

MICHIGAN VISUAL & RADAR SIGHTINGS

Sightings of sparkling lights & a series of radar returns strike the Holland, Michigan area.

By Shirley Coyne

Michigan, like most states, has its share of UFO sightings during any given year. The first 66 days of the new year were extremely quiet, with only two or three sightings being reported. That changed on March 8, 1994, at 9:30 in the evening, when the airspace over Holland, Michigan was invaded by unidentified flying objects.

At 2130 hours, the Ottawa County Central Dispatch received a telephone call from Mrs. Holly Graves of Holland, MI. She asked the dispatcher if they knew anything about the lights she and her family were watching. The dispatcher told her that they did not know anything about them. She said, "They look like a string of Christmas lights up in the sky. It's a circle of a lot of different lights, and I think somebody should check it out." She told the dispatcher that the red, white, and blue lights were "drifting slowly to the east-southeast." The dispatcher asked for her address and said they would send an officer to check it out.

The second call to Ottawa 911, was from Troy Prince, a young man who lives two blocks from the Graves. Troy told the dispatcher, "We are seeing four lights going back and forth. It's a circle of lights and they split apart leaving three, split apart leaving just two. Then they are like in a "V," you know..."

The dispatcher told Troy that an officer had already been dispatched to his area, Country Club Lane and 16th Street.

At 2133 hours, Officer Jeff Velthouse had been dispatched to investigate the lights on Country Club Lane. He was enroute to the Graves home when he got the second call from the dispatcher. He was already traveling on 16th Street, where Troy Prince lives in an apartment complex, and decided that he might as well respond to that address first.

As he approached the apartment complex, he was told by the 911 dispatcher that they had received numerous calls about the strange lights. If he would go to the Graves residence, he could see the "objects" from the Graves front yard. He radioed his back-up, Sgt. DeJonge, and handed off the Troy Prince call.

It was 2143 hours, when Officer Velthouse responded to the Graves home and noticed Darrell Graves standing in the front yard with binoculars. Mr. Graves told the officer that he had been alerted by his children, who had seen a strange object hovering above the house across the road. He then pointed to an object that was southwest of them and approximately 25° up from the horizon.

Mr. Graves told him that the object, along with four or five similar objects, had formed a circle and then

separated. He handed the binoculars to Officer Velthouse so he could look at the objects, which were a couple of miles away.

While using the binoculars, the officer was able to see a second object. He said the objects were separated by quite a distance but did not know how far apart they were. There were red, green, and white lights on the objects, but he was unable to determine any type of shape. He said the lights appeared to be different than any aircraft lights he had ever seen. "The lights on the objects appeared to be oscillating, rather than blinking," he said. They were still moving in a southwesterly direction so he decided to follow them. He got into the patrol car and headed southwest. "I wanted to watch them to see if I could tell what they really were," he said.

He radioed 911 and was told they had received a great number of calls from concerned citizens. The dispatcher asked Velthouse to give the present direction in which the objects were traveling. Velthouse replied, "Still traveling southwest."

After talking with Velthouse, the 911 dispatcher continued to receive calls from excited residents in Ottawa and Allegan Counties, so he decided to call the National Weather Service which is housed at Muskegon County Airport, 60 miles to the north of Holland. When the weather person answered the telephone, the dispatcher asked if they had access to radar, and was answered in the affirmative.

911 dispatcher: "Are you getting anything unusual in the southern portion of Ottawa or northern Allegan Counties?"

Radar operator: "Nothing more than the usual."

911 dispatcher: "We're getting reports of strange objects that are jumping about and traveling to the southwest. We have 60 calls already."

Radar operator: "I'm looking in the vertical, getting a large return down there. It's about 6,000...oops! it just disappeared...uh...yeah, there it is about 6,000 feet...now it's moving south."

911 dispatcher: "That's really strange."

Radar operator: "It's moving...looks like it's about 80 kilometers from me, down near South Haven...now moving toward the west-southwest. It looks like a big blob."

911 dispatcher: "That's the way it was explained to us. We'll have to call the UFO Reporting Center..."

Radar operator: "It's a pretty strong return I'm getting...Oh my God, what is that? Now I'm getting three...just getting three of them separated by about...5,000

feet in height and maybe 50 kilometers apart. They are very strong returns. It's something pretty solid."

As the radar operator watched the objects on the scope, Officer Velthouse was in his patrol car driving southwest, and watching three objects that were moving in the same direction. He was unable to get closer than two miles from them, therefore, he could not see a shape or size.

He got on the radio and put in a request for the dispatcher to call the National Weather Service and ask if they had any "blips" on their radar. The dispatcher told him that contact had already been made, and the radar operator was tracking three objects over the same areas where eyewitnesses were watching them from the ground.

As Velthouse continued following the objects, the 911 dispatcher was still talking on the telephone, getting a blow-by-blow account from the radar operator.

Radar operator: "There's one over South Haven, one by the lake shore near Benton Harbor, one near Decatur...wait...there's one down by Berrien County. Wait a minute...South Haven just moved northwest by about...one 20 miles west, over the lake. There's one down by Coloma and one just off the coast of Benton Harbor. They're 7 to 12,000 feet..."

911 dispatcher: "This is really strange...weird."

Radar operator: "I'm getting four...these are big, bigger than planes. Three moving toward Chicago, three in a triangle and one way down on the southern coast of Lake Michigan."

Officer Velthouse suddenly lost sight of the objects, as he drove southwest. He drove over to Tulip City Airport, parked the patrol car, and attempted to relocate them. For several minutes he waited, scanning the night sky visually. There was nothing unusual in the sky, not even a plane taking off or landing at the small airport. He did not see any personnel because the airport, being small and without radar, closes at 9:00 in the evening.

About 2250 hours, Velthouse called 911 and was patched in to the National Weather Service. He wanted to ask the radar operator what he had seen on the radar screen.

The radar operator called 911 and asked if Officer Velthouse was who he said he was. The dispatcher told the radar operator that the officer was the person who had watched the objects from the ground and followed them. The radar operator then said that he would talk with Velthouse.

Radar operator: "What is really going on down there?"

Officer: "We don't know. People are calling in and telling us about these strange objects..."

Radar operator: "What did it look like?"

Officer: "Witnesses are seeing five or six objects, some cylindrically-shaped, circles with blue, red, white, and green lights. We've had reports from south Holland

"It's a pretty strong return I'm getting. . . Oh my God, what is that? Now I'm getting three of them separated by about 5,000 feet in height and maybe 50 kilometers apart. They are very strong returns. It's something pretty solid."

and over in northern Allegan County. Lots of lights moving all over the place."

Radar operator: "There were three and sometimes four blips, and they weren't planes. Planes show as pin points on the scope, these were the size of half a thumb nail. They were from 5 to 12,000 feet at times, moving all over the place. Three were moving toward Chicago. I never saw anything like it before, not even when I'm doing severe weather."

Officer Velthouse asked the radar operator if he could determine how fast the objects were traveling. He told the officer that one moved 20 miles off shore in 10 seconds.

Radar operator: "Wish we had pictures of what I could see. Actually there are blips showing up on the screen and being recorded on the computer part of it, so we can see that." He then informed the officer that the tower at Muskegon County Airport had also observed the objects on radar, as did the tower at Grand Rapids International Airport.

At 10:36 p.m., I was in my office grading some Field Investigator exams when the telephone rang. Robert Gribble, Western Region Director for MUFON, and founder of the UFO Reporting Center based in Seattle, WA, was calling to give me information about a radar observation/UFO sighting. When we finished the conversation and said goodbye, I began making telephone calls.

I called the Ottawa County Central Dispatch, control towers at Muskegon County Airport and Grand Rapids, the National Weather Service, and Val Rose, Michigan MUFON weather person.

Dispatch deputy director, Rebecca Schatney, told me that it was the department's practice to call the weather service for information about why an officer was observing something unusual. She said the officer and the dispatchers had completed their 3 to 11:00 p.m. shift, but if I would call back the next day I would be able to speak with them.

The radar operator stated that he had tracked three and sometimes four objects which were jumping all over the place, were very strong returns, and very solid. The object that had hovered over South Haven moved 20 miles off shore in 10 seconds. He was still very excited over what he had observed and repeated the details three times. He also said it was their practice to contact

the UFO Reporting Center when something was observed.

The control tower personnel stated they did not see anything on their radar. They did admit watching from a window as the lights moved in a triangle formation.

When Officer Velthouse spoke with the radar operator at 2250 hours, he was given the same information about the object's movement to the center of Lake Michigan, and the time it took to get there. He also told the officer that he had spoken to me earlier (at 10:40 p.m.), and he gave him my name and telephone number. That portion of their conversation was not included on our copy of the Ottawa County 911 tape. Also missing was confirmation that the object moved from South Haven to 20 miles off shore in 10 seconds. When Officer Velthouse wrote his report at the conclusion of his shift, he included the conversation that he had with the radar operator.

To the southeast of Decatur, approximately 10 miles distance, is the small town of Marcellus. A young woman who lives there took several minutes of video footage while standing on her back deck. She saw two objects at 9:30 p.m., and watched as they "jumped" around in the night sky. As the radar operator watched the screen, he could see a "blip" over Decatur. The woman was video taping what he was seeing.

Officer Velthouse said the lights were moving southwest toward Lake Michigan. Each object had one light that was green, another that was red, green and white. They would stand still over Holland, then move southwest. When the objects were flying in a triangle formation, one would move out of formation, then move back in.

At the same time, the National Weather Service operator picked up radar blips that were moving in the same manner. Simultaneously, tower personnel at Muskegon County Airport saw what they took to be aircraft flying in formation some 60 miles south, near South Haven.

Reports began to "trickle" in and eyewitnesses were located. On Friday, March 11, 1994, we were knee-deep in sighting reports. Our telephones were ringing non-stop, day and night. We tried to make assessments of what we had and what we were dealing with. State Section Directors Donald Ashley for Ottawa County and Virginia Tilly for Kent County began to coordinate the field investigators. We launched a full investigation by undertaking the slow process of interviewing the witnesses.

Actually the sightings began on March 7, 1994, at 10:30 in the evening, when Scott Ruitter was driving south on 168th Street, near M31 in Grand Haven. He noticed a string of four lights moving from west-northwest to east-southeast. The lights, which were moving slowly, would blink in sequence from right to left, then repeat the pattern. He stopped his car and watched them for a

while. The object appeared to be at an elevation of 2,000 feet or less, and was one half mile away, over a tree line. He watched the lights until they moved out of his range of vision. There were three other witnesses to this event and the investigator is trying to locate them.

Joey Graves, age 14, was the first member of the family to see the object on March 8, 1994, at 9:30 p.m. He and sister Michelle, age 10, were in the living room watching TV. Their parents, Holly and Darrell Graves, were in their bedroom watching TV.

Joey was lying on the sofa as he watched TV. When he changed his position, by rolling over, his attention was drawn to a circle of lights which were above the road about tree-top level. To him, it looked larger than the length of three cars put together. "It had white lights and every once in a while they changed over to red. It was too big to be a balloon." As the object was "drifting slowly" toward the farmhouse across the road, Joey began to yell, "Look at this...look at this!"

Michelle looked out the front window and saw the object hovering above the farmer's house. "It had all kinds of lights going in a circle around it. It was pretty big, maybe as big as the house it was sitting over," she said. The children fled the living room to alert their parents. They were both yelling "look at this," as they ran toward the bedroom.

The whole family returned to the living room window. Everyone was shocked at what they saw. Holly Graves said, "It was the weirdest thing I saw in my life." She said it was just sitting there above the house. "It was a big circle. It had lights, but they weren't blinking, not then. It was circular and turning and not blinking," she said. She was curious and excited, but had no idea what she was looking at. It just seemed really "weird" to her. When the lights began to blink, it reminded her of Christmas lights when they are blinking, "like they are chasing each other." She said, "What we saw was not the whole craft, but the bottom of it, turning in a clockwise motion."

Darrell Graves thought he was looking at helium balloons. He figured some kids had put lights in balloons, for a prank. Suddenly he realized this was something unlike anything he had ever seen. He also described the object as being circular with inset lights. "The body of the object was oscillating in a clockwise motion but there was no sound," he said. They watched for 10 minutes before the object began to rise and drift away very slowly.

The family watched four to five similar objects as they moved together to form a circle, would separate, move about, and come back together. When an object left the formation, it would dart away, then return.

Officer Velthouse arrived at 9:43 p.m., and Darrell spoke with him. After he left, the family went to bed.

Troy Prince, his brother, and another man all share an apartment on 16th Street. When they noticed the lights they stepped onto their second story balcony so they

could get a better view. They could see four lights that were in a circle-shaped formation. The lights were blinking in sequence. They would separate and come back together in what looked to them like a big "V"-shape. The objects would separate one at a time. "First there were four, then three, then two," Troy said. The men watched until a line of trees obscured their vision. They felt certain the objects had gone down in a corn field. (Note: A team of MUFON investigators walked the corn stubble field but did not find any evidence that indicated a landing.)

Lee Lamberts, sports editor for the *Holland Sentinel* newspaper, saw intense lights flying in a boomerang-shaped formation, about the same time the Graves and Troy Prince were experiencing their sighting. Lambert said, "The formation of lights stayed perfect. It sounded distinctly like one jet, but there were half a dozen lights on it, and as many as ten." The object moved very slowly over Holland High School field house.

At 9:30 p.m., the woman who lives in Marcellus looked out the window and saw some very strange lights in the night sky. She picked up her video camera and went out on the deck. She took several minutes of footage as two objects darted about.

Marcellus is less than 40 miles from South Haven and 10 miles from Decatur. Perhaps the woman filmed the object at Decatur and the one that suddenly showed up in Berrien County, which is southwest of her.

To the north of Holland, in Newaygo County, a man was standing outdoors at 9:30 p.m., looking at the stars. He was looking west when suddenly an extremely bright object "dropped" straight down. He thought it was probably a falling star "without a tail," until the second object dropped in the same manner in the same spot.

At the same time, his sister, who lives in Ferrysburg, was watching a bright object that was hovering over Lake Michigan. She turned from the window momentarily and when she turned back, the object was gone. Ferrysburg is 15 miles south of Muskegon, 30 miles north of Holland.

Two employees at the power plant in South Haven watched lights that were hovering nearby. Suddenly the lights shot out across Lake Michigan. Were they looking at the same object the radar operator was seeing on the scope?

State section director for Van Buren County, Elmer Bean, and other investigators are following up on this sighting. There are other witnesses involved and they are trying to locate them.

Michigan MUFON is in the midst of a major, radar-confirmed UFO "flap," with more than 300 witnesses to interview. What the eyewitnesses were seeing coincides with what the radar operator was looking at on his scope.

In Newaygo County, a man standing outdoors at 9:30 p.m., looking at stars, saw an extremely bright object suddenly drop straight down. He thought it was a falling star "without a tail," until a second object dropped in the same manner in the same spot.

Everyone is interested in what happened in Holland, Michigan on that cold starry night of March 8, 1994. The last reported sighting from Holland occurred one hour ago, at 10:30 p.m., March 11, 1994.

The sightings were not isolated incidents on the west side of the state. On March 8, 1994, at 9:30 p.m., sightings were occurring all over the State of Michigan. There are 82 counties in the state; sightings were reported in 42 of the counties, from the Upper Peninsula, down to the Ohio and Indiana borders. The more interesting cases occurred from March 10, 1994 to the present. Part two of this article will contain detailed descriptions of some of the cases that occurred in Ottawa, Kent, Van Buren, Kalamazoo and Genesee Counties.

There are ten video tapes that are in the process of, or waiting to be analyzed, and more than a dozen photographs. Two of our MUFON investigators were fortunate in that they had sightings in different counties on different nights.

I have filed Freedom of Information Act requests with the National Weather Service to obtain the "computer part" print-out of what was being seen on the radar screen. I was told that the SR-70 radar that was being used that night did not have computer "hook-up" capability. I suspect that isn't true, however, because the radar operator made the statement to Officer Velthouse that "actually, there are blips showing up on the screen and being recorded on the computer part of it, so we can see that."

Requests have also been filed with the FAA in regard to the radar observations by control tower personnel at Muskegon County Airport, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, O'Hare, and near Kimbell, Minnesota.

We have the written report that Officer Jeff Velthouse filed, admission from the radar operator, and a copy of the Ottawa County 911 tape, which was obtained through an FOIA request by Michael Walsh, a reporter for the *Muskegon Chronicle* newspaper in Muskegon.

A case of this magnitude could take a year or more to complete. Look for Part Two in a subsequent issue of the *Journal*.

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