



**THE
VANISHING**

**MARK GREENWOOD
HISTORY HUNTER**



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INTRODUCTION

In 1978, a young pilot took off from Melbourne on a twilight flight to King Island in the Bass Strait, between mainland Australia and Tasmania. He never returned. Less than an hour after take-off, his conversation with an air traffic controller would spark one of Australia's most perplexing mysteries.

I'm a history hunter, drawn to search for the truth. Join me as I delve into the unexplained and investigate the extraordinary story of Frederick Valentich.

Are we alone in the universe? This question has intrigued humankind for centuries. We look to the stars and wonder if life exists in faraway galaxies. For many years, the only 'evidence' of extraterrestrial life came from fake or fuzzy photos of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs), bizarre crop circles, reports by alarmed eyewitnesses and some who claimed to have been abducted by aliens.

Scientists believe that the universe may be infinite, with the potential for life in many places. So far, sensitive receivers haven't picked up any definitive communication signals from the stars. Probes to Mars have found evidence of water and ice, but no Martians. Yet strange flying shapes and darting fleets of lights, hovering or orbiting in formation, have been reported worldwide.

Astronauts, pilots, police, and people from all walks of life, including a former president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, claim to have seen UFOs. Today, government agencies around the globe are devoted to collecting information on what they now refer to as Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAPs). The recent name change (from Unidentified Aerial Phenomena) broadens the definition to account for unidentified phenomena that appear in the air, in water, or transitioning between different mediums. Military intelligence aims to assess any technological advances, as well as potential threats these might pose to flight safety or national security.

For many years, UAP sightings remained unproven until 2020 when the US Department of Defense declassified videos of aerial phenomena demonstrating advanced aerospace technology, characterised as ‘unidentified’.

‘Look at that thing, dude,’ gasps the pilot of an F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet off the coast of San Diego, while an oval-shaped object, described as ‘a

giant Tic Tac, accelerates at speeds never seen before.

A series of incidents caught on film also includes an encounter with an object that first appears below the ocean's surface, churning the water. Elongated in shape, it rises suddenly and hovers above the water. With no visible means of propulsion, it accelerates at extreme speeds and performs advanced manoeuvres. Pilots question what they are watching. 'Wow, what is that?' one exclaims. 'Look at it fly!'

A US Navy video, referred to as 'The Gimbal', shows a UAP in the skies over the East Coast of the United States. It travels at hypersonic speeds, rotates and spins like a top before defying gravity, hovering stationary against the wind.

When modern military aircraft are outclassed by the superior performance capabilities of a UAP, it's either an advanced craft or it's not from Earth.

Unidentified Amorphous Phenomena are out there. The question is, are they interplanetary visitors to Earth from alien worlds? Sceptics argue that most sightings



The Gimbal.

Still from a declassified video of an encounter between a Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet and a UAP.

fall into explanatory categories, like manufactured airborne clutter — things like drones, high-altitude weather balloons, fireworks, satellites, and space junk re-entering the atmosphere. Other sightings are caused by natural atmospheric phenomena, rare weather and cloud formations, meteorites, or the

unusual optical alignment of stars and planets.

When reporting a close encounter, there are three categories. The first encounter is a sighting of a UFO. The second encounter is physical evidence proving the existence of an alien. A close encounter of the third kind is contact with alien life forms — the type of encounter that includes alien abduction.

In July 1947, one of the most famous UFO incidents occurred on a ranch in the desert near Roswell, New Mexico (USA). The authorities initially claimed they had recovered a 'flying disk'. The news made headlines around the world. After the US Army examined the wreckage, the story changed and it was declared to be the remains of a weather balloon.

The official government report denied coming into possession of advanced extraterrestrial technologies or recovering any alien flight crew. The debris collected at the Roswell crash site was said to have come from a top-secret research project code-named MOGUL. The now-declassified program involved high-altitude spy balloons.

But true believers were convinced that something from beyond this planet crashed on the ranch at Roswell. Perception of a cover-up lingered. Years later, witnesses, including former military personnel and respectable members of the community, claimed the object that crashed there contained alien life forms that were taken to a top-secret facility.

Over the years, no physical evidence or incontestable photograph of the 'flying disk' or an alien has been produced. Yet after the Roswell incident, conspiracy theories flourished. Magazine articles and science fiction books about visitors from outer space entertained worldwide audiences and inspired Hollywood storytellers. Movies like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and *ET the Extra-Terrestrial* popularised storylines that placed ordinary people in out-of-this-world situations.

But sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. In 1978, Frederick Valentich, an ordinary young man from Melbourne, found himself in a most extraordinary situation ...