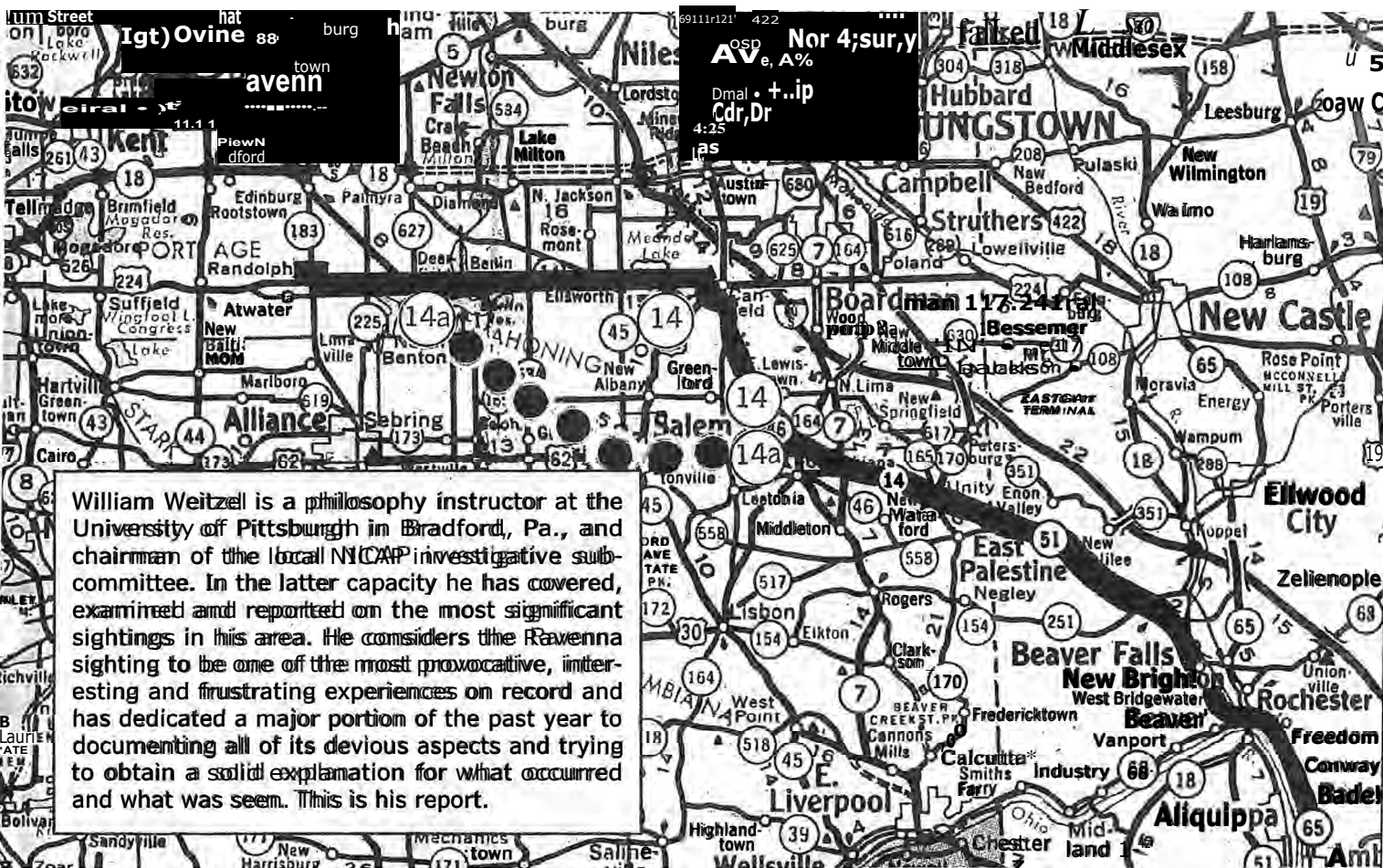


# ...Into The Middle of Hell



*Dark line is actual 86 miles covered by UFO and pursuers from Ravenna, Ohio into Pennsylvania. Dotted line was assumed route caused by Road 14 misunderstanding.*

- Deputy Sheriffs Dale Spaur and Wilbur Neff stood rooted to the spot, their heads tilted back, staring at the enormous, brilliant object above them. It seemed to be staring back, with its piercing white light. Neither man could speak or move. Spaur looked down at his hands and clothes, expecting them to be on fire, but there was only the cold, brilliant light that illuminated a patch of ground around them and their cruiser, next to Ohio State Route 224. Perhaps it was just the contrast with an otherwise dark morning that made the light, which had moved over them moments before, so bright; but it made the deputies' eyes water.

The huge object was only a few dozen feet up, but it

made no sound except for a faint humming. Neither had ever seen anything like it. It had drifted level over the road, then back to hover directly over them. It seemed to be waiting for them to do something. Without a word to each other, the men dashed for their cruiser. When Spaur touched the door handle, he was shocked. He realized he had expected the cruiser to disappear into thin air when he touched it, as though this were all a wild dream.

The men jumped inside and slammed the doors. Now, in familiar surroundings, the reality of the situation hit them and they began trembling. The object was still above them, but it moved off down the road about a hundred feet and stopped. Again, it seemed to be waiting for something.

Deputy Spaur took the radio microphone in his shaking hand and pushed the button to "transmit," to report what

was happening, but what, could he say, *was* happening?

Portage County Deputy Sheriff Dale Spaur and Mounted (auxiliary) Deputy Wilbur "Barney" Neff were a good team. Spaur had been with the sheriff's department a year, and Neff had been on patrol with him and other deputies for some time, when he had time aside from his job as a local Thermo-King mechanic at a truck stop near Ravenna, Ohio. Spaur had a reputation for never losing a court case, nor a speeder, and was thought of most highly by his fellow deputies and by Sheriff Ross Dustman. Six feet four inches tall, 190 pounds, police experience in photography, fingerprinting and radio operations, three years experience in the Air Force as an in-flight refueling boom operator, and a former race-car driver, he was the model of a capable law enforcement officer.

The morning had been a routine one. A car had smashed into a utility pole near Atwater, in the southeastern part of the county. The men got the driver to a hospital, and the car towed. While they sat in P-13, their cruiser, they drank some coffee and talked with a repairman, who was working on the damaged pole and lines. A call came over their radio about 4:50 a.m. "Woman in Summit County reports a low-flying bright object went over her property, headed east toward Portage County." "The weird ones are out tonight!" Spaur remarked.

He drove off with Deputy Neff, toward the western part of the county to inspect a shopping center in the vicinity. After going a short distance, however, he noticed a car parked by the other side of the road, and turned around to check. There was almost no traffic that time of morning, and the car seemed to be deserted.

He parked on the broad berm beside the road, leaving the engine running and the headlights on. Neff got out and stood by the right headlight, ready in case any trouble should develop. Spaur walked over to the 1959 white Ford, saw that it was empty, and looked around at the woods to his right, thinking perhaps the driver was there. Then he saw the light.

It was small at first, no bigger than a pinhead at arm's length would have appeared. It was coming from the west, on an imaginary line that would have extended not far south of the road. It grew larger rapidly, and within a short time was almost due south of him.

"Look at that light, Barney!" he alerted Neff. "Maybe that's that flying saucer that we heard about a few minutes ago!" Neff turned halfway around and his jaw dropped. The light was much bigger now, and the area was getting brighter. The men said nothing as it swerved from its westerly path and came toward them from the south. It grew to immense size and went right over the road to the north. It stopped. Then it came back and hovered overhead, humming softly. After about a minute, the men bolted for the car.

In Ravenna, the radio operator for the Portage County Sheriff's Department, Deputy Robert Wilson, noted the time-5:07 a.m.—and asked for details.

"It's about a hundred feet ahead, over Route 224," Spaur

said. "We're parked on the berm, headed east. It's about fifty feet across, and I can just make out a dome or something on the top, but that's very dark. The bottom is real bright, it's putting out a beam of light that makes a big spot underneath. It's like it's sitting on the beam. It was overhead a minute ago, and it was bright as day here; our headlights didn't make nearly as much light as it did. And this is no helicopter or anything like that; it's perfectly still and it just makes a humming noise."

Deputy Wilson didn't hear all the details; Spaur was excited and spoke rapidly. But he gathered that the men in P-13 were observing a "flying saucer." Wilson had heard that such sightings were often due to weather balloons, and thought of an easy test the men could perform. "P-13, Dale, do you have your 44 Magnum with you?" "I do," Spaur replied. "Take a shot at it!" Wilson suggested.

Spaur thought this over briefly. From what he had seen so far, he was impressed, and didn't want to risk irritating the object. It was as big as a house, and looked quite solid. It could easily come back and settle on the car, squashing it like an egg. "I don't think I want to do that," he radioed back, and repeated his description of the object. "Listen, Bob," he added, "this thing's a monster! It's like looking down the middle of hell!"

Wilson realized Spaur was dead serious. He called in Sergeant Hank Shoenfelt, and asked his advice. Shoenfelt got on the radio. "Keep an eye on that thing, and we'll dispatch a car with a camera, and get a picture of it." Spaur

*continued on next page*



*"It looked like this," Deputy Spaur explained. "It maneuvered. Somebody had control over it."*

felt it was good advice. He put the cruiser in gear and moved slowly forward, to get a better view.

As he advanced, the object started moving away. It elevated a bit, then went off rather slowly, due east over Route 224. Spaur called in, "It's moving off. Shall we follow?" Sgt. Shoenfelt answered, "Stick with it until that camera car gets out there."

Spaur accelerated. The object accelerated. Spaur floored the gas pedal and began tearing after it. The object gathered more speed and within a minute, P-13 was barreling down the road at 85 -miles an hour in pursuit.

Spaur was approaching an intersection, where Routes 183 and 224 go south together for about half a mile. He decided, since he had to make a turn, to follow 224 south. As he slowed, the object shot out over a field bordered by 183. It continued east, while Spaur turned right, following the road to the south. When 224 left 183, going east again, Spaur turned left to follow the object, which was now northeast of him. Just after he turned, the object made a right angle turn and came south, going across the road ahead of him; then it turned left and sped eastward, to his right, while he drove east on 224.

THE deputies noticed now that when the object moved forward, its leading edge tilted down. The light underneath it, on the ground, followed behind, as if the head of a flashlight aimed down were tilting forward and its beam casting a spot behind it. Then, too, the sky was becoming brighter, and they could see the top clearly silhouetted against the sky. There seemed to be an antenna or probe projecting from the top rear, about 20 feet long, tapering to a pointed tip. The object was about half as thick as it was wide, shaped something like a football in cross section. The bottom was still glowing brilliantly.

Neff watched the object out his right window, to the southeast, until P-13 got to Deerfield. As they drove over a reservoir, it rose up to about 500 feet and turned north, going over the road above them. Now both P-13 and the object were racing due east toward Canfield, about 18 miles away, at nearly 100 miles an hour. There was practically no traffic and, except for an occasional dip or twist, the road was perfectly straight. The object was due north.

Spaur was headed into Mahoning County, out of his jurisdiction. He radioed his base. "We just passed Deerfield circle, now on Route 14," he said. "This thing's right out my left window, and we're going about the same speed, almost 90 miles an hour. Please advise." Sgt. Shoenfelt called back, "Stay with it until that camera car gets there." "Will do," Spaur replied. "It's getting light now. I should be able to identify it pretty soon."

Unfortunately, Spaur's report of "Route 14" was misinterpreted by many listeners. They took Spaur to mean he was now traveling down Route 14A, which used to be called 14. As a result of this mixup, the camera car was side-tracked and several police officers in that part of the state turned their attention in the wrong direction. The mistake was cleared up when they got near Canfield and reported their location approaching that town.

Here the object again crossed the road ahead of them, and headed southeast. Spaur turned right onto a large bypass loop that goes around Canfield. They had not gone far,

gradually turning east again, when the object went across the loop to their left, still in a southeasterly direction. To match, as best he could, its southerly component of travel, Spaur turned right onto Route 14, going directly south.

The object seemed to be receding to their left, but suddenly it swung around and headed south over the road ahead of them. Spaur began to feel a new kind of fear.

As long as the sky had been dark and visibility limited, the men could assume, after their initial fright, that they were witnessing an ordinary something-or-other under unusual lighting conditions. Spaur had hoped that when it became lighter he would recognize what it was they were chasing. But the sky was quite light then, and the object seemed even more mysterious. The top had a metallic surface, and its outline, with the "antenna," was much more visible.

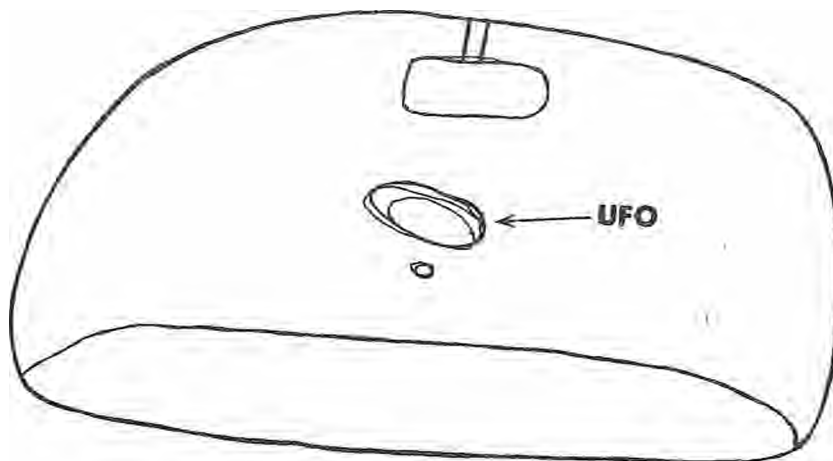
Spaur began to question whether they were chasing the object, or it was chasing them. When he would slow down to maneuver in traffic, it would slow down a bit, then speed up again. It seemed to be playing cat and mouse, and it was unclear who was the cat or the mouse. Ever the first time since the chase had begun, Spaur began to doubt his senses. Neff was still radioing in locations and observational details, but he obviously was making an effort to keep cool. Spaur hoped desperately that someone would come to their assistance. He was out of his county, and would soon be out of the state, into Pennsylvania. But his sergeant told him to keep going, and he was intent on finding out what he was chasing. He raced on down Route 14 toward Columbiana, dodging occasional traffic at a mile a minute.

Suddenly it occurred to him that an airplane pilot would get a good view of the object. "Bob," he radioed Wilson, "can you get an airport to send up a plane?" Wilson called the Youngstown Air Force Base and made the request.

As the deputies passed through Columbiana, city patrolman Jack Haines, who had been listening to the radio traffic, finally found a camera for which he had been looking. He drove to Route 14, but P-13 had passed. It was on its way to a near disaster. At the intersection of Routes 14 and 146, the object made a 100° turn to the left, going in the direction of Route 14. Spaur made an abrupt turn to follow it, and the cruiser slipped in some gravel. Spaur's racing experience paid off. He got the car back on the road, and headed east after the object. "Dale," Neff said, "we nearly turned over!" "Yeah," said Spaur, "can't you just see the obituary? 'Racked up while pursuing a flying saucer.' Barney, when are we gonna get some help on this?" Neff didn't answer. He had his head pressed up against the windshield, looking almost straight up at the object, which had elevated and slowed down "for them."

As they approached Unity, Ohio, East Palestine patrolman Wayne Huston drove to the edge of Route 14 and waited to see if he could observe the subject of the last quarter hour of excited radio traffic. In the northwest he saw a light approaching that quickly took on detail and flew almost straight overhead about 900 feet up, going over 80 miles an hour. Huston later described it as a flattened ice cream cone, a dark dome-like top and a cone shaped light from a bright bottom. The light looked like a focused beam in smoke or fog would look, and it was tilted to the rear of the object's direction of travel.

*From the initial interview with Dale F. Spaur: his comparison of UFO size with that of rear view mirror in car when UFO was seen ahead of him after coming through underpass area at Rochester, Pa. This is apparent size of UFO in answer to question, "If it had gone behind your rear view mirror, would the mirror have covered it?" Spaur answered that even if it had centered behind the mirror, it would have stuck, out on both sides.*



*Similar figure below UFO is my illustration of what I meant by "apparent size" when I asked the question that way. I sketched the window diagram; Spaur drew in the UFO-size-diagram.*

As P-13 sped by, Huston jumped into his cruiser and turned onto the road after it. It took several minutes to catch up, and he probably would not have, if P-13 had not been slowed down by traffic and the road, which was now narrower and more winding. The object also slowed.

"P-13," Huston radioed to Spaur and Neff, "this is OV-1. I see your object. I'm right behind you."

"At that time I wanted to kiss that man," Spaur said later. Here at last was a corroborating witness.

Patrolman Huston, following close behind Spaur and Neff, called his base. "We're off Ohio Route 14, onto Pennsylvania 51. Call the Pennsylvania State Police for some support. Find out if someone can get after this thing in an airplane. And if it's being picked up- on radar anywhere." A call was placed to the Chippewa Barracks of the Pennsylvania State Police, on Route 51 near the state line. Trooper Antonio Taglienti sorted out the requests and Called the Greater Pittsburgh Airport. He was told that nothing unusual was on their radar, and that the only available planes were jet interceptors, which would be too slow. As he tried to get a State Police cruiser into the area, he heard the deputies and Huston roar by. He looked through the window, but the men were out of sight. He saw nothing unusual in the sky.

A few miles outside Beaver, Pennsylvania, the road turned into a broad stretch of highway that curved around to the right. Spaur had been watching Huston's cruiser through his rear view mirror and he saw the nose of the

cruiser dip suddenly as Huston braked. "There it is!" he shouted. Directly ahead of them, only a few hundred feet off the road, the object was hovering, stationary.

Huston noticed the- projection on the rear- of the object before it shot up to about a thousand feet, stopped, then took off away from them in the direction of Rochester. The cat-and-mouse game began again. When traffic conditions forced the cruisers to slow, the object would wait, but not long enough for them to catch up.

Outside Freedom, the road, now Route 65, broadened into a four lane highway, and the officers sped up again, but Spaur's cruiser was running low on gas. He saw a police car parked across the road in the distance, at an Atlantic gas station.

Conway, Pa., Patrolman Frank Panzanella had just left a restaurant and was on- his way home after a night on duty. As he drove over the top of a hill near Route 51, he saw a bright light in the sky to the west. It was too big for a star and seemed to be moving. He stopped to get a better look. It grew in size and he thought it was an airplane on fire. It seemed to be coming straight at him. "My God," he thought, "it's going to hit right here on the hill!" He turned the car around and drove back down the hill toward the highway. As he turned at an intersection near the road, he saw the thing out his left window, moving slowly now toward the Northern Lights shopping center, which borders on the highway. He parked at the Atlantic station and got out. The object had hovered not too far away. It had an

*continued on next page*

outline like a football cut in half along its length, and the flat bottom was all lit up—Panzanella thought he had seen individual lights around the bottom rear when it passed nearby—and an antenna-like projection at the rear. A penny held at arm's length would not have covered it. He could not believe what he was seeing and decided to say nothing about it to anyone.

Two cars screamed to a stop on the road behind him. He turned and watched P-13 and OV-1 make a quick U-turn into the station. All three men jumped out and ran up. "Do you see it?" they asked. "See what?" he replied, still reluctant to admit he had been watching something so weird. "That thing over there! We've been with it all the way from Ohio!" Huston pointed to the object. Panzanella admitted he had been looking at it.

As the four -men stood there together the object receded

horizontally, making a swishing noise. It hovered again in the east, in line with a television antenna on a nearby roof. The crescent moon was to its right, and Venus shown as a bright dot of light to the right of the moon.

**A**gain the object moved, this time straight up, and hovered again. A large commercial airliner, United Airlines flight 454 on route to Buffalo, N. Y., flew under the object. "Someone on that plane is bound to see it," Neff said. Panzanella walked to his cruiser, still watching, and called the Rochester base radio station, which serves several surrounding communities, including Conway. He asked the radio operator, John Bieghey, to call the airport, to see if anything was on the radar screen there, and to contact the pilot of the plane. He gave a description of the object and asked if any interceptor planes could be sent up. Bieghey did this, and called Panzanella back. "They've got it on radar, and are sending two up!" By coincidence, just as the planes were mentioned, the object accelerated upwards and shot straight out of sight.

The officers looked around and could see nothing else in the sky, except the moon and Venus, and the contrails from two jets to the northeast. The arcs were growing from north to south, toward the rising sun.

The Ohio officers left, while Panzanella stood by his cruiser, still looking for the object. As they drove off, he got a call from John Bieghey, requesting that the deputies call someone with the United States Air Force Reserve at the Greater Pittsburgh Airport, to report the object. He drove off after them and caught up with them in Freedom. On the way, his radio picked up a weak transmission from a patrolman in Economy Borough, Henry Kwiatkowski: "Hey, Frank, I just saw two jets. . . ." The end of the call was indistinct; radio reception faded.

Kwiatkowski was standing on a high point of ground three miles southeast of the Atlantic station. He had been in touch previously with Panzanella, asking where to look for the object. Just after it left the Conway area, Kwiatkowski saw two jets northeast of him heading south, followed by a bright, football-shaped object. He watched until the trio got almost in front of the sun.

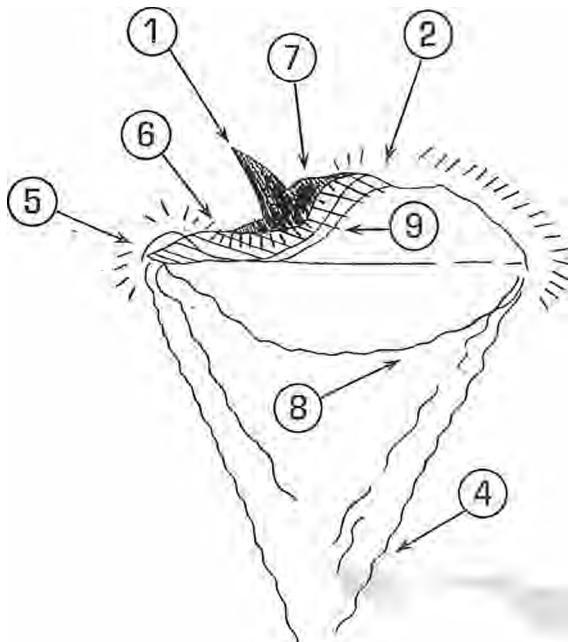
The four officers drove to the Rochester base station and Spaur called the number he had been given, 264-5000. He does not remember to whom he talked, only that it was an Air Force colonel, and that the officer, after about a minute of questioning, told him his report would be forwarded to Dayton, Ohio, the location of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Project Blue Book, the Air Force's official UFO investigating project.

Spaur started the 73 mile trip back to Ohio with Neff and Huston.

When they arrived at the sheriff's office in Ravenna, things were in a turmoil. Their radio reports had been heard by someone connected with the news media, and the station was flooded with phone calls and reporters. No one knew what to make of the incident; even their questions were incoherent. A Civil Defense official checked the cruiser and

### SPAUR'S SKETCH OF UFO

1. Projection, tilted from rear, 18' long
2. Dome-shaped top
3. Glowing front
4. Cone-shaped light underneath
5. Glowing tip of trailing edge
6. Metallic surface
7. Sharp "drop-off"
8. Rounded "undercarriage"
9. Line separates metallic from self-illuminated portions



the men with a Geiger counter, but found nothing above normal background level.

Spaur typed his report, referring repeatedly to the object as "the (?)." "The ( ?) was about 35 to 45 feet across the bottom and about 24 feet high. The (?) was very bright. The (?) seemed suspended on a beam of light. . . . I was shook up at this time." He was still shaking, four hours after the chase began, and the sheriff sent him home for some rest. Neff was so disturbed by the excitement, that he went into seclusion.

## THE INVESTIGATIONS

I was on my way to church that morning when a news bulletin about the chase came over my car radio. As sub-committee chairman, I usually am called when a member thinks something should be investigated, but that morning I had been unavailable. After the services I was in touch with several members, including the minister, Reverend Shaw, learning what I could of the reports that I found had received nationwide coverage.

I heard that the police chief of Mantua, Ohio, Gerald Buchert, had taken a picture early in the chase, which he thought showed the object. A good UFO picture is a rarity; I felt this one should be examined immediately, before it was mishandled or lost.

I made an appointment to meet with Chief Buchert at the Portage County Court House in three hours.

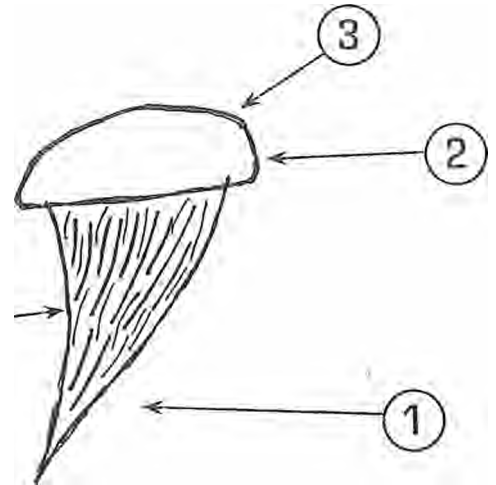
Reverend Shaw accompanied me and I began interviewing Chief Buchert immediately. He had been in Mantua at the start of the chase, about 18 miles northwest of the spot on Route 224 where Spaur and Neff first had seen the object. He had seen a small light in the sky in the general direction of their location, and had taken four pictures. The light had seemed to bob around a bit, but was still there when the men were chasing their UFO down the road. Buchert showed me an 8x10 enlargement of the one part of his film that had an image on it among the four pictures he had taken. It showed only two dark, fuzzy arcs, with no other objects in the photograph to indicate elevation or apparent size. I asked to see the negative, but he said he preferred to show it to someone in the government first, in case he had photographed some kind of secret military device. He would not even allow Reverend Shaw to make a Polaroid copy of the print. I suggested he call Wright-Patterson AFB to see if anyone would be interested in looking at the picture. He did this and was advised by a Lieutenant Weisinger to lock up the prints and negative film until the next day.

Neff could not be reached, but Deputy Spaur had agreed to come over and while I waited for him, I shut myself in an office away from the mob of reporters and deputies, and took notes from his official report.

Tom Schley, of the *Beaver County Times*, whose story on the now famous Lucci UFO photograph taken in Beaver, Pa., in August, 1965 had stimulated his already existing interest in UFOs, arrived from an interview with Officer

### HUSTON'S VIEW OF UFO

1. Cone-shaped light underneath
2. Bright, self-illuminated solid appearing top
3. Dome shape
4. Cone tilted toward rear



Panzanella in Conway and prepared for another with Wayne Huston. I decided to defer that part of my investigation until I could get some more information about the Buchert film.

When Detective Leland finally brought Spaur in, I was almost sorry I had asked to see him. He had slept for less than an hour and was obviously exhausted. He looked as if he had seen a ghost, and expected he wouldn't be believed. But he definitely believed what he had seen, and we were hardly introduced when he started right in with his account. While he was talking, two representatives of the Akron Flying Saucer Investigating Committee, A. E. Candusso and Larry Moyers, came in with a Civil Defense radiation counter. I asked Spaur if he would take us out to the initial site and he agreed.

We all drove to the exact spot on Route 224 and parked behind the white Ford, which we later learned had been abandoned there after the engine had thrown a rod.

Candusso and Moyers found no radiation in the area above the expected background count. I asked Spaur to go through his story again, as to what had happened right at this spot. One of his responses really drove home the enormous size of the object, and the seriousness of Spaur's reaction. "Suppose you held your arm out straight," I asked, "and pretended you were holding the object between your thumb and forefinger. In other words, how big was the image of the object, at arm's length?" "Hell," Spaur said, mustering a weary chuckle, "I'd have to hold both arms up!"

*continued on next page*



One side was over the middle of the road, and the other side was over this hill next to the berm. That thing was only fifty feet up, and it would have covered the road!" He held both arms up at about a 45° angle, as though he were pointing to the opposite sides of the object. For the first time since we, had gotten out there, I felt the cold.

Back at the station things had calmed down somewhat, but no one seemed to know yet just how to interpret the morning's event. Sheriff Ross Dustman was there, and he supported Spaur without reservation, believing him to have seen just what he described. The other deputies joked with him, asking what he thought would have happened if he had shot at the UFO.

"I wouldn't have been surprised," Spaur said wryly, "if a big fly swatter had stuck out the bottom of that thing, and SPLAT! I don't know why we felt safer when we got in the car; it really wouldn't have helped if that thing got mad. But getting something between us and it was better than just standing there."

The next day Major Hector Quintanilla, Jr., chief of Project Blue 'Book, called the sheriff's office from Dayton and talked with Spaur and Buchert. He identified himself as "Mr. Quintanilla." "I was a little ticked off at him," Spaur told me. "Maybe he was trying to be easygoing, but he didn't talk for more than a couple of minutes, and he started with, 'Tell me about this .mirage you saw.' When I started to tell him about what we chased, he asked, Did you have [it.in](#) view for more than a few minutes?' I told him' Barney and I had pursued it across-several counties out of the state, for over a half hour. Then he kind of lost interest and the next question he asked was, 'Who has the pictures?' " Told that Chief Buehert was right in the office, the major concluded his talk with Spaur and spoke with Buchert. "That's all 'he asked me," Spaur said. "Why, I talked longer with that colonel Sunday morning, and *he* didn't ask much."

Quintanilla asked Chief Buchert to mail the negatives to Wright-Patterson, but said it was all right to give the prints to the press. Buchert permitted me to have contact copies made. Contact prints are of some help, in showing an object's angular size, compared to the camera's view angle in the picture frame.

When I looked at Chief Buchert's negative, I realized that the picture offered -no corroboration. There were two light .arcs on the film, representing a dark photographic subject. But the arcs were lighter than the background on the film, which had recorded so little light that dark morning that not even frame boundaries were visible near the "UFO images." The "images" could not be due to exposure to light, nor to a dark pair of objects in lighter surroundings. They must have resulted from some processing accident, either mechanical or chemical. I was sure the film had been handled carefully, but even a momentary folding of the film could have caused this effect, probably "cinch marks." So the pictures were no good as evidence.

Neff remained unavailable until 10 days after his sighting with Spaur, but when he submitted his report it was

much the same as Spaur's and strongly corroborated by the testimony of Officers Wayne Huston and Frank Panzanella. Huston's report seemed crucial. He had seen the UFO flying from the northwest, go overhead, and continue to the southeast, and had chased it quite a distance with the deputies.

Spaur and I talked several times more. His story did not vary. He was emphatic about seeing the three objects—the UFO, the moon, and Venus (which he repeatedly described as "that one bright spot to the right of the moon")—at and near the end of the chase.

Spaur's sense of humor seemed to help him put his experience, and the ribbing he took as a result of it, in a healthy perspective. During one of our interviews, I called his attention to the way he would tell his whole story in minute detail, seldom generalizing or summing up any part of his observations. "Well, I guess it's because I don't know what that thing was, or could even say what it's like," he explained. "Now, if I'd seen a particular car or airplane that I was familiar with, I could 'say, 'There goes a 1963 Ford,' or 'I saw a B-52 bomber,' or something. But this thing, I couldn't call it anything that would tell you what it was like. If I had to call it anything, well, since I saw it first, I'll call it by my middle name. 'Floyd.' That's it. We chased Floyd!" That's what he called the UFO frequently, and the name caught on among the deputies.

On April 19 a reporter for the *Ravenna Record-Courier*, Carol Clapp, called . Major Quintanilla to see if he had



*When Ptl. Wayne Huston joined chase in East Liverpool, Ohio Spaur was elated.*

made an evaluation yet. He said he was waiting to get Chief Buchert's film in the mail. Would he come to Portage County to interview the deputies in person? No, because "it would be impossible to recreate the scene."

On Friday, April 22, Major Quintanilla called Sheriff Dustman to announce his evaluation. The sheriff "laughed out loud," when the major told him the deputies had initially observed an Echo satellite going from northwest to southeast, then had seen Venus in the southeast and had chased it into Pennsylvania, thinking it moved around in the sky as their relative direction on the road changed. Buchert's pictures were processing defects. The major had checked all the aerial activity on the morning of the 17th, he said, and the UFO could have been nothing else.

On Saturday, when the news story appeared, I interviewed Spaur for his reaction. He stated the following: "After hearing the Air Force release, well, it's, I don't know how much investigation they made but evidently it wasn't a very lengthy one or it didn't involve me. First of all I don't think we have a satellite that can go this low. . . I'm definitely sure that I wasn't chasing Venus or observing Venus and running wildly over the countryside; I'm not quite that bad off. I don't think for a minute in my own mind since I think about what happened that morning that I would have gambled my life, my partner's life or any innocent person on the highway. . . . Also the same object that I observed and that Wayne Huston observed that another officer in Conway, Pennsylvania, could observe the same thing still traveling from the west to the east and to the left of the moon—and which as I understand it, Venus was to the right of the moon, I don't know anything about astronomy but I'm positive of what I was chasing, and I also don't agree it was Venus. I was a nonbeliever before this and never had any thought in my mind that the Air Force couldn't explain every one of these things. I believe in what I saw and nothing is going to change my mind."

No one familiar with the details of the UFO sighting took Blue Book's analysis seriously. But the effect of its conclusion was to make people take the deputies' report less seriously. Their sighting had become a joke. Spaur and Neff became the object of "yell meaning" ridicule. Spaur wondered how effective his testimony in court as to seeing a certain license number on a speeding car would be. What if the defense lawyer said, "Aren't you the fellow who chased Venus into Pennsylvania?" His phone became tied up day and night. He got an unlisted number, but that helped only a short while. Eventually he had his phone removed, but letters still came to him at the station, from all over the country, even from abroad. Blue Book's statement to the press had made no mention of Neff, Huston, or Panzanella. Spaur felt very much alone.

I was somewhat annoyed myself at Major Quintanilla's conclusion.

I prepared a long letter in the form of a rebuttal to the AF evaluation and sent it to Congressman William Stanton, of Ohio's 11th District, wherein Portage County is located.

The letter was mailed April 24. The first of many.

Congressman Stanton forwarded the letter to the Air Force and asked for an explanation. A few days later, Portage County Common Pleas Court Judge E. Cook wrote to the congressman with a strong criticism of Blue Book's action, and a request for an on-the-spot investigation by someone from that office. "Their conclusion that the object sighted was the planet Venus is so ridiculous that the United States Air Force has suffered a great loss of prestige in this community. . . . I personally know the three officers involved. They are men of integrity and I feel it is grossly unfair to them for the Air Force to reach any conclusion in this matter until it has conducted an on-the-spot investigation and re-evaluated its findings after such a visit."

Congressman Stanton's reply appeared in the May 5 issue of the *Record-Courier*. "Stanton said that the letter 'made an excellent point—not only has the Air Force failed in its responsibility in thoroughly investigating this incident, but in addition we have not heard, as of today, from the commanding general of the Air Force.' . . . 'I'm a firm believer that if there is something the Air Force wants to hide, they are making a big mistake. . . . Once people entrusted with the public welfare no longer think the people can handle the truth, then the people, in turn, will no longer trust the government,'" Stanton pointed out.

In the meantime, I had been trying to dig up more information on the sighting from other witnesses or those who had heard the radio reports.

On April 27 and 28 I visited several state police, sheriffs' offices, and city police radio stations in eastern Ohio, to see if their operators had anything to offer. I got an intriguing report at the Salem, Ohio, police station, from officers Ray Esterly, Lonnie Johnson, Lt. Richard Whinnery, and radio operator Jack Cramer, all of whom had heard the radio traffic on the 17th. Esterly and Johnson, on a hill in Salem, had seen three jet planes apparently chasing a bright object, in the direction in which the deputies were traveling. At the same time, Cramer and Whinnery, in the police station, heard what they believed to be the voice of a pilot, over the radio. "I'm going down for a closer look. . . . It's about 45 feet across, and it's trailing something "

## THE HEARING

On May 9, Deputy Spaur called to tell me Major Quintanilla was coming to Ravenna the next day, to interview him. Congressman Stanton's visit to the Pentagon and talk with Lt. Col. John Spaulding, Chief of the Community Relations Division, USAF, had prompted the decision; Col. Spaulding admitted the major's investigation had been "in error."

Spaur was worried that the major planned to interview only him, without corroborating testimony. He asked me to tape the session. I was ready with my recorder.

Major Quintanilla showed surprise when he met us in the sheriff's office. "I didn't expect all these people. I thought I'd just talk to Officer Spaur." With Spaur were Sheriff Dustman, reporters Carol Clapp and Tom Schley, myself, and

*continued on next page*



Colonel Freeman, USAF Chief of the Civil Branch, Community Relations Division, in the Pentagon. He said if such a reversal had come through, it would be known by Colonel R. R. Hippler, in the office of Deputy Chief of Staff for Research and Development.

I called Colonel Hippler. He suggested calling Major Quintanilla. Fortunately the major was in Washington and I reached him in a few moments. He said the Portage Conn-



*Dale Spaur today; a bearded stranger for whom the world has fallen apart.*

ty case was completely out of his hands, that the decision to re-evaluate rested with Colonel DeGoes and Dr. Hynek, to whom the major had mailed the USAF case file and the NICAP June 28 report, at his Ohio vacation home.

I called Colonel DeGoes at Wright-Patterson. He claimed he knew nothing of any re-evaluation, and reminded me that Dr. Hynek was on vacation. I told him what the major had told me, and reviewed the situation. He said he would look into it as soon as the major returned to the base.

After several more unsuccessful efforts to get an answer, I decided to call Project Blue Book and find out for myself what was going on with the Portage County case.

The answer, after two phone calls: Project Blue Book was standing firm, as Lt. Marley, Major Quintanilla's assistant: put it. No change of conclusion. Still "satellite—Venus."

The major was sticking with the testimony he had collected the first week after the sighting, rather than that obtained in Ravenna May 10.

Why did the major go to Ravenna at all, if it were not to correct the "error," as Col. Spaulding had called his earlier efforts? How could the few minutes of testimony obtained the first week after the sighting stack up, against what the major had heard in Ravenna, and taken as written re-

ports? What about the testimony from Officers Huston and Panzanella? "The major is standing firm," Lt. Marley said.

On August 17, Dr. Hynek's views finally reached the public. Carol Clapp had interviewed him and found he had read the NICAP report, and disagreed with Blue Book's conclusion. To him, the crucial question was, "What did the deputies see rise over the treetops?"

On August 18, Congressman Stanton wrote to Major Quintanilla, asking for a review of his re-evaluation. "It certainly seems most significant to me," he stated, "that the officers reported seeing Venus as well as the other object which they described as being as large as an airplane . . ."

## THE RE-RE-EVALUATION

At about this time I got word on recent developments with Spaur and Huston. The publicity on their experiences had been too much for them. Spaur had left his job as deputy sheriff and was "hiding" in a lonely Ohio motel. Huston had left the state entirely and moved out west. Certainly their UFO sighting was not the sole source of their problems; everybody has problems, but in their cases, the problems they already had were underscored by their finding it hard to lead a normal life.

A change of the Air Force's evaluation from "satellite-Venus" to "unknown" would do little to rectify whatever problems the witnesses had at this point, but it still seemed important, at least for the record, to have it acknowledged that their behavior on that morning four months before was sensible, and not the result of irresponsible, hysterical stargazing.

By September, two of my letters to Colonel Holm, FTD Commander at Wright-Patterson, had gone unanswered. Then on October 4, a letter came from Congressman Stanton. He enclosed a letter he had received from the Air Force.

Colonel Hayden Mims, in the USAF Congressional Inquiry Division, Office of Legislative Liaison, had replied for Major Quintanilla to Mr. Stanton's August 18 inquiry.

"The Air Force has carefully considered your suggestion that the Portage County sighting should be changed to unknown. However, after again reviewing the statements submitted by all of the persons involved, it was determined that the original evaluation should stand.

"Statements were received from personnel at the Greater Pittsburgh Airport, Pennsylvania, Chief of Police Buchert, Mantua, Ohio, and Deputy Sheriffs Dale Spaur and Wilbur Neff. We think it should be noted that Deputy Neff's statement was exactly the same as that of Deputy Spaur. The other statements did differ in a number of respects; however, this information must also be taken into consideration.

"Deputy Spaur's statement is purely subjective and impossible to duplicate. He stated that the object was right over the Greater Pittsburgh Airport and that an aircraft had flown directly over the object. When a check was made with the tower operator to determine whether he had observed the object that Deputy Spaur was reporting, he stated he did not see it. However, he asked the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) radar controllers if they could make contact. The FAA controllers could not pick up the

object that Deputy Spaur was reporting. Two days after the observation, the Air Force contacted the radar site at Oakdale Army Installation, Oakdale, Pennsylvania, and asked if they had picked up any unusual radar tracks. Their reply was also negative.

"Deputy Spaur also made the statement that at daybreak, the object disappeared within a matter of two or three seconds while traveling through a 90-degree arc. If this had been the case, we believe that someone in the vicinity would have heard a sonic boom. There were no such reports."

There was more, referring primarily to the Buchert photo; then the Colonel closed with:

"We hope you will understand that the Air Force is not questioning the integrity of any of the observers; however, considering the information we have received about this experience or account, we must try to explain it in terms of the data available. You may be assured that the Air Force has tried to make an honest evaluation of what transpired with all the information which was collected."

I wrote a long rebuttal, noting points of discrepancy and red herrings. One red herring was the argument based on lack of radar reports. The Air Force is itself working on radar absorbent materials (RANO, to render normally reflective objects "invisible" to any radar signals. Furthermore, Lt. Stephen Paquette, a radar operator and officer in charge of uvo reports at Oakdale, had told me he knew about the April 17 report and would not have expected Oakdale's radar to detect it!

One of the descriptions in the letter, "while traveling through a 90-degree arc," was in error and may have resulted from Major Quintanilla's phrase "90 degree climb," by which he means "straight up." Regarding that point, a sonic boom would not be expected in the first place; the shock wave would not have propagated in the right direction, from vertical movement. Or the object could have disappeared in a fraction of a minute simply by "turning off its light," in the bright morning sky.

The mistake about the airplane being seen flying *over* the object, and the error in its location ("over the Greater Pittsburgh Airport") led me to think the main source of information for Colonel Mims' letter was not the testimony from the deputies and police officers, but the official FAA report, which is the only record I know of with the mistake about the airplane. That report reads as follows:

"(5:58 AM EST) Rcvd call-from-State Police at BVR & Rochester Police. Seems that some Ohio police had spotted this flying object flying SE bnd in verity E Palestine. They took after it & were able to follow it by maintaining speed of approx -105 mph. It was large, round, had a large antenna sticking out of the top & several big white lights around it. They were on Rt. 51 & they lost it as it crossed the river east bnd. They saw UA7454 lvg here •nrt BUF & this object went blo United. It was approx 500', United was climbing to 19,000. Ckd & pilots didn't see anything. Referred to USAF for action. . . ."

Of course, if the UFO were over the airport, one would expect it to be seen under the airplane. But in fact it was 90° away—the airport is due south of Conway; the object was seen to the east. Since it was close to the men, its line

of sight elevation could have been higher than that of the plane. And their testimony was unequivocal on this point.

In summary, the rebuttal said: "This letter from Colonel Minis indicates that Blue Book overlooked corroborating testimony resting in Blue Book's files. It focuses on Dale Spaur as the chief witness, and belittles his testimony, with pejorative and erroneous references."

A letter arrived soon from Colonel Gerald Jorgensen, Chief of the Community Relations Division, USAF. The colonel indicated that the April 17 case was being re-re-evaluated. Or was it re-re-re-re-evaluated? I had lost track. Things were looking up again, but I felt no optimism. Things had looked up before. At any rate, the tone of Colonel Jorgensen's letter was encouraging, and hinted at a full scale USAF review of the case. I waited impatiently until



### HOAX WAS A HOAX

At the time the excitement over the Ravenna sighting was at its peak, a report was received that two students had designed and released a battery operated hoax. The report was published by the local press as an explanation for the sighting- and the harassed officers were subjected to added ridicule. Later it was determined that the hoax, although contemplated, was never attempted. Air Force officials acknowledged a point made by Dr. James McDonald that the man-made UFO would have been too heavy too get off the ground and never could have performed the maneuvers witnessed by the Ohio-Pennsylvania officers.

November 7, when the following letter came from Colonel Freeman:

"I have undertaken this response relative to the Ravenna case and your recent letters to Colonel Holni, Colonel DeGoes, Colonel Jorgensen, Colonel Mims, Lt. Colonel Rippler, Major Quintanilla and myself.

"The Ravenna case has been adjudged as presenting no evidence of a military threat to the United - States and an explanation has been recorded as to the probable cause. Only in the event new tangible evidence is discovered will there be any reassessment of the case.

"We respect your right to disagree with Air Force findings in this case and understand your desire to convince us of the correctness of your assessment. We cannot agree, however, that continued review of portions of the case already well known to the principals can or will prove fruitful. Hence, correspondence toward that end is futile."

That, in essence, is where this controversial sighting and its baffling, embittering and even tragic, aspects rests today. For some it has been a lesson in self-control; for others, in bureaucratic confusion. For me, a lesson in futility. •