

Soviets shoot down thesis by D.M. man on UFOs

By RANDY EVANS

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Somewhere in the bowels of the Soviet Union's bureaucracy are two partial copies — pages 201 to 341, to be specific — of Des Moines educator Herbert Strentz's doctoral thesis on "flying saucers."

They have been shot down by some government policy there.

Strentz, the dean of the School of Journalism at Drake University, had attempted to send the dissertation to a man in the Soviet Union who expressed an interest in reading the paper, which is titled, innocuously enough, "A Survey of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966."

Strentz mailed the thesis off to the Russian in two packages. The first 200 pages got through unimpeded, but the last half never arrived, the man wrote Strentz. So the Iowan dispatched another copy of the missing part, but he was notified last month, this time by the U.S. Postal Service, that the parcel had been confiscated by Soviet authorities "because the nature of its contents were prohibited by virtue of the legislation of that country."

Form Letter

That it was a form letter from the Postal Service amazed Strentz. "I'm sure it's only one bureaucracy dealing with another," he said. "Apparently this sort of thing happens often enough that they have a form letter they use."

Ironically, Strentz said, the section that reached the Soviet man was the portion of the thesis that contained the only references to the Soviet Union. "The involvement of the Soviet Union and the communists is related to the McCarthy period in

American history ... when there was fear that subversives would infiltrate UFO groups," he said.

The concern then was that these Soviet sympathizers would coordinate reports of UFO sightings to coincide with, and camouflage, a Soviet attack on the United States, he said.

Technology

Strentz's Soviet correspondent also will be able to read of the U.S. military's reaction to "flying saucer" reports in the late 1940s. There were fears in this country, Strentz said, that reports of UFOs were linked to sightings a year earlier in Sweden of so-called "ghost rockets," which officials believed were of Soviet origin and were linked to the Soviets' latching onto Nazi Germany's V-2 rocket technology.

"The part which got seized deals with the last half of a chapter on the United States Air Force and its involvement in UFO reports and press coverage of them," Strentz said.

Strentz has never met the Soviet man and does not know the person's background. But Strentz said his dissertation has been mentioned in several books on unidentified flying objects, and the Soviet citizen apparently learned of the paper from the bibliography of one of those books.

"I consider it scholarly material, and it is troubling that it would be seized," Strentz commented.

"I thought it was kind of funny because I couldn't understand it," he said. "But I have some feeling of regret and frustration that here I have a friend I've corresponded with who is interested in this material, and it's been denied to him."

Will Strentz try to spirit the last half of the dissertation into the Soviet Union by some covert means, perhaps by mailing one page at a time to the man?

"I can't say," he replied. "That's top secret."



HERBERT STRENTZ

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