

UFOs 'in raid on Soviet space centre'

A concerted "sabotage" effort was made by alien spacecraft to shut down the giant Baikonur cosmodrome, Russia's answer to America's Cape Canaveral, during the first two weeks of last June, according to reliable Soviet scientists interviewed in Moscow.

During an anxiety and tension-filled 16 days not a single Soviet spacecraft was launched from the usually bustling Soviet multiple launch quadrangle as work crews repaired the damage which was discovered just in time to prevent a major disaster.

Scheduled launches of spacecraft including an important test flight of a new space vehicle were diverted to two other cosmodromes, the Kapustin Yar space centre, about 1,600 km to the west, and Plesetsk, some 2,400 km to the north.

One of the scientists said: "Whatever you like to call the uninvited visitors from the skies — UFOs or alien spacecrafts — two of them, flew in from a northerly direction at around 2 am on June 1.

"One apparently concentrated on Baikonur's major launch sites, the other on the two sites housing Baikonur personnel 32 km to the south.

"They were flying side-by-side. Witnesses described them as orange-coloured and having jelly-fish-like shapes.

"One headed south to the city. The other remained over the spaceport. It hung motionless right over the huge towers of Launch Pad No 1, the key installation. Then, suddenly, a silver-coloured shower, almost like rain, came down from the hovering craft. The shower seemed to envelope the target below.

"The attack lasted 14 seconds. Then the silver rain stopped and the craft began to move again. It made a giant circle over the outside perimeter of the spaceport, then flew on. Not more than half a minute had passed between its arrival and departure. It moved noiselessly."

During the raid, bolts and rivets were apparently sucked from the support towers of the main installation.

The other UFO's attack had the effect of smashing windows along the upper floors of the town's buildings.

Some 30 seconds later the two UFOs rejoined each other near the spaceport, then headed back north. Within seconds, they disappeared from sight.

The scientists reported that witnesses found it impossible to judge the size of the craft as they were apparently flying very high.

"Incredible as it may sound," one scientist said, "the elaborate defences of Baikonur were taken completely by surprise. There was a lot of commotion the following day when the damage to Launch Pad No 1 was discovered.

"A single launch of a smaller Cosmos satellite from an isolated pad some 64 km from the main installation was allowed to proceed on schedule, but two dozen launch sites were shut off and put under heavy guard. Within 24 hours Baikonur was totally paralysed.

"Nothing like this has ever happened before to our spaceport since 1955."

That was when the site in the Kazakhstan steppe was chosen for a space centre. The land was flat and empty of people for hundreds of miles; the sky was always clear. The remote area was considered the safest in the Soviet Union.

When it was decided to shift the site of the test launch it entailed a feat of improvised logistics involving the use of giant military helicopters, the scientist said.

The vehicle was dismantled and rushed to Kapustin Yar, 96 km east of Volgograd in the Astrakhan steppe.

As the substitute site was situated on approximately the same latitude as Baikonur — 48 degrees north — it meant the spacecraft would go into the same orbit as if it had been launched from the original site.

Crash crews working around the clock completed the installation as zero hour struck and the space capsule took off on June 4 to perform its mission as planned.

Baikonur heaved a sigh of relief, the scientist said, while continuing to clear up the mess around the main launch pad and checking every bolt and rivet on each of the 24 other sites.

"It was more luck than foresight," he said, recalling that Kapustin Yar, the Soviet Union's first cosmodrome, had been placed in mothballs, soon after Baikonur came into existence.

It was from Baikonur that on October 4, 1957, the Soviets ushered in the space age by shooting off its 215-lb Sputnik satellite.

Baikonur was considered secure, tucked away between the Aral Sea and the Ural Mountains; Kapustin Yar was much too vulnerable to US aerial surveillance, radar and bombers. But recently the old cosmodrome underwent a total modernisation and new launch pads were installed to include one capable of handling payloads as heavy as most of those shot into space orbit from Baikonur.

"Should there be more sabotage at Baikonur," said a source, "we'll have to fall back on Kapustin Yar for help unless we agree to curtail our space programme; which we have no intention of doing."

In fact, when on June 18, Baikonur resumed operations it was to conduct a complicated "defence manoeuvre," according to US intelligence. Both Plesetsk and Kapustin Yar participated.

"On that day," said a US military source, "in a major Soviet missile programme, six to eight launchings from all three space centres were carried out within several hours.

From HENRY GRIS in Moscow

"It was a major military exercise involving rocket launchings and re-entries, a most impressive military space action."

A challenge to those unwanted space visitors? Whatever it was, from June 2 to June 18 the rest of the Baikonur space traffic was carried by Plesetsk in northern Russia.

Plesetsk is the Soviets' most modern cosmodrome and its space shots are mainly of a military nature. It was recently extended to include simultaneous launches in a wide range of inclined orbits.

Ideally situated in the lowlands of the frozen north for say overflights of most inhabited parts of Earth, it was built behind an overpowering wall of secrecy and security.

Thus, while Baikonur is both unofficially and officially a Soviet cosmodrome, Plesetsk has never been identified as a spaceport.

While Baikonur has been merely "misplaced" on the maps of the Soviet Union, deliberately identified with a small mining settlement instead of the town of Tyuratam, 304 km to the south

where it is actually located, Plesetsk, officially, is simply Plesetsk.

It is just a small town on the railway line from Moscow to Archangel, 416 km below the Arctic Circle, one is told. It has no significance whatsoever.

The Plesetsk cosmodrome, a quadrangle 48 x 64 km dotted with sophisticated installations, to all intents and purposes, does not exist. To be sure, the Russian people have been denied all knowledge about it.

The only ones who have suspected that "something" is going on up there," to quote them, are the Russian civilian UFO spotters who have long pinpointed the area of Plesetsk as having had more UFO overflights than any other rural area in European Russia.

"They keep flying in and out of this region like bees around a beehive," said one Russian ufologist.

Told that Plesetsk harbours a giant, if secret cosmodrome, long photographed by US satellites, he nodded: "Makes sense!"

It was this Plesetsk, then, that found itself working overtime to fill in for the sabotaged Kazakhstan cosmodrome while carrying out its own extensive space programme.

The sabotage of Baikonur coincided with its main launch site, used to lift 11 manned space vehicles, getting ready to shoot off the new Soyuz T spacecraft.

This latest Soviet manned transport vehicle carries a crew of three and is considered the newest, extremely efficient, workhorse of the Soviet space programme.

"Nobody was talking," said Doctor of Geology Alexei Zolotov, a prominent and highly respected Soviet scientist and explorer, who happened to be in the area the day the UFO attack happened.

"Apparently something was very wrong as there was feverish activity all over the place. Also, during the night searchlights kept scanning the skies."

Dr Zolotov stayed at the Hotel Cosmonaut in the town where everybody works for at the spaceport.

Said to house some 60,000 people, the town came into being at the same time as the cosmodrome and is still growing.

In addition to rows of neat six-storey apartment houses, the deliberately nameless new town features space research installations, space training facilities, laboratories, a hospital, sports arena and other sports facilities, a theatre, cinemas, restaurants, a television centre, and a cosmonaut club, all built within the last few years. Everything but a church.

The town is situated on a railway line and major highway and is connected to the cosmodrome by several smaller roads.

The actual spaceport, the largest such installation in the world, is criss-crossed by special concrete roads capable of carrying extreme weights during winter and summer, railway tracks and security trenches. It is dotted with numerous outside hangars, immense rocket assembly installations, fuel storage facilities and sophisticated test facilities.

The whole area is protected by three concentric rings of military outposts. It is completely isolated from the rest of the world.

"Not that this stopped the UFOs," Dr Zolotov said. "The city was helpless

against the intruders, and was vandalised on the night of June 1.

"No one was killed even though people were injured by flying glass caused by unknown 'snipers' apparently shooting holes into windows. Having been to Petrozavodsk and most recently to Leningrad, I recognised the neat round holes. Similar sniping there has been attributed to overflying spacecraft."

In the morning Dr Zolotov was told that the people he had come to see were not available, and he was advised to leave the space city as soon as possible.

He was only too happy to get out, he recalled. It appeared that Dr Zolotov knew more but preferred to keep his mouth shut.

But another Russian scientist elaborated on what happened to Baikonur on that night on condition that his name be withheld:

"People still up at 2 am when it happened saw holes mysteriously appearing in their apartment windows, and pieces of glass falling to the floor. But they never saw where the shots came from or who did the shooting. It all happened in total, oppressive silence. The window panes with the holes in them were immediately replaced on orders of the town administration.

"All I know about the events at the spaceport itself is that it was the other object that overflew it and shot bolts and rivets out of the launch pad support structures. Again there were no casualties.

"The launch site which was damaged was No.1, built to hold the heaviest space equipment.

"During the night, guards on the site heard strange creaking sounds. At daybreak while inspecting the steel structures they noticed rays of light shining through the steel beams. As they closed in they found the holes and realised that these were bore holes for bolts and rivets. The bolts themselves were gone.

"In all, workmen discovered hundreds of holes — according to one version several thousand — in the steel beams that make up the intricate structures, in the upright towers and the leaning support-and-feed masts.

"The missing bolts were later found below, lying on the concrete flooring intermingled with their nuts which, too, had been removed. Neither bolts nor nuts had been damaged.

"The men also discovered that some of weld seams had been tampered with and that some of the sections had indeed become separated. Obviously, no human hands could have brought this about — especially, in so short a time.

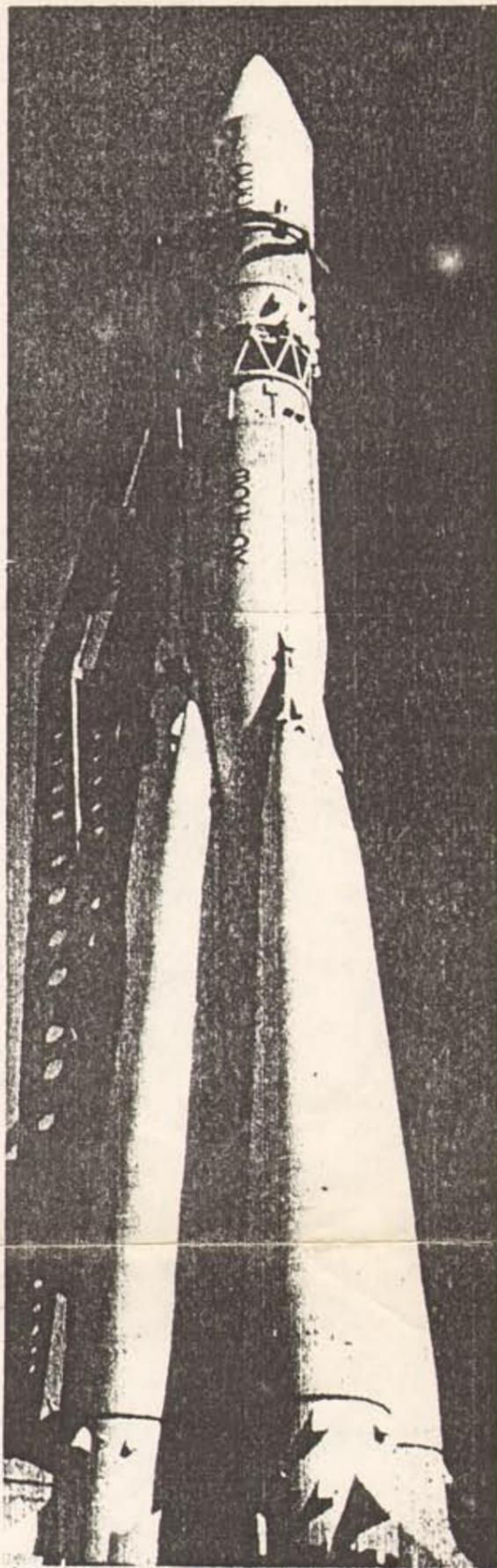
"One must rule out any theory that saboteurs infiltrated the intricate tower system and carried out their work hanging from beams five storeys above ground. It would have taken them days. There simply was no other explanation but one — and this was an eerie one to say the least.

"On the other hand, the damage was far from catastrophic," the scientist said.

"In fact it was well within ordinary maintenance repairs. The bolts could be put back in place, and the unwelded beams rewelded.

"The act of sabotage appeared almost as though whoever did it wanted us to notice in time to carry out repairs before tragic consequences set in."

Twenty days later, he said, the Soyuz T carrying



A rocket carrying a manned spaceflight on the launch pad at Baikonur.

three spacemen including French astronaut Jean-Loup Chretien, was supposed to blast off.

Its objective was to dock with the orbiting space lab Salyut 7 with two Soviet cosmonauts aboard.

Things were back to normal a full nine days before the important launch and nothing further upset it. The sabotage remained a well-kept secret until recently when a cosmonaut mentioned it in passing at a meeting with scientists in Moscow.

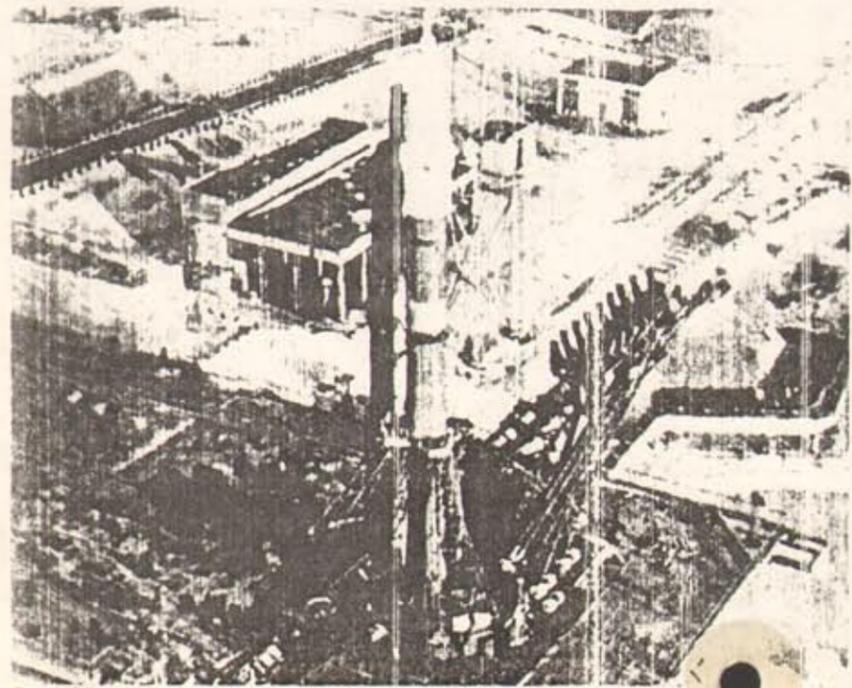
Actually, the scientist said, a check on all other launch sites determined that no other structures had been sabotaged.

The one affected, on the other hand, was a key launch pad surrounded with a veritable forest of steel beams, cable supports and anchors.

Its mainstay, an elaborate quadruple tower opening like a giant steel tulip, embraces the vertical rocketship suspended over a steel pod sunk deep into its concrete flooring.

"Unlike the American support towers," he said, "ours swing from ground-level hinges, their tops sailing away in arcs of over 70 metres to let the space vehicle and its cluster of boosters pass through unhampered at lift-off."

It was these towers that had been precariously weakened by the removal of con-



One of Russia's Soyuz rockets being prepared for launch at the cosmodrome.

nection bolts. A sudden wind could have caused the tower to topple and collapse, tearing the rocket down with it. But there was no wind that night and the steppes of Kazakhstan lay peaceful and calm under a starless sky.

"And so, incredibly, all ended well," the scientist said. "Still, for a full two weeks not a single rocket shot up from the Baikonur cosmodrome while new measures to protect it were being adopted." He refused to comment on the significance of the triple military operation of June 18, claiming he knew nothing about it.

The fact that Baikonur came to a mysterious standstill last June has since been confirmed by the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Soviet space expert and noted astrophysicist Vladimir Azhazha, reached by phone in Moscow, said: "I have no reason to doubt that extraterrestrials must be well aware of our increased space activity. For all I know they are better informed about its objectives than the average man in the street."

"I have always contended, that superior civilisations are more concerned with peace and harmony than we are. Those 'star wars' that fiction writers dream up, are, in my view, sheer nonsense."

"Beings more advanced than we are will keep us in check somehow — even if it hurts us on occasions. "At least, I hope so."

— Camera Press