

The Phoenix Lights: 10,000 Witnesses and a Governor Who Laughed — Then Confessed

The largest mass UFO sighting in American history. The official explanation lasted one press conference.

Date	Location
March 13, 1997	Phoenix, Arizona (and across Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico)

Key Witnesses

10,000+ including Governor Fife Symington, military personnel, pilots

Official Response

Flares from National Guard exercise – physically impossible explanation

Witness Count

Estimated 10,000+ across three states

// OBSERVER'S PREAMBLE

The Phoenix Lights event of March 13, 1997 is the largest mass UFO sighting in recorded American history. Ten thousand people across three states witnessed a structured craft of extraordinary scale pass slowly across the sky on a clear night. The governor of Arizona subsequently held a press conference at which he appeared with a man dressed in an alien costume, implying the reports were humorous. Six years later, the same governor admitted publicly that he had personally witnessed the craft, was certain it was not conventional, and had staged the press conference to keep the public calm.

The Event: March 13, 1997

Beginning at approximately 7:30 PM, reports emerged from Henderson, Nevada of a V-shaped formation of lights moving south. Over the next two hours, the same or similar formation was observed moving across the state of Nevada, into Arizona, and across the Phoenix metropolitan area — a city of two million people — before disappearing south toward Tucson. The craft was described consistently as an enormous V or boomerang shape, solid and structured, with five to seven lights in a fixed geometric relationship, moving silently at low altitude and very low speed.

Multiple military pilots, airline pilots, and astronomers were among the witnesses. The described craft's angular size — based on thousands of independent measurements — was approximately one mile across. It flew over a major metropolitan area at an altitude estimated at 1,000–2,000 feet. It was as visible as a football stadium in the night sky.

7:30 PM

FIRST NEVADA REPORTS

~2 hrs

TRANSIT DURATION ACROSS STATES

10,000+

ESTIMATED WITNESSES

~1 mile

ESTIMATED CRAFT WIDTH

3 states

NEVADA, ARIZONA, NEW MEXICO

6 yrs

BEFORE GOV. SYMINGTON ADMITTED PERSONAL WITNESS

"As a pilot and as a former Air Force officer, I can say with confidence that I cannot explain what I saw on March 13, 1997. And I still can't."

— Governor Fife Symington, Arizona — 2007, six years after staging the ridicule press conference

WITNESS CATEGORY	TESTIMONY	WEIGHT
Gov. Fife Symington	Personally observed craft — admitted 2007 after staging dismissal press conference	Highest civilian official in the state
Dr. Lynne Kitei, MD	Physician — personal observation from home at close range; photographed lights over weeks	Medical professional — trained observer
Multiple airline pilots	Reported independently to FAA and air traffic control	Professional observers — career at stake in false report
Mike Fortson, witness	Described craft as 'two football fields wide' passing overhead — blocked out stars, had structure	Civilian — part of thousands of consistent accounts
Tim Ley family	Observed craft for 20+ minutes as it slowly passed overhead — structure clearly visible	Extended observation — eliminates brief-sighting interpretation
Military witnesses	Multiple USAF and Air National Guard personnel — most did not file official reports	Institutional pressure prevented official reporting

The Flares Explanation

The Arizona National Guard subsequently acknowledged conducting a flare exercise near Phoenix that night, and the military's explanation for the lights was that these flares — dropped at high altitude over a range south of Phoenix — were the source of the reported lights. This explanation does not address the formation of lights reported over Nevada, which preceded the Arizona sightings by hours and was north of the flare exercise area. It also does not address the thousands of witnesses who described a solid structured craft, not a formation of discrete lights — the shadows cast by the structure were noted by many observers.

Two distinct events appear to have occurred on the same night: the passage of a large structured craft across three states, and a separate military flare exercise. The military explanation correctly addresses the second event and is deliberately silent about the first.

// SCALE AND SUPPRESSION

Phoenix 1997 pushed the boundaries of what the institutional dismissal mechanism could absorb. 10,000 witnesses, a sitting governor, and photographs from dozens of independent sources created a record that partial explanations could not fully account for. The pattern that follows — the USS Nimitz encounter, the eventual declassification of gun camera footage — suggests the institutional management was beginning to shift from suppression to controlled acknowledgment. [Read: Chapter 14 — USS Nimitz: The Tic-Tac That Rewrote the Rules →](#)

