

establishment had within it the skills and resources appropriate to this mission, in particular, engineers and personnel with high-level technical knowledge who were in close touch with scientific circles. A scientific council chaired by Hubert Curien and composed of twelve members who were representative of the social and exact sciences guaranteed that this complex and delicate subject would be handled with all the necessary precision. This council had the job of guiding, organizing, and reviewing the work of GEPAN annually.

Three phases can be distinguished in the progression of the activity connected with the study of UFOs in France, which culminated in 1988 in the creation of the Service d'Expertise des Phénomènes de Rentrée Atmosphérique (SEBRA), which succeeded GEPAN, still within CNES:

- a phase that consisted of setting up the organization and defining the procedures for the collection and processing of data, which is described in this chapter,
- a phase that consisted of defining the scientific method for studying cases,
- a phase that consisted of implementing the previously defined methods and procedures, the last two of which are discussed in the next chapter.

SEBRA plays a more limited role in the study of UFOs than does GEPAN, the scientific council of which has ended its mission

6.1 The Setting Up the Organization Phase

GEPAN's first job was to form a partnership among the different public, civilian, and military agencies with a view to organizing the collection and analysis of reliable data. The Gendarmerie Nationale, the civil and military aviation authorities, the National Weather Service, etc., were approached and brought together in this organization via agreements and protocols established with GEPAN.

The first goal set was the rapid acquisition and provision of data collected at the sites where a phenomenon was sighted. To do this, in accordance with the directives of the scientific council, GEPAN was tasked with the mission of forming teams of specialized investigators for the collection of psychological and physical data, such as, for example, taking samples of tracks in the ground. In parallel to this organization, various civilian and military research laboratories were asked to participate in expert's appraisals and analyses of the data collected in investigations, such as, for example, the processing of photographic documents and radar recordings.

6.2 Participation of the Gendarmerie Nationale

It was in February 1974 that the first instructions were given tasking the Gendarmerie Nationale with the job of collecting and centralizing spontaneous testimonies on UFOs. Previously, these testimonies had been collected on an occasional basis in the regional [gendarmerie] forces and rarely gave rise to the drafting of reports or to in-depth investigations (the Valensole case in [1965]). The administrative or technical authorities did not process or use these documents.

Beginning in May 1977, one of the six copies of the report drafted by the regional gendarmerie forces was forwarded to GEPAN, which from then on became the recipient of all information collected on UFOs.

6.2.1 Role and Action of the Gendarmerie Nationale