

A flying saucer motionless in the sky over West Richland, Washington



On May 31, a witness observed a disk-shaped craft above the hills overlooking Vantage Highway, just a few miles from the Hanford nuclear site. The object, whose lower half reflected sunlight "like a mirror," vanished within seconds — a pattern echoed by dozens of other accounts recorded along this corridor over the past eight decades.

It was 10:04 a.m. on Sunday, May 31, 2026, when a driver traveling along Vantage Highway, north of West Richland, Washington, looked up toward the slopes of Rattlesnake Mountain. According to the report he filed that same evening with the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC), headquartered nearby outside Spokane, he spotted a shape he initially compared to a blimp hanging motionless in the air.

"It was a disk, the upper half a dark color, the lower half a blinding chrome, with the sun reflecting off it," he wrote in his statement. He placed the object roughly four to five miles away, to the southeast, at an elevation angle of about 45 degrees. It showed no movement whatsoever. "It was stationary, huge. I saw it for three to six seconds. Then it disappeared instantly, like a cloak had been thrown over it."

The witness, alone in his vehicle at the time, stressed the intensity of the metallic glare: "I can't express enough how much the bottom half of the craft shined." No trajectory, no acceleration, no sound is mentioned in the report. Rather than fleeing, the object seems to have simply switched off — a pattern ufologists sometimes call "instantaneous occultation," documented in several hundred cases worldwide without any optical or atmospheric explanation reaching consensus.

Hanford, the most fertile ground in the country for unidentified craft

Taken alone, this single account could be dismissed as an optical illusion or the glint of a conventional aircraft. But its location places it squarely within a landscape steeped in history. West Richland borders the Hanford Site, the former plutonium production complex built in 1943 as part of the Manhattan Project, which supplied the fissile material for the first atomic test at Trinity and for the bomb dropped on Nagasaki.

Researchers who study the Hanford file trace the earliest sightings back to the very period of the site's construction. By late 1942, the location had been chosen to host the world's first plutonium production facility, with no prior interactions with unidentified craft recorded anywhere in Washington State. But within months of the completion of the first production unit, "B Reactor," in September 1944, unexplained radar "blips" began appearing over the installation.

Correspondence later retrieved by researchers at the Project 1947 archive documents the account of Commander R. W. Hendershot, tasked with investigating these unidentified radar returns detected in late 1944 and early 1945. The matter grew serious enough that local military command became formally involved. Colonel Franklin Matthias, the officer in charge of the Hanford Engineer Works during the war and the man responsible for the press briefing held after the bombing of Hiroshima, later confirmed that radar had been installed "when we saw, or thought we saw, unidentified aircraft operating." He noted that an arrangement had been struck between Hanford and the Navy under which fighter pilots from the 9th Service Command would defend the site against aircraft of any kind.

Those pilots were called into action on several more unsettling occasions in January 1945, when unidentified objects were reported on at least three separate instances over Hanford's plutonium production plant. One of the fighter pilots involved, Clarence R. Clem, described them as "bright, reddish-orange fireballs... with no form, no substance."

[A corridor that has never stopped drawing eyes skyward](#)

Far from fading after the war, the phenomenon persisted across the following decades. One account gathered more recently recalls a night in the summer of 1965 when an entire family reportedly watched roughly a hundred glowing, capsule-shaped objects scattered across several hundred acres of Hanford's shrub-steppe land, remaining lit for hours without any change in intensity — a scene the witness still counts among the most vivid memories of his childhood.

According to Dan Nims, a Walla Walla-based representative of the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), sightings at Hanford actually predate the famous 1947 wave, going back to 1944 and 1945, when the site, in the midst of wartime, was an extremely sensitive and closely guarded area. More recently, a worker at the nuclear reservation driving north across the site at night was startled by a vertical, cigar-shaped object outfitted with lights, hovering more than 500 feet in the air. "As I was looking at it, it disappeared," he reported to MUFON, before the same object reappeared, this time "much closer and directly on top of me," measuring an estimated 100 to 300 feet in length.

Nims, who spends part of his time collecting such accounts on MUFON's behalf, points to a hypothesis frequently debated in ufological circles: nuclear installations — whether power plants, nuclear-equipped naval vessels, or weapons sites like Hanford — appear to draw a disproportionate number of sightings. Some researchers argue that the trigger may have been the detonation of the first atomic weapons themselves, marking, in the eyes of hypothetical observers, a major technological leap for the human species.

The area encompassing Hanford and Benton and Franklin counties remains, according to figures cited by both MUFON and NUFORC, one of the hottest spots in Washington State for sightings, with the two organizations together logging between ten and twelve thousand reports nationwide every year.

[West Richland, already no stranger to the phenomenon](#)

The May 31 sighting is not the first to come specifically out of West Richland. One witness previously reported, from Keene Road facing Rattlesnake Mountain, a metallic flash observed in broad daylight, with no visible object and no clouds in the sky aside from the glare itself — a flash that repeated four times before fading away in the direction of Hanford, in a description strikingly similar to the one gathered this spring.

"It was stationary, huge. I saw it for three to six seconds. Then it disappeared instantly, like a cloak had been thrown over it."

— Excerpt from NUFORC report no. 198204, filed May 31, 2026

The shadow of Maury Island and the birth of the modern era

It is hard to discuss the skies over Washington State without circling back to the founding event of modern ufology. The dawn of the modern UFO age is generally traced to 1947, when Bill Bequette, then a young reporter at the East Oregonian in Pendleton, wrote a short story about the extraordinary sighting reported by pilot Kenneth Arnold. Arnold was flying between Chehalis and Yakima when he spotted a string of nine objects speeding in formation past Mount Rainier, at a speed he estimated at roughly 1,200 miles per hour.

Just days after that now-legendary sighting came the so-called Maury Island incident in Puget Sound, where a harbor patrolman reported seeing six circular, doughnut-shaped objects. Some theorists have tried to link the episode, without credible evidence, to radioactive waste from Hanford — a claim historians of the case now consider unsupported by any documentation, since Hanford's waste has always been kept under strict containment on-site.

What to make of this latest report

Taken on its own, the May 31 account amounts to a brief sighting, uncorroborated by other witnesses and unsupported by radar or photographic evidence. Still, the profile described — a motionless, reflective disk followed by an instantaneous disappearance with no transition — remains consistent with a significant number of earlier reports gathered from this specific stretch of American territory, which has drawn disproportionate attention from witnesses and researchers alike for more than eight decades.

One question remains that even partially declassified military archives have never settled: why does this stretch of arid land along the Columbia River — birthplace of America's plutonium program — continue, generation after generation, to draw these silent apparitions?

Sources

- nuforc.org

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