

UFO UPDATE

By Harry Lebelson

Physical evidence remains the decisive factor in the search for UFOs, but would finding it really be enough to prove their existence? People assume that if the evidence itself were alien to anything we know on Earth, verification of its being extraterrestrial would be immediate. If, however, the article were made of materials familiar to us, its authenticity would likely be doubted.

This problem surfaced recently when *Omni* acquired two metal samples purported to be extraterrestrial. The bizarre circumstances surrounding their discovery led the magazine to commission an analysis of the samples by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge. But to understand better the significance of both specimens, some background regarding their appearance is in order.

The most intriguing of the two specimens is the Ubatuba, Brazil, magnesium sample, reputed to be part of an unidentified flying object that exploded off the coast of Brazil in 1957. The other specimen, a seven-centimeter metallic bar etched with symbols, allegedly materialized in the Charleston, South Carolina, home of William Herrmann. The metal ingot is supposedly a "gift of friendship" from extraterrestrial visitors.

On September 14, 1957, Ibrahim Sued, a well-known Rio de Janeiro columnist, received a strange letter from one of his readers. A fisherman who was fishing with some friends near the town of Ubatuba, São Paulo, Brazil, reported that they had seen a disk maneuvering at unbelievable speeds in the sky. Suddenly the object made a sharp upward turn, climbed rapidly, and exploded into flames, sending thousands of fiery fragments into the sea. A small number of these pieces fell close to the beach and were picked up by the fishermen. Three small fragments were sent to Sued, who sent them to the late Dr. Olavo Fontes, the Brazilian representative of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO). The fragments were of a fissured, dark gray, and highly oxidized metallic substance. A white

powdery substance was seen in the cracks of the samples.

Upon receiving the pieces, Fontes kept one and sent the two others to APRO in Tucson, Arizona. In an attempt to analyze the material, Fontes submitted his sample to the National Department of Mineral Production of the Agriculture Ministry of Brazil. Dr. Luisa Maria A. Barbosa, a chemist-technologist, reported that "the spectrographic analysis showed the presence of magnesium of a high degree of purity and the absence of any other metallic element." To ensure the accuracy of this report, an additional spectrographic analysis was made by Elson Teixeira. He stated that "the spectrographic analysis identified the unknown metal as magnesium and showed it to be absolutely pure. No impurity or other metal was detected in the sample analyzed; even trace elements, usually found with any metal, were not present." Additional analyses were made of the metal, two of which were done by the Brazilian Army and Navy. The results of these additional tests are unknown, however. Unfortunately, because of extensive laboratory testing, sample 1 has been completely oxidized.

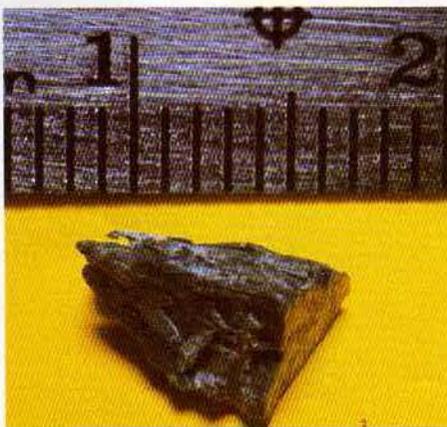
Meanwhile, in the United States, APRO, which had possession of the two remaining samples, submitted a portion of sample 2 to a U.S. Air Force

spectrographic laboratory for analysis. For unknown reasons, the entire piece was burned before conclusive results could be obtained. The air force requested another sample, but APRO refused the request. The next series of tests was conducted by the Atomic Energy Commission's Oak Ridge National Laboratory on another portion of sample 2. The results of this analysis showed that sample 2 was less pure than sample 1 was reported to be by the Brazilian scientists. A comparison of the test results of all three samples shows that each varies in purity.

In his 1969 study of the Ubatuba magnesium samples, Dr. Walter W. Walker, who has a Ph.D. in metallurgy, stated, "The Ubatuba magnesium has been widely acclaimed as direct physical evidence of the extraterrestrial nature of UFOs. But, as of the present, after more than a decade of investigation, the extraterrestrial nature of the Ubatuba material has yet to be conclusively proved or disproved. The lack of subsequent verification of the Ubatuba purity has been the reason that all investigations to date have discounted extraterrestrial origin." Walker continues: "Little further study along the line of chemical analysis would be fruitful. It is also apparent that the structural aspects of the Ubatuba samples have been ignored. These are the aspects that show the most promise for further study."

Now, ten years later, the controversy still persists. Advocates and detractors alike continue to voice their opinions. Carl Sagan, a professor of astronomy at Cornell University, states, "There have been debates on the purity of magnesium samples from purported crashed UFOs, but their purity was within the competence of American technology at the time of the incident." Yet a two-page CIA foreign-intelligence information report, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and dated January 29, 1976, states, "There is a rumor that fragments of a possible UFO found in Brazil bore a relationship to superconductors and magneto-hydrodynamics."

Omni's own efforts to clarify the mystery



Ubatuba magnesium fragment analyzed by MIT.



M104, NGC 4594, Sombrero Galaxy, KPNO 4-M photo.

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UFO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

of Ubatuba led to Robert E. Ogilvie, a professor of metallurgy at MIT, who conducted an analysis of a fragment supplied to the magazine by APRO.

The specimen was examined by metallographic analysis to determine its mechanical and thermal history. Electron probe microanalysis was employed to determine the chemical composition and the distribution of elements within the specimen. Results of these tests showed the metal to be pure magnesium. No impurities or alloying elements, such as aluminum, zinc, manganese, or tin, were found. An oxygen x-ray map picked up magnesium and oxygen x-ray signals, thus confirming the network to be magnesium oxide.

"My conclusion," says Ogilvie, "is that the specimen from Brazil has a composition that would be found in magnesium weld metal. However, the structure is indeed unusual. In my opinion it could only have been formed by heating the magnesium very close to its melting point in air. It would be necessary to hold the temperature for only a minute or so. This would produce an oxide coating on the material, which is clearly visible. Also, oxygen would diffuse down the grain boundaries, thereby producing the oxide network. It is therefore quite possible that the specimen from Brazil was a piece of a weld metal from an exploding aircraft or a reentering satellite."

Another intriguing example in the search for extraterrestrial substances is the William Herrmann case. Despite its sensationalistic overtones and parallels with the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the Herrmann case has generated little or no publicity. Herrmann had decided to minimize the details of his experience because of his wish for privacy. However, because of a recent turn of events, he has decided to publicize his case in the hope of acquiring some insight into the origin of the phenomenon.

The Charleston UFO observations began on November 12, 1977. On a clear day, with 20-mile visibility, Herrmann observed a bright-silver, metallic disk. The object was describing strange triangular patterns in the sky near the South Carolina Electric and Gas power towers adjacent to the Ashley River basin west of Dorchester Road. This object was also seen by other residents in the North Charleston area. The sighting would set the stage for a series of inexplicable events. In a brief period of a year and a half, more than 40 sightings, 9 of which were by Herrmann, of a similar object occurred in the Charleston area. Not only has Herrmann photographed the object, but he claims to have been abducted by alien visitors on two separate occasions, March 18, 1978, and May 16, 1979. Perhaps the most significant event, in terms of validating his experience, was the materializa-

tion of the metal bar in his home on the night of April 21, 1979.

While Herrmann was in the bedroom of his mobile home that Saturday night, the room suddenly brightened. He looked around and saw a ball of blue light emanating from the top of his dresser. The light grew in intensity and then, just as suddenly, began to fade. As it did so, Bill made out a faint object in the center of the vanishing ball of light. Dazed and puzzled, Herrmann crossed the room and picked up a rectangular bar similar to a small ingot of precious metal. Overwhelmed by the experience, he remained silent and distant as he pondered the strange, symbollike markings engraved in the bar. Immediately after regaining his composure, he notified Wendelle Stevens, who had been the initial investigator in the case. Stevens notified APRO, which arranged for Dr. Walter Walker to analyze the bar. A careful visual and microscopic examination revealed that the artifact was a casting. Precision thermal analysis and qualitative and semiquantitative chemical analysis identified the material as hard lead containing 4 to 6 percent antimony.

Two small metal fragments of the Herrmann bar were sent by *Omni* to MIT for metallographic and electron probe testing. Results of MIT's analysis fairly duplicated APRO's conclusions. The specimen was made of a cast alloy, and its composition approximated that of lead water pipes or of lead grids from an automobile battery. This analysis corroborated APRO's finding that the fragments contained 6 percent antimony.

The second time Herrmann was abducted, he was told the following by an alien aboard the UFO: "In regard to the bar, we have been authorized to give solely and without favor to you. It is a gift of respect and appreciation. You are one of the few to receive such a bar. It has much value to us . . . though it is regarded as worthless to you when its value is estimated according to your primitive measure of comprehension."

A statement that was made by Dr. Walker some time ago while studying the Brazilian magnesium specimen best sums all this up. "Perhaps the extraterrestrials used methods within our technology and material available on Earth, and therefore their handiwork cannot be distinguished from our own." Whatever the conclusions, pro or con, one thing is certain, events of this type help to give us a better understanding of an enigma yet to be solved. Of course, the whole world is waiting for the moment when the proverbial flying saucer lands on the White House lawn (see "Illegal Aliens," page 84). Until then, however, we'll have to settle for random chunks of metal accompanied by stories so weird they cannot be ignored.

If you know of anyone who has knowledge of, or possesses, any hard evidence relating to the UFO phenomenon, contact the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, 3910 East Kleindale Street, Tucson, Arizona 85712, or phone 602-323-1825. ☐



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