In the early 1980s, a huge UFO appeared in the Hudson Valley



Between 1982 and 1986, several thousand residents of Westchester County, New York, reported the recurring appearance of a massive, silent craft — shaped like a V or a boomerang — gliding at low altitude above the Taconic Parkway. Neither the investigators of the time nor the authorities ever fully explained the phenomenon.

A New Year's Eve Like No Other

According to the archives compiled by the earliest investigators, it began on the night of December 31, 1982, just minutes before midnight. A retired police officer, sitting in his backyard in the town of Kent, spotted a cluster of red, green, and white lights to the south. He first assumed it was a plane in distress. But the object passed over his house at an estimated height of about 150 meters, moving far too slowly and too quietly for a conventional aircraft — accompanied only by a low, distant humming sound. As he watched, he made out a dark, triangular fuselage connecting the lights, arranged in a V formation.

That lone account went largely unnoticed for months. It would take until the following winter for the case to take on an entirely different scale.

The Night of March 24, 1983: Yorktown's Switchboard Overwhelmed

A week after sheriff's deputy Dennis Sant spotted a dark, metallic object near Brewster that he would describe as "a city of lights," reports began pouring in once again. On March 24, 1983, a former police officer once more saw the V-shaped formation, this time accompanied by a more pronounced hum. That same night, IBM computer engineer Ed Burns was driving along the Taconic Parkway near Millwood when his car radio began crackling with static; he pulled onto the shoulder, joining dozens of other motorists, to watch what he would later describe as a massive, perfectly silent "triangular ship."

In Yorktown, calls flooded in so heavily that the local police switchboard nearly buckled under the load, to the point

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that officials feared they would be unable to handle genuine emergencies. Two officers present at the scene at the same time gave contradictory descriptions: one described a single mass carrying several lights, the other described a tight formation of small planes — a discrepancy that would fuel debate over the object's true nature for years to come.

A Scientific Investigation Takes Shape

On March 26, 1983, the Westchester-Rockland Daily Item ran a now-famous front-page story under the plain headline: "Hundreds Claim to Have Seen UFO." The article caught the attention of a group of independent researchers connected to J. Allen Hynek, a former scientific consultant to the U.S. Air Force on Projects Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book, and founder of the Center for UFO Studies. Alongside the astronomer, teacher and investigator Philip J. Imbrogno took charge of the fieldwork.

The team set up a dedicated hotline and logged more than three hundred calls in a single evening, on the night of March 24 alone. One witness, later quoted in their book, summed up the general impression in a line that would become well known among researchers working the case: if there were such a thing as a flying city, that was exactly what the object looked like that night. The findings of this investigation were eventually published by Hynek, Imbrogno, and journalist Bob Pratt in Night Siege: The Hudson Valley UFO Sightings, which remains the definitive documentary account of the case.

One Object, or Dozens of Prankster Pilots?

Given the sheer scale of the reports, the most commonly offered explanation was a hoax: a group of amateur pilots flying tight formations of ultralight aircraft, running flashing lights, to simulate a single craft. The theory found grim partial support on Halloween night 1984, when a small plane landed at Stormville Airport — one of the object's recurring flight paths — and its pilot was detained by a state trooper who suspected him of staging the sightings. The man denied any involvement and was never charged, but the report the officer wrote that night would become, in the eyes of skeptics, the key piece of evidence for the mundane explanation.

Imbrogno himself, however, rejected that single explanation for every sighting. He pointed out that the object had been seen well before these nighttime formation flights began, and that witnesses who observed multiple separate appearances reported clear differences between them — some matching the description of a single, rigid craft, others, later on, matching a swarm of small aircraft. Air traffic controller Anthony Capaldi, who himself observed the object over Stormville in the summer of 1983, further noted that aircraft flying in such a tight formation would necessarily have produced audible engine noise — yet nearly all witnesses insisted instead on the craft's near-total silence, broken at most by a faint hum.

The Flyover of the Indian Point Nuclear Site

The episode that gave the case its most unsettling turn came on June 14 and July 24, 1984, when several witnesses — including security guards at the Indian Point nuclear power plant on the eastern bank of the Hudson — reported a large, structured object moving slowly or hovering in the immediate vicinity of the reactors. One guard on duty estimated the craft at roughly 100 feet long, flying at under 900 feet, and compared it to several helicopters flying in extremely tight formation. For those inclined toward the extraordinary explanation, the object's proximity to such a sensitive facility as a nuclear plant made the prankster-pilot theory considerably less convincing; few ultralight enthusiasts, it was argued, would risk flying so close to a restricted installation.

A Phenomenon That Spread Far Beyond Westchester

According to estimates from the Hynek-Imbrogno team, the object — or objects — were seen by more than five thousand witnesses between 1982 and 1986, across an area extending well beyond Westchester County alone: reports also came from Putnam and Dutchess Counties, and as far as neighboring Connecticut, including New Haven and Brookfield. The reports point to a preferred flight path along the corridor formed by the Taconic Parkway, a marked tendency to hover over bodies of water, and exclusively nighttime appearances — no credible daytime sighting was

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ever recorded.

The case saw a major resurgence of media attention in 1992, when the American television program Unsolved Mysteries devoted a segment to it. The show managed to gather a group of pilots willing to claim responsibility for the formation flights — but they balked at publicly recreating the V-shaped maneuver they claimed to have flown, citing the FAA regulations such a demonstration would have violated. To this day, the case remains officially unsolved.

Timeline

December 31, 1982 — First recorded sighting, in Kent, New York.
March 17, 1983 — Sighting by sheriff's deputy Dennis Sant near Brewster; traffic halted on Interstate 84.
March 24, 1983 — Major wave of sightings; Yorktown's police switchboard overwhelmed; more than three hundred calls received by the investigation hotline in a single night.
March 26, 1983 — Publication of the Westchester-Rockland Daily Item story; Hynek and Imbrogno's investigation begins.
Summer 1983 — Sighting by air traffic controller Anthony Capaldi over Stormville.
June 14 and July 24, 1984 — Reported flyovers near the Indian Point nuclear power plant.
October 31, 1984 — A pilot is detained at Stormville Airport.
1992 — Unsolved Mysteries airs its segment on the case.

Archival Document — Witness Testimony Collected by Investigators

"If there is such a thing as a flying city, this was a flying city. There was no engine noise at all, just that low, almost continuous humming sound. The lights were arranged in a clear V shape, and the whole thing moved with a slowness that made no sense for an aircraft of that apparent size."

— Testimony quoted in Night Siege: The Hudson Valley UFO Sightings (Hynek, Imbrogno & Pratt), regarding the events of March 24, 1983.

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