

Paranormal passion drives UFO hunter

It was a weekend story out of Brazil that made me wonder whatever had happened to John Musgrave.

Considering the way he had vanished from the front pages he had graced in 1975, it seemed almost as if the little green men might have taken him away for getting too close to their secret.

I had completely forgotten about Musgrave until the report out of Brazil confirmed the air force had dispatched six fighter planes to chase away "intense green, red and white lights moving at between 160 and 990 miles an hour."

That's right, UFOs.

Remember them?

Eleven years ago, when John Musgrave's name wasn't on the front pages, it was being raised in Parliament by angry MPs.

What they demanded to know was why the Canada Council had awarded a \$6,000 grant to an Edmonton man so he could spend his time tracking down flying saucer stories.

A few entries in Hansard, a few pages of newsprint, some glossy magazine mention — and then nothing.

Paul-Emile Leblanc, head of the Canada Council's explorations program back in 1975, when the grant was made, remembers only the brief sensationalism, then the way Musgrave vanished.

On request, the Canada Council did a quick check this week and found some correspondence from September of 1979, when Musgrave reported he had managed a small publication of his findings, then nothing.

At Edmonton's Athabasca University, where Musgrave had done tutorial work while he continued his research, no one had heard of him for years.

"I haven't the slightest idea where he went to," a spokesman said.

"I've been right here all along," John Musgrave counters from the end of a telephone line when he's finally located after two days of calls.

No little green men.

It's just that, well, the UFO business has had a bit of a downturn.

No-one knows precisely why — a couple of scientific studies weren't impressed with the evidence; the Eighties aren't particularly imaginative; most of the organizations packed it in for lack of funds — but no one denies this has happened.



MacGregor at large
Roy MacGregor

"I haven't had any real, honest-to-goodness experiences reported to me in seven or eight years," says Musgrave.

But it hasn't discouraged him. Though he works these days as a consultant, his keen interest in UFOs went on long after the \$6,000 Canada Council grant ran out.

Five filing cabinets in his Edmonton home brim with what is indisputably the most complete compilation of Canadian sightings.

The earliest dates from Simon Perkins diary, Oct. 12, 1796, in which 15 space ships are reported hovering over the Bay of Fundy. The most recent might be yours, tonight.

Ever eager to record more Canadian sightings, John Musgrave soldiers on, having recently returned from a week at the Aerial Phenomena Research headquarters in Arizona, where "I literally spent every waking minute photocopying material on Canadian sightings."

It has been 31 years since John Musgrave was 14 and had his first, and still only, sighting of a UFO in El Cajon, California. But his belief they exist has never been shaken.

"There is a phenomena almost by definition, a social phenomena," he says. "It may be physical, it may be psychological, but you cannot deny the phenomena of UFOs."

"But what they are, I don't know."

As for the shrinking number of sightings, he has no answer. One thing those who study UFOs have noticed, however, is while "sightings of high strangeness" are down in North America, they are up in certain other parts of the world, particularly South America, which may explain the air force alert in Brazil.

But one other key point John Musgrave raises is we are foolish to presume UFOs have to be seen by people in order to exist.

"We may feel we are the dominant species on this planet, but that may be just a conceit."

"For all we know, they could be much more interested in dolphins."