an interview I conducted with a former high-level CIA employee concerning the rumor that Eisenhower may have viewed crashed-saucer wreckage at Edwards (then Muroc) AFB in early 1954. The individual intended the statement as a general observation concerning problems with security leaks originating with persons around the President at the time; it did not specifically relate to the matter of crashed saucers.

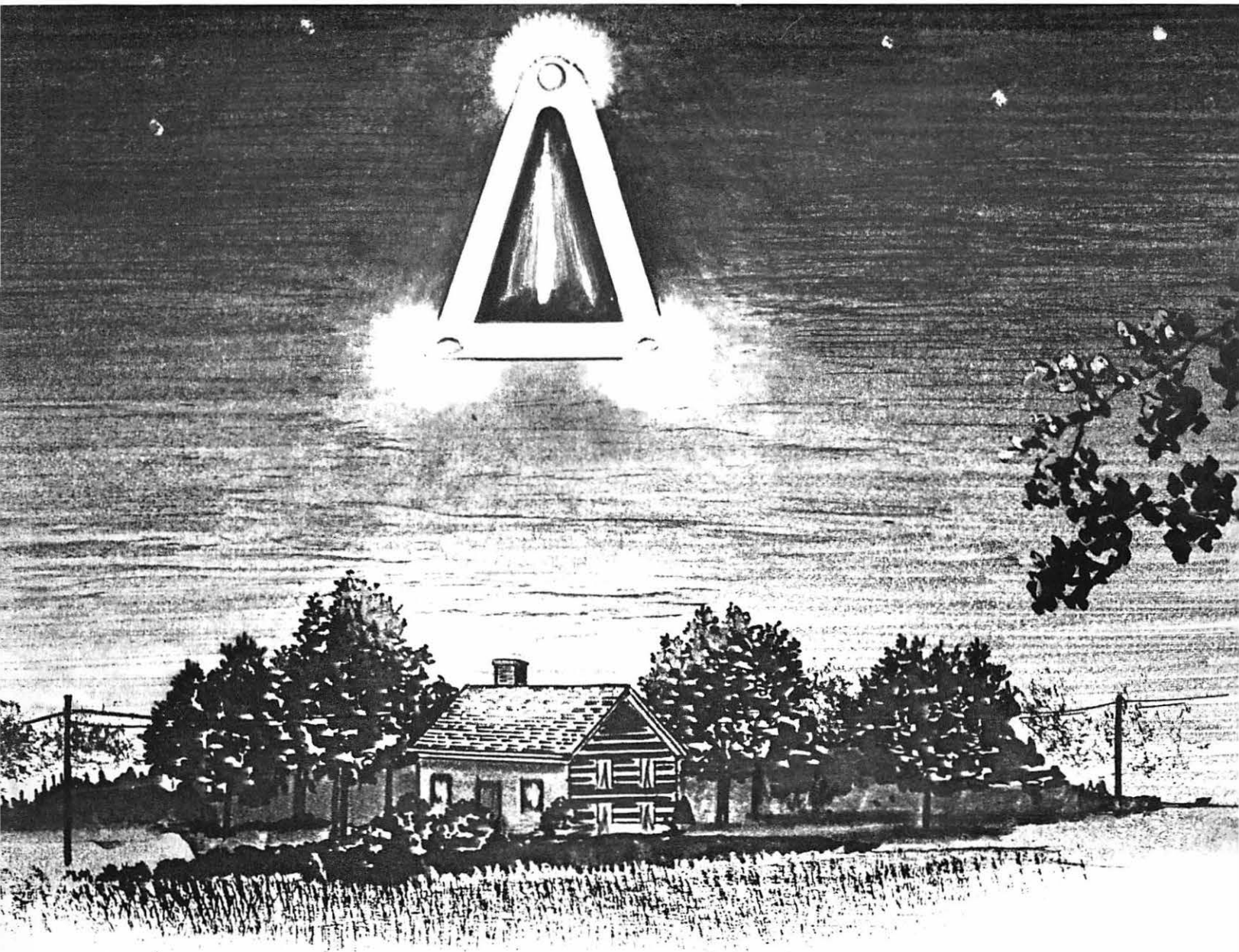
Aside from this one source, I have never seen any evidence that would substantiate such a statement. Nonetheless I sent the notes on this particular interview to Berlitz who, in the process of writing the text for the book, somehow managed to give it far more play than it deserved and to get it substantially confused at the same time.

In the final analysis, Klass has attempted to debunk the Roswell crashed-disc case on six major points, not one of which holds up under scrutiny. Let's summarize:

(1) Klass has claimed that the Roswell case is nothing more than a resurrected retelling of the old Frank Scully crashed-saucer hoax of 1949-50. In-depth investigation of the facts

INTERNATIONAL UFO REPORTER

JULY/AUGUST 1986
VOLUME 11, NUMBER 4



Unidentified flying triangle

INTERNATIONAL UFO REPORTER

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It is the persistence of the UFO reports, and the contents of those reports, that constitute the UFO phenomenon; it is this phenomenon that must be studied and its validity judged independently of any hypothesis of its origin. To do otherwise is simply not honest science.

J. Allen Hynek
1910 - 1986

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Address all editorial correspondence to *International UFO Reporter*, Jerome Clark, Editor, 1511 Greenleaf Street, Evanston, Illinois 60202.

Address all subscription correspondence to *International UFO*

Reporter, 1955 John's Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-1615, (312) 724-2480.

The *International UFO Reporter* is a benefit publication mailed to Associates of the Center for \$25.00 or more. Foreign Associates add \$7.00 for delivery. All amounts in U.S. funds. Other publications also available for contributors of larger amounts. For details, write to 1955 John's Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-1615, USA. Postmaster: Send Form 3579 to CUFOS, 1955 John's Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-1615.