

THE COST OF SILENCE

WHY REPORTING WHAT YOU SEE MATTERS

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For most of my life, I've worked in environments where missing a single detail could have real consequences. I spent over 26 years in the United States Air Force, retiring as a Chief Master Sergeant, and more than a decade as a Phoenix police officer.

In both careers, one principle was constant: Information matters. What people see, what they report, and what gets documented can determine whether a situation is understood or completely missed.

That same principle applies to something many people still hesitate to talk about: unidentified flying objects in the sky. Somewhere along the way, the word "UFO" stopped being treated as a category of observation and started being treated as a punchline. If someone reports something unusual, the assumption is no longer curiosity; it's skepticism, humor, or dismissal. People laugh, make a joke about aliens, and move on.

That reaction creates a problem. When people stop reporting what they see, we don't just lose stories, we lose data.

That's where the concept of the "918 Files" comes in. In my work and writing, a "918" represents a case that doesn't resolve cleanly. It's not necessarily something paranormal or extraordinary; it's simply something that remains unexplained due to incomplete information, conflicting accounts, or missing pieces. These are the cases that don't fit neatly into a box, the ones that leave questions behind.

What most people don't realize is that many of these "918" situations exist not because the event itself is beyond explanation, but because the reporting around it was incomplete or never happened at all.

When Stigma Becomes a Reporting Problem

This leads to a hard truth: People don't avoid reporting because they didn't see anything significant. They avoid reporting because they don't want to be labeled.



Reporting unexplained sightings helps turn isolated observations into information investigators can compare. Over time, those reports can reveal patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed.



Careful documentation gives investigators valuable details about when, where, and how a sighting occurred. Those details can help separate the explainable from what truly remains unidentified.

I've spoken with countless individuals, credible, grounded people, who admitted they saw something they couldn't explain. Their observations were clear, their details were consistent, and yet they never filed a report. The reason is simple. They didn't want to be seen as "crazy."

That single word has done more damage to public awareness than most people realize. It creates hesitation, silence, and a culture where people second-guess their own experiences before they ever share them. Instead of asking, "What did you see?" the conversation becomes, "Do I even want to say anything at all?" The result is what I refer to as a reporting gap, a massive amount of real-world observation that never makes it into any system where it can be analyzed, compared, or understood.

One of the most powerful examples of this is the Phoenix Lights event in 1997. Thousands of people across Arizona witnessed something that night — families, pilots, and law enforcement, ordinary individuals with no reason to fabricate what they were seeing. For a brief moment, people did exactly what they were supposed to do: They talked about it, reported it, and tried to make sense of it.

WHAT GOES UNREPORTED MAY NEVER HAVE THE CHANCE TO BE FULLY INVESTIGATED.

Then the tone shifted. Instead of being treated as a serious event, it was publicly mocked. The governor at the time turned it into a joke, and the message became clear: This is not something to take seriously. When leadership laughs, people stop talking. When people stop talking, information disappears.

To this day, the Phoenix Lights incident remain one of the most widely witnessed aerial events in modern history and one of the least fully understood. Not necessarily because it couldn't be explained, but because the opportunity to gather complete data was lost in real time.

The Conversation Begins to Change

What's notable now is that the tone around this topic is beginning to change. You see it in the increased attention from government officials, with congressional hearings where pilots, intelligence officers, and other trained professionals openly discuss encounters with unidentified aerial phenomena. These are not fringe voices; they are individuals whose careers are built on observation, discipline, and accountability.

You also see it in the media. Major filmmakers are



Reducing the stigma around UFO reports may encourage more witnesses to speak openly about what they observed. More reporting means more data and a better chance of understanding unusual events.

revisiting the topic, including new projects from Steven Spielberg, someone who has long shaped how audiences perceive the unknown. The difference today is that the conversation feels less like entertainment and more like reconsideration. Something is shifting. We are moving from a phase of automatic dismissal into a phase of cautious acknowledgment and that shift matters.

This isn't about proving extraterrestrial life or forcing a specific explanation. It's about awareness. Modern airspace is more complex than ever, with drones, experimental aircraft, and foreign technologies operating in ways that weren't possible just a decade ago.

When something unidentified is observed, it represents a piece of information, a timestamp, a location, a behavior. On its own, that information may seem insignificant. But when combined with other reports, patterns begin to emerge.

Patterns are what investigators rely on, whether in law enforcement, military operations, or national security. Without reporting, those patterns never form. Events remain isolated, trends go unnoticed and potential risks remain unidentified. That is the real issue, not what's in the sky, but our willingness to acknowledge it.

From Ridicule to Responsibility

If we want to remove the stigma, we need to change how we frame the conversation. Reporting something unusual should not be viewed as irrational; it should be viewed as responsible. It should be treated the same way we treat any observation that falls outside the norm. Because that's what it is, an observation. Nothing more, nothing less.

The goal is not to jump to conclusions. The goal is to collect information, compare it, and allow it to be examined through the proper lens. That is the foundation behind *The 918 Files* and the reason I recently wrote the book *UFO ≠ Aliens: Unidentified Doesn't Always Mean Extraterrestrial*.

The deeper conversation is not about convincing people of a specific answer, but about encouraging a shift in mindset, from dismissal to documentation and from ridicule to responsibility.

At its core, every investigation, whether it involves a missing person, a suspicious incident, or something in the sky, begins the same way. Someone saw something. The real question is whether they are willing to report it and whether we are willing to listen. ♦