

FOCUS

Orange County Focus is dedicated on Monday to analysis of community news, a look at what's ahead and the voices of local people.

In Person

Looking Into the Alien *Ex Machina*

Physicist Bob Wood Wants to Know How UFOs Get Here

By RUSS LOAR
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Attention extraterrestrial visitors: If your travel plans include an Orange County flyover, you might want to stop by Bob's house.

Bob Wood, a former director of research and development at McDonnell Douglas who holds a doctorate in physics, would like to chat. The 68-year-old Newport Beach resident has spent the last three decades trying to answer a single, basic question: How did you get here?

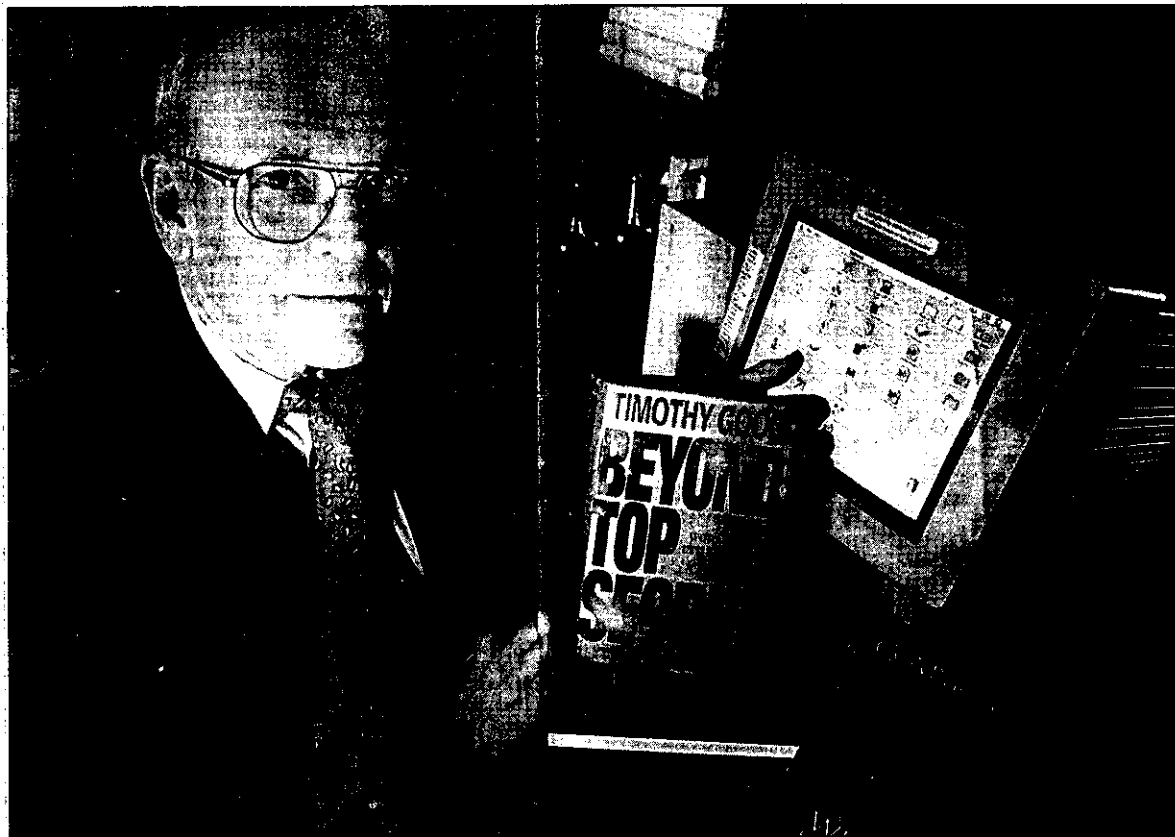
"We're just a little bit behind in understanding all of the technology used by the aliens, or visitors—or whatever you want to call them," said Wood, research director of the 5,000-member Mutual UFO Network and its Orange County chapter. "But there are ways to figure it out and build such craft. I don't accept the idea that we won't be able to replicate their capabilities."

But he does accept the idea that visitors from other worlds have been coming to Earth for a long time. And in 1967, he managed to convince McDonnell Douglas that the idea was worth studying.

The giant aerospace company allowed him to assemble a small team of researchers to investigate reports of UFOs and alien encounters, with the goal of discovering the underlying science that could make their visits possible. The project ended after two years with no definitive results, but the research made him a believer.

"I read a book, then I read another book, and pretty soon I'd read about 100 books and I decided this was no joke, there was something to it. The preponderance of eyewitness accounts was just so overwhelming, I couldn't ignore it."

One of the most intriguing UFO accounts Wood has investigated was reported in 1965 by Orange County highway inspector Rex Heflin. Wood ranks it as the county's most significant UFO sighting to date.



CHRISTINE COTTER / Los Angeles Times

Bob Wood: "We're just a little bit behind in understanding all of the technology used by the aliens, or visitors—or whatever you want to call them."

Profile: Bob Wood

Age: 68

Hometown: Little Falls, N.Y.

Residence: Newport Beach

Family: Wife Charlotte; two grown children; two grandchildren

Education: Bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering, University of Colorado; PhD in physics, Cornell University

Background: McDonnell Douglas Corp. researcher and executive for 43 years, including eight years as director of research and development; director of advanced development for space station project

UFO research: Investigated reports of sightings and conducted scientific research on possible methods of UFO space travel for McDonnell Douglas, 1968-70; director of research for Mutual UFO Network Inc. (MUFON) since 1993; founding director of research for the Orange County section of MUFON since 1995

Who are those guys?: "I'd say there are several civilizations that might be involved, based on the in-depth interrogation of witnesses who are willing to go on record. Extraterrestrial societies could be better at some things, such as propulsion. But that wouldn't make them necessarily better in ethics."

Source: Bob Wood; Researched by RUSS LOAR / For The Times

Los Angeles Times

"During his normal routine, somewhere near Dyer and Myford roads, he saw this craft right in front of his windshield. He had a loaded Polaroid camera on his front seat because that was his job, to photograph things that needed to be fixed. So he took a shot right through his front window."

Heflin took three photos before the hat-shaped UFO left the area. "He drove farther and then got out and took a picture of the smoke ring that was left behind after it accelerated out of sight."

The first three photographs were published in an Orange County newspaper more than a

month later. They were examined in 1967 by the Condon Committee, a team of scientists from the University of Colorado commissioned by the Air Force to conduct an independent study of UFO reports.

"The Condon Committee declared that maybe it was a hoax, because of their inability to prove that it couldn't have been a small model," said Wood, who first met Heflin in 1968. "He seemed quite credible to me. And there were other things that were consistent with other sightings: His radio crackled and went out just as the UFO was close. And he described a wedge-shaped region of light on the bottom of the craft. He never knew that this light was on his photographs. It was only later that the researchers found it on the photographs."

Wood and Pasadena researcher Ann Druffel have obtained the original photos, which were taken from Heflin in 1965 and mysteriously returned to him in 1993. Heflin said he'd given the photos to someone claiming to be an official from the North American Air Defense Command. But NORAD officials denied contacting him.

"He told me that he'd gotten a phone call from a female voice that said, 'Have you looked in your mail box recently?' He said, 'No,' so he went out and looked and there was nothing there. He went out and looked a half-hour later, and some-

body had left him his original photographs inside an envelope."

Using the latest computer technology, Wood hopes to determine if the photos are indeed genuine.

"You couldn't have done this five years ago. We will be using a new technique for finding patterns in photographs—it's basically a computer scan."

Of the 300 sightings reported to MUFON each year that are considered unexplainable, about 10 are from Southern California. The 100-member Orange County chapter gets only a few calls each month, and most have earthly explanations.

"You have to think of multiple explanations for these anomalous things. Many times there are reasonable explanations, and you don't want to be led down the wrong path."

For those unexplainable accounts of UFOs and alien encounters, Wood said there is no consensus on whether the visitors are friendly or hostile.

"I'd say there are several civilizations that might be involved, based on the in-depth interrogation of witnesses who are willing to go on record. Extraterrestrial societies could be better at some things, such as propulsion. But that wouldn't make them necessarily better in ethics. There's significant evidence that people have been abducted, but for the most part, the interest seems to be one of curiosity and seeking understanding."