

## 1967: PA'S CAPITAL BECOMES THE "UFO CAPITAL"

by John D. Weaver

From the spring of 1967 through the winter of 1968, the area around Pennsylvania's capital city of Harrisburg experienced a major wave of UFO sightings. By the time summer arrived, police and a regional NICAP (*National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, and the MUFON of its day*) investigators were flooded with calls. Reports appeared almost daily in the local newspapers. The frequency of reports even prompted a July visit by a team from the Air Force-sponsored "Condon Committee" study led by the University of Colorado's Dr. Edward U. Condon. It was a truly major "Flap" and part of what is now recognized by researchers as a substantial nationwide "Wave" of UFO sightings.

The local NICAP Sub committee, headed by a George B Cook, was active in investigating reports and by early June, had released detailed Studies of 30 sightings they considered "genuine". One of the most notable came from April 1: 3 children were playing along Linglestown road at 6:30pm. They noticed a round object approx. 35-50 ft in diameter which descended to within 50 feet from the ground about 50 yards away. It was said to be yellow and blue and altered its color. No sound was heard. A ray of light came from the object and focused on nearby power lines for about 2 minutes. The frightened children began to run and it began to rise straight up. An adult neighbor came out of his house in time to see the object ascend, noting it left a "jet trail in its wake". The neighbor also reported the children were "white as ghosts" following the sighting. Of the many sightings, this is significant not only for the number of witnesses, but the time frame -- this was one of the first reports; people were not yet out actively looking for UFOs.

Fast forward to July 6, when the number of "genuine" reports had swelled to over 100; NICAP noted that 2 of these included possible humanoid sightings. In one, a couple driving near the City Reservoir's DeHart dam saw what they first thought was a deer, but as they got closer, realized it was a "strange person with glowing eyes". On the same night of this report, another couple about 4 miles away, were awakened by their dog's agitated barking. They saw a "huge white light and heard a droning noise". No person or entity was seen but they heard voices speaking in a "high pitched unintelligible language". Police were called, but the light and voices disappeared prior to their arrival.

All across the Harrisburg region -- with Carlisle 20 miles to the West and Lebanon 25 to the East -- reports of sightings came in. Driven by the almost daily newspaper articles and enticed by balmy summer weather, thousands of people were scanning the skies nightly. Naturally, many of the reports were easily explained as

planets, aircraft lights and other mis-interpretations by inexperienced observers. Some hoaxes were also noted, but even with these accounts dismissed, the volume of potentially genuine sightings was incredible.

In East Pennsboro Township, people began gathering nightly along Tower Road, an elevated area where several TV and Radio towers are located, to view the skies after several UFOs were reported at the location. The crowds were so large, that an enterprising hot dog vendor even set up shop regularly! This scene was repeated at many spots where sightings had occurred, and indeed such was the case along Brandy Lane near Mechanicsburg, where I was to have my own sighting. *(Described later in this article)*

Enter the Condon Committee: Attracted by the incredible rash of sightings (which received national media coverage), a team from *This graphic detailing some recent sightings was released by NICAP and appeared in the Harrisburg "Evening News" on 7/6/67.*

The University of Colorado arrived late in July. After spending several days with the NICAP representatives, local authorities and some individual witnesses, they concluded the level of activity was significant enough to warrant bringing in an "all sky" surveillance camera that records images from all around the horizon. This camera was placed atop one of the area's tallest buildings (Harrisburg Hospital) and operated for 17 nights. It was subsequently reported that of approx 9000 images taken, only 12 could be categorized as "questionable". A portion of the Condon report's conclusion on their Harrisburg investigation reads *"The fact that even though scores of UFOs were reported during that time, the investigator could find nothing to examine with his instruments and nothing remarkable on thousands of all-sky camera exposures with the exceptions noted above is highly significant."*

Today, live "Sky Cams" views can be found all over the internet - - most are weather and astronomy based, but some have been placed in UFO "hotspots" -- and they have frequently captured anomalies, even when it was not their intention. Even today's cameras are limited by numerous factors, including lens performance; I have been unable to find any "Sky Cam" images from the 60s' era, but it is logical to assume that technology from the era would be generally inferior. Despite employing the device in other investigations besides Harrisburg, no "questionable" images captured by these cameras appear in the Condon report itself.

Despite actually containing considerable worthy information, Condon's personal interpretation of the report he organized made it seem like another Government-funded whitewash. From respected researcher Stanton Friedman's overview of the report: *"Dr.*

*Condon's thoroughly negative summation was in stark contrast to the fascinating data buried in the lengthy report, where 30 percent of the cases were left without conventional explanation. Of more*

*than 550 unexplained reports then in the Project Blue Book files, only three were considered by the University of Colorado..."*

As summer became fall, the sightings dropped off, perhaps with less inviting weather keeping people indoors. The Civil Air Patrol formed an alliance with local NICAP reps in late 1967; sporadic reports continued into the winter months, with February 1968 being one of the last noted in the articles I've found in my research.

Looking back at the hype surrounding the events of that summer, I certainly agree that a large percentage of the sightings may have had "natural" explanations or even been fabrications. However, from personal experience, I know *something* was going on in the skies around Harrisburg.

**JUNE 1967 - MY OWN UFO ENCOUNTER** How does the old phrase go - "I wish I knew then what I knew now"?

In my case, "then" would be the summer of 1967, but "knew" would be "had at my disposal", meaning the various cameras, camcorders and other instruments I use today to investigate reports of hauntings and other paranormal activity.

June 1967. I was 13 years old, focusing on baseball, Scouting, swimming and other innocent summer pursuits. I don't recall the exact date, but something happened that month that fostered my life-long interest in the paranormal: I saw a UFO.

So did other people. Thousands of them. The Harrisburg area was in the midst of a major UFO "Flap" and as the last days of the school year passed, reports started appearing in the media about strange lights being reported in the sky at night.

Brilliant, star-filled nights at Scout camp had made me passionate about astronomy, and I was instantly curious about what people were reporting. I began scanning the skies each night from various locations in my Mechanicsburg hometown in hopes of seeing what this was all about, but only the familiar late spring and summer constellations, planets, moon and erstwhile "shooting star" were to be seen. Oh, there were plenty of lights moving about, but I knew aircraft navigation and landing light arrangements as well as the stars... nothing strange here, I smugly thought.

Then one day at the pool, a friend from the north side of town told me how all these people had flocked to Brandy Lane the night before to see the UFOs. (*Brandy Lane is on the outer northeast corner of Mechanicsburg and skirts the Naval Supply Depot as it winds its way to the Carlisle Pike. It is an old road, mentioned as being used by men from Gen. A. G. Jenkins brigade during the 1863 ANV invasion of the West Shore.*) I immediately decided to ride my bike out there that evening to see if there was anything to all the fuss. I was not disappointed!

Riding my prized gold Huffy, festooned with an overkill of lights and reflectors, I must have looked like a ground-hugging UFO to

the crowds gathering along Brandy Lane in the twilight. Some residents sat in lawn chairs; visitors who parked alongside the road sat on car hoods. It was a real party -- almost like the scene in *Close Encounters*, when people are waiting on a hillside for the craft to re-appear. (The Harrisburg *Patriot* would later print a photo of a similar parade of cars in East Pennsboro Twp; all summer long, the nightly vigils were repeated throughout the area)

For a 13 year-old, this was thrilling, and my excitement grew as I overheard people talking about what they had seen the night before. Some gestured to different parts of the sky; some held binoculars and I even saw a telescope. I recall a clear sky, but again not an exact date. It was sometime in the latter part of June, perhaps the 25-30th. A check of planet positions for those dates and times shows Venus and Jupiter were low in the West with Mars in the South. Despite the frequent erroneous reports of Venus as a UFO, that was not to be the case that night. Not only could I clearly tell the difference, but what I (and several others) witnessed, was in another part of the sky... and moving!

I continued riding down the lane, keeping alert for anything in the sky and the traffic "cruising" by. Near the entrance to a trailer park (still there today) a clamor arose from the roadside: "There - in the trees! It's moving! Look at that!" Through the trees, I quickly noticed a very bright light -- much brighter than an aircraft landing light, I thought. It was following a west to east track, seemingly parallel with the road. No sound was heard -- only the growing comments from people who finally spotted the object.

Trees pretty much covered the north side of the road until a 90 deg. bend to the left ahead. I knew a clearer view would be available there, so I rode like crazy, hoping it would continue on its path. I was in luck, and arrived in time to watch it move off toward the northeast, seemingly closer to the horizon than it was in the trees. It was a white, glowing light with two smaller reddish-orange lights (I cannot really recall if they were still or pulsating) I was unable to judge its distance. It appeared to gain speed and I finally remembered the binoculars around my neck. Trying in vain to focus on the object, I found nothing in the field of view and realized it had either vanished or accelerated away at a tremendous speed!

From this point I really don't recall anything else. No, I'm not proclaiming this was what we now know as missing time, a component of the abduction experience; it was simple youthful excitement - I had just seen a UFO!!! I'm not even sure how much longer I hung out that night (although I did return the next few, without any repeated sightings)

I cannot say how many people also saw this object, but they would just add to the thousands of reports made that summer. Within a couple weeks, I was surprised to see the name of my Jr. High Art Teacher in an *Evening News* article. He and his wife had an encounter

with a very similar object "brilliant white light with smaller pulsating red lights" which "started pacing our car only 30 feet above the ground". When school resumed that fall, we shared our stories with each other. To see someone I respected still visibly upset by his experience really stunned me.

Brandy Lane today: There are more trees (or at least they are taller than I recall) on the north side. The trailer park remains, but some newer houses have been added on this side. All of the houses on the south side are older and were there in 1967. The majority of these are smaller "starter homes" and thus occupied by younger families; if any residents remain from 37 years ago, their numbers would be few. Several new garage-type businesses have sprouted on the south side of Brandy Lane over the past years; these small lots border the US Naval Supply Depot and the somewhat mysterious mounds which are seen over the fence in this corner of the base. (As a child, I heard rumors these contained everything from bodies to nuclear waste. Surplus ore deposits is the actual explanation. I do recall at the time of the sightings that some people speculated the UFOs were "checking out the mounds on the base") Photo recreation below taken at approx. location of where I had the best view of the object, looking north. Sky was actually a bit darker; object seemed closer to the horizon at this point than seen when observed through trees moments earlier. This area was open fields in 1967. Today, it includes several ball fields & warehouses.

This incident fostered a life-long interest in the paranormal for John Weaver, who is an illustrator/art director and investigates hauntings with his wife Kelly, founder of the Spirit Society of PA.

Article originally appeared in Paranormal PA & Beyond magazine. John D. Weaver is also a researcher for UFORCOP and a Field Investigator for the Mutual UFO Network.