

Sightings of UFOs had been occurring steadily over Papua New Guinea for almost a year before Father William Booth Gill, in the company of 37 other witnesses, experienced one of the most famous **close encounters of the third kind**. Gill's colleagues and fellow Anglican missionaries from Australia were intrigued by the events, and one of them, the Rev. Norman E. G. Cruttwell, was keeping careful records and interviewing witnesses. Gill himself was skeptical, however. When his colleague Kenneth Houston told him of a sighting he had made on October 18, 1958, Gill suggested he had seen the Soviet satellite Sputnik.

On April 9, 1959, Gill did not think to connect UFOs with an unusual light he saw high up on the flank of Mount Pudi near the mission station at Boianai (at the southeastern tip of Papua New Guinea), even when after 10 minutes the light reappeared on the opposite side of the mountain—a distance no human being could have traveled in so short a time. In any case, no one lived up there; the land was arid and remote.

At 1 a.m. on June 21 Gill's assistant Stephen Gill Moi saw an "inverted saucer" in the sky above the mission. On the twenty-sixth he wrote a friend, the Rev. David Durie, who was a UFO buff, and signed himself "Doubting William." "I am almost convinced about the 'visitation' theory," he said, "but my simple mind still requires scientific evidence before I can accept the from-outer-space theory." But before he got a chance to mail the letter, he would have a remarkable experience.

That evening, at 6:45, he spotted a bright white light in the northwestern sky. Thirty-eight persons gathered to watch a large, four-legged, disc-shaped object hover overhead. (Gill would later estimate its angular size to be comparable to that of five full moons lined up end to end.) On top of the object four humanlike figures, their bodies surrounded by illumination, were busy at some unknown task. At various times one or all of the figures would disappear below, only to reappear soon after. At 7:30 the object was lost from view when it ascended into the gathering clouds.

About an hour later other smaller objects arrived on the scene. Gill speculated these might be satellite craft from the original vehicle—the one he thought of as a "mother ship," which again became visible at 8:50. The UFOs remained intermittently visible until 10:50, when clouds covered the view.

The sighting had lasted over four hours. Twenty-five of the observers signed a report of the incident that Gill prepared soon afterwards.

At 6 p.m. the next day, the twenty-seventh, a Saturday, the UFOs and their occupants returned. One was the mother ship with its four occupants; two of the smaller craft could also be seen. Gill later told Cruttwell:

On the large one two of the figures seemed to be doing something near the center of the deck. They were occasionally bending over and rais-