



## The Mutual UFO Network of Ohio

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# The Zanesville, Ohio Photographs

by Warren B. Nicholson and Ronald Fisher

We arrived at Ralph Ditter's barbershop on the morning of October 23, 1971. The shop was located on Main Street in Zanesville, Ohio.

Mr. Nicholson proceeded to get a haircut and engaged Mr. Ditter in a conversation about his rather famous UFO photographs, reportedly taken in Zanesville on November 13, 1966. Early in the conversation Mr. Ditter handed Mr. Nicholson a document about 3/8" thick and requested that he read this first, and then they could talk about his photos.

The document was a report by the Rand Corporation that dealt with the photographic analysis of the photos Mr. Ditter had taken. Mr. Nicholson scanned the report checking their methodology and read their conclusions about the photos. The report stated, (1) the object in the photos was 3 to 4 inches in diameter, not 30 feet as claimed by Mr. Ditter, (2) the object was not at a considerable distance, but a mere 3 to 4 feet from the camera lens, and (3) the photos were not taken in rapid succession, but approximately one hour and ten minutes had elapsed between photos. Also, the numbers on the backs of the photographs were out of sequence with Mr. Ditter's story.

At this point, Mr. Nicholson asked Mr. Ditter what he thought of their analysis and he replied, "What do you think of it?" Mr. Nicholson again asked his opinion and stated he felt that Mr. Ditter's response was of more value at this point.

Mr. Ditter then stated, "Well, I am the one who faked them. What do you think?" Mr. Ditter then proceeded to tell the authors the entire story of the bogus photographs.

Mr. Ditter's story began about a year and three months before the photos first hit the press. His daughter had just read a book on UFOs and had said, "Daddy, will you take a UFO picture for me?" The father replied, "Yes, someday."

Approximately three months after this, Mr. Ditter was cleaning and repairing his daughter's wagon. During this process he removed the hubcaps and wire brushed them. He noticed how much they appeared like UFO photos he had seen in books and magazines.

Remembering his daughter's request, he took his Polaroid camera and started taking some snap shots. After about a pack and a half of film and some interruptions he had two photos which resembled photos he had seen.

Mr. Ditter gave the photos to his daughter who was very happy with her father's handy work. What his daughter did with the photos is not known but about three months later Mr. Ditter saw the photos lying around the house so he decided to take them to the shop. The photos were then taped to the mirror behind his barber chair where, when his patrons inquired about them, he had a suitable story to tell.

Approximately nine months later a customer saw them for the first time and asked about them. He then excitedly left the shop and contacted his physician who was a member of The National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). The physician then reported the photos to NICAP and to the media. The next thing Mr. Ditter knew, in to his shop walked representatives of the media and the ball started rolling.

The pressure was now on Mr. Ditter to again tell his story, which he did, but this time it went far beyond the barbershop. The story was on the news wires and his shop was besieged with investigators, reporters, and the curious.

Mr. Ditter was now riding high on the publicity from radio, TV, and the press, but the crash was soon to come. Investigators soon spotted a discrepancy in his story. The first photo he took according to his story was of the UFO hovering over his house,. The second photo was of the UFO as it moved away from the house and was over a field. Investigators asked him if he was sure that was the sequence of events, and he stuck to his story.

The photos were numbered on the back and his so-called first photo was numbered 7 and the second was numbered 6, showing a reverse of sequence. With his back to the wall, so to speak, Mr. Ditter stuck to his story. Polaroid was contacted and they stated that very rarely are film packs mislabeled, but that it did happen.

Ralph was still holding firm to his story, but that was enough proof for many investigators and the photos were dubbed a hoax. The photos were then sent to the Rand Corporation for analysis.

Mail poured in to Ralph Ditter's barbershop from all over the world. The mail was from people who claimed to have had sightings and who were very supportive of Mr. Ditter's position. Time proceeded and by the time the Rand Corporation's results came out, the world had finally lost interest in Ralph Ditter and his photographs.

The Rand report is unknown to most UFO investigators, but when studied it shows that many man-hours of excellent work had been done in a scientific manner. Mr. Ditter stated to us, "I don't know how they did it but they were just about damn right about everything they said about those pictures."

## 1999 Update

*Two investigators wrote this unpublished report for the now defunct Columbus based Civil Commission on Aerial Phenomena (CCAP) in late 1971. In spite of their report, the Rand report and Mr. Ditter's relatively unknown confession, Mr. Ditter's photographs still show up occasionally in books and magazines. We are publishing the CCAP report in order to put the record straight about this well-known Ohio case. We understand that Mr. Ditter passed away several years ago. This report is a testament to his accidental contribution to ufology. His contribution is not the photographs, but the lesson that not all hoaxes in this field are planned. Some are quite accidental, but they are no less damaging to the credibility of scientific UFO*

*research. Hoaxes may be more numerous than we might wish to admit.*



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