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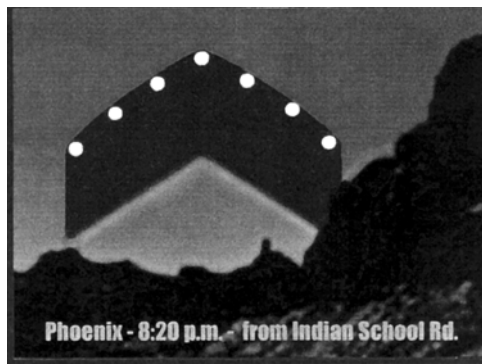
**Phoenix (Arizona) lights** At approximately 6:55 P.M. (Pacific Time) on Thursday, March 13, 1997, a young man in Henderson, Nevada, reportedly witnessed a V-shaped object, with six large lights on its leading edge, approach his position from the northwest and pass overhead. In his subsequent written report to the National UFO Reporting Center, he described it as appearing to be quite large, approximately the “size of a [Boeing] 747,” and said that it generated a sound which he equated to that of “rushing wind.” It continued on a straight line toward the southeast and disappeared from his view over the horizon.

This sighting is perhaps the earliest of a complex series of events that would take place during the next 2-3 hours over the states of Nevada, Arizona, and possibly New Mexico, and which would quickly become known as the “Phoenix Lights.” It involved sightings by tens, or perhaps even hundreds, of thousands of witnesses on the ground, and it gave rise to a storm of controversy over what had caused the event.

The next reported sighting was from a former police officer in Paulden, Arizona. He had just left his home at approximately 8:15 P.M. (Mountain Time), and was driving north, when he looked out the driver’s window of his car to the west and witnessed a cluster of five reddish or orange lights.

The formation consisted of four lights together, with a fifth light seemingly “trailing” the other four. Each of the individual lights in the formation appeared to the witness to consist of two separate point sources of orange light.

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Artist’s conception by Robert Fairfax

The witness immediately returned to his home, obtained a pair of binoculars, and watched as the lights disappeared over the horizon to the south. He watched the lights for an estimated two minutes, and reported that they made no sound that he could discern from his vantage point on the ground.

Within a matter of minutes of these first sightings, a “blitz” of telephoned reports began pouring into the National UFO Reporting Center, to other UFO organizations, to law enforcement offices, to news media offices, and to Luke Air Force Base. They were submitted from Chino Valley, Prescott, Prescott Valley, Dewey, Cordes Junction, Wickenburg, Cavecreek, and many other communities to the north and west of Phoenix.

Witnesses were reporting such markedly different objects and events that night that it was difficult for investigators to understand what was taking place. Some witnesses reported five lights, others seven, or even more. Some reported that the lights were distinctly orange or red, whereas

others reported distinctly white or yellow lights. Many reported the lights were moving across the sky at seemingly high speed, whereas others reported they moved at a slow (angular) velocity, or they even hovered motionless for several minutes.

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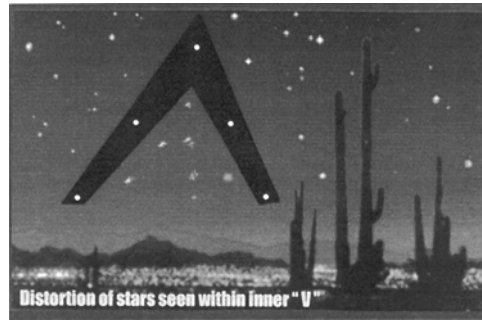


Illustration by Robert Fairfax

These apparent discrepancies, together with the large number of communities from which sightings were being reported in rapid sequence, raised early suspicions that multiple objects were involved in the event, and that they perhaps were traveling at high speed. These suspicions would be borne out over subsequent months, following extensive investigation by many individuals. The investigations pointed to the fact that several objects, all markedly different in appearance, and most of them almost unbelievably large, passed over Arizona that night.

One group of three witnesses, located just north of Phoenix, reported seeing a huge, wedge-shaped craft with five lights on its ventral surface pass overhead with an eerie “gliding” type of flight. It coursed to the south and passed between two mountain peaks to the south. The witnesses emphasized how huge the object was, blocking out up to 70-90 degrees of the sky.

A second group of witnesses, a mother and four daughters near the intersection of Indian School Road and 7th Avenue, were shocked to witness an object, shaped somewhat like a sergeant’s stripes, approach from over Camelback Mountain to the north. They report that it stopped directly above them, where it hovered for an estimated 5 minutes. They described how it filled at least 30-40 degrees of sky, and how it exhibited a faint glow along its trailing edge. The witnesses felt they could see individual features on the ventral surface of the object, and they were certain that they were looking at a very large, solid object.

The object began moving slowly to the south, at which time it appeared to “fire” a white beam of light at the ground. At about the same time, the seven lights on the object’s leading edge suddenly dimmed and disappeared from the witnesses’ sight. The object moved off in the general direction of Sky Harbor International Airport, a few miles to the south, where it was witnessed by two air traffic controllers in the airport tower, and reportedly by several pilots, both on the ground and on final approach from the east.

After this point in the sighting, the facts are somewhat less clear to investigators. It is known that at least one object continued generally to the south and southeast, passing over the communities of Scottsdale, Glendale, and Gilbert. One of the witnesses in Scottsdale, a former airline pilot with 13,700 hours of flight time, reported seeing the object execute a distinct turn as it approached his position on the ground. He noted that he witnessed many lights on the object as it approached him, but that the number of lights appeared to diminish as it got closer to overhead. Many other witnesses

in those communities reported seeing the object pass overhead as it made its way toward the mountains to the south of Phoenix.

Other sightings occurred shortly afterward along Interstate 10 in the vicinity of Casa Grande. One family of five, who were driving from Tucson to Phoenix, reported that the object that passed over their station wagon was so large that they could see one “wing tip” of the object out one side of their car, and the other “wing tip” out the other side. They estimated they were driving toward Phoenix at approximately 80 miles per hour, and they remained underneath the object for between one and two minutes as it moved in the opposite direction. They emphasized how incredibly huge the object appeared to be as it blocked out the sky above their car.

Many witnesses located throughout the Phoenix basin continued to report objects and peculiar clusters of lights for several hours following the initial sightings. One group of witnesses reported a large disk streaking westward over Phoenix at high speed. Others reported peculiar orange “fireballs” which appeared to hover in the sky even hours after the initial sightings.

One of the more intriguing reports was submitted by a young man who claimed to be an Airman in the Air Force, stationed at Luke Air Force Base, located to the west of Phoenix in Litchfield Park. He telephoned the National UFO Reporting Center at 3:20 A.M. on Friday, some eight hours after the sightings on the previous night, and reported that two USAF F-15 fighters had been “scrambled” from Luke AFB, and had intercepted one of the objects.

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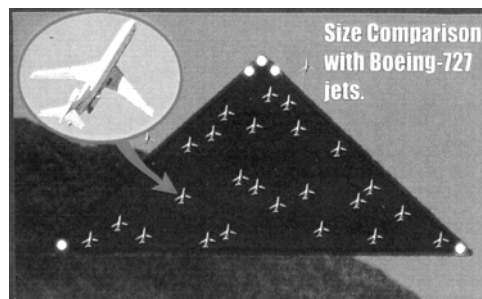


Illustration by Robert Fairfax

Although the presence of F-15’s could never be confirmed, the airman provided detailed information which proved to be accurate, based on what investigators would reconstruct from witnesses over subsequent weeks and months. Two days after his first telephone call, the airman called to report that he had just been informed by his commander that he was being transferred to an assignment in Greenland. He has never been heard from again since that telephone call.

Most of the controversy that arose from the incident centers around a cluster of lights that was seen, and videotaped, to the south of Phoenix at between 9:30 and 10:00 P.M. on the same night as the sightings. In May 1997, the Public Affairs Office at Luke AFB announced that their personnel had investigated these lights, and had established that they were flares launched from A-10 “Warthog” aircraft over the Gila Bend “Barry M. Goldwater” Firing Range at approximately 10:00 P.M. Even the most implacable UFO skeptics admit, however, that irrespective of whether such flares had in fact been launched or not, they cannot serve as an explanation for the objects that had been witnessed by many individuals some 1-2 hours earlier.

Another interesting aspect of the case is the virtual absence of coverage in the print media, save for a handful of articles in local newspapers. The Prescott Daily Courier carried an article on March 14, but the Phoenix newspapers, and the national wire services, provided no early coverage of the event, even though they had been apprised of it.

It was not until mid-June, almost ten weeks later, that the national press took any interest in the incident with the appearance of a front-page article in USA Today on June 18, 1997.

Investigators may never be able to reassemble all of the facts surrounding the events that took place over Arizona on the night of March 13, 1997. However, there is no doubt in the minds of most that what occurred was extraordinarily bizarre in nature, and that many thousands of witnesses can attest to the events.

—PETER B. DAVENPORT