

# Andrew Rothovius

## Deadly pitted windshields

Last week I examined in this column how, 40 years ago this month, the coming into the public consciousness of the UFO's — the Unidentified Flying Objects or "Flying Saucers" — was accompanied at the very beginning by the setting of a precedent of denial of facts and concealment of what it was decided by a few that the many should not know, in the case of the mysterious wreckage that then crashed from the skies near Roswell, NM, and to this day remains just as mysterious and officially non-existent.

Coincidentally, and perhaps I might even say fittingly, even while my readers were scanning my analysis of this cover-up of four decades ago, they were watching and hearing the self-glorification of this art of denial and deception, into a high patriotic virtue.

Today I'd like to relate another instance of official covering-up, one that has resulted in serious illness and death for a high number of victims who had done nothing to bring such a fate upon themselves; and which at the time — 1964, seven years after the initial manifestation of the UFO's — was widely thought to be somehow connected with them.

That, it can be said and in fact has long been known, was definitely not the case, weird and unearthly though the first appearances were, of the phenomenon I am discussing.

Starting in the first few days of April 1964, a strange pockmarking of automobile windshields started to be noticed at scattered locations in the Pacific Northwest and the northern Great Plains.

Reported for the most part only in local news, little notice was taken at large, until on the 19th this pitting of glass began occurring on a much wider scale in the lower peninsula of Michigan, with its dense urban population.

To take a typical example, a salesman in Pontiac was driving along slowly along a well-paved street, with no vehicle ahead of him, when he suddenly felt sharp needle-like jabs on his face and then heard odd ticking noises that seemed to emanate from his windshields: on which pockmarks began to appear even as he watched. He drove to a police station to report the occurrence — I have remarked more than on once, on previous occasions, about our peculiar American trait of resorting to the police when anything strange happens, such as earthquake or tornado or falling meteor, subjects on which one would not expect them to possess any expertise — and the pits continued to increase and widen while the car was parked there.

The next day, plate glass windows in an office building in Middlevale, Mich., were suddenly and badly pitted, to the accompaniment of a snapping noise; peculiarly, the pits seemed to be mostly in the interior of the glass panes, instead of on either of their outer surfaces.

By the 23rd, hundreds of reports of pitting had flooded into police stations all across southern Michigan. In one large municipal parking lot (at Mount Pleasant), nine of every 10 cars had their windshields damaged by pitting, as did seven of the eight police cruisers sent to investigate. In some cases, the pitting was accompanied by a fall of silvery or ashy flakes, about as wide as a pencil, and extremely thin; these would fall on the windshields or on the hoods, and when wiped off — they would disintegrate in the act — pitted glass or paint would be found underneath.

Paint, however, was usually pitted only very slightly, compared to the actual damage incurred by glass, often necessitating its replacement.

After all the usual tired old explanations had been routinely trotted out, of vandals seemingly possessed of supernatural invisibility and agility, or of wind-carried dust from the overplowed Great Plains (how was it that the dust had never pitted glass

before?), the official attitude became one of attributing the whole thing to "popular hysteria"; and after a while, when the pittings ceased, of saying that it had never happened at all.

A few scientists noted that hydrofluoric acid, a product of hydrogen bomb explosions, could cause glass pitting — it is, after all, used commercially to etch designs into glass — but only slowly; they could not see how the acid was able to form the pits instantaneously.

Nevertheless, the guess was in the right direction. On March 1, the US had detonated at the Eniwetok test site in the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific, an enormous hydrogen bomb; this was followed by two somewhat smaller test blasts on March 26 and April 6. It was the airborne fall-out from these tests, carried out before meteorologists had worked out any adequate theory of radiation dispersion in the atmosphere, which caused the pitting and the silent deadly effects which followed.

The prevailing belief then was that radiation dispersed uniformly and thus it could be readily calculated that any harmful effect would be quickly dissipated and washed out, in ratio to the square of the distance it was carried from the blast.

Actual experience from the March 1 explosion — code-named Bravo — soon demonstrated otherwise; radiation tended in fact to clump into pockets and parcels, some of which would fall out quickly and others be carried long distances, remaining in suspension sometimes even for years while continuing to retain some of their deadly potential.

Fall-out from Bravo hit with devastating and fatal effect the inhabitants of one side of the Marshall Islands, who had been supposedly well within the protected ring of nonexposure, where the radiation was being blown up far into the stratosphere and away from them; on the other side of the island, only minor illnesses resulted, indicating the small dimensions of this particular parcel of rapid fall-out.

Another one fell on a Japanese fishing vessel, the misnamed "Lucky Dragon", with severe effects on its crew, who had been assured they were in a safe zone. The ensuing protest from the Japanese Government, which refused to heed our request to keep the incident secret, resulted in a brief flurry of public notice and alarm, but it was soon forgotten; what had happened to the unfortunate Marshall Islanders, took nearly 30 years of investigative journalism to uncover.

It was not until 1960 that it became realized that one of the most dangerous radiation products, Strontium 90, had become present in the soil, water and grass of the Dakotas and Minnesota to an extent that through human consumed milk and wheat could cause irreparable genetic damage.

Lester Machta of the National Weather Service developed a stratospheric model that explained how pockets of severe radiation from the 1964 and other tests continued to be carried aloft in the tropopause — the boundary between the clouds and the stratosphere — and remained dangerous, possibly for years, when they finally fell out. And it became understood that the beta and neutron particles, in the highly concentrated densities they would have had in the period immediately after the 1964 blasts, would disorder the molecular structure of glass — especially on a slanting surface, such as a windshield — thus enabling the hydrofluoric acid formed in the same explosions and carried aloft in the form of ash-like flakes, to very quickly enter and pit it.

All these considerations, and the further discovery that it was in a band a few hundred miles wide along the northern tier of the United States, that the prevailing upper-air wind flow

would deposit the greatest amounts of radiation, led to the abandonment of above-ground nuclear testing by both this country and the Soviets in 1962.

Both had come to realize that its continuation meant irreparable harm to their own peoples. Yet it was too late to undo the damage already done; for many forms of cancer, the death rate in that above-named band has been since 1960 far above the natural expectancy.

The lesson here is that official secrecy, which first downplayed and then denied the evidence of the windshield pitting contributed to those needless cancer deaths.

And since the Chinese commenced above-ground nuclear bomb tests in 1967 and have continued them at irregular intervals, there have been further occasional and unpublicized instances of windshield pitting in the Mid-West, attesting that further dangerous radiation is still being added, even if on only a relatively minor scale to that already present.

There is no indication that we are using any of our new leverage with Mao's heirs, to get these tests halted.

Last year's Chernobyl disaster in the Soviet Union provided further proof of the wrongness of the old notion of uniform radiation dispersal — though a great many officials still seem to believe it, in their pointless arguments about whether 1 mile or 10 miles is a safe zone around Seabrook (in no way can it be predicted with any accuracy in advance, for it would depend entirely on the winds at several layers of the atmosphere.)

Locations in places as far apart as Wales, Lapland and Italy had severe radiation effects; others in between, and much nearer Chernobyl, had little or none.