

MAGONIA ETH Bulletin

Editor: JOHN HARNEY

No. 6 August 1998

EDITORIAL

In an article in the latest *Fortean Times* (No. 114, September 1998) Bruce Lanier Wright asserts that 'the PSHers hold that all UFO percipients are lying, mistaken or crazy and that the human mind is a fascinating thing'. He is wrong, of course. The UFO percipients are not crazy; they usually report just what they experience. The crazy people are those ufologists who put an ETH spin on their stories, thus ensuring that they are unlikely to be taken seriously by those best qualified to evaluate them.

We are also told by Wright that 'PSHers favour the squishy language of the social sciences, and while some of the work is beautifully written, other parts bear an eerie resemblance to French film criticism'. Not only that, but 'Saucer debate is Jesuitical'.

However, here is the latest issue of our publication, of which Wright says: 'As polemic, the *Bulletin* is wonderful.' I hope that readers will not find it too squishy or Jesuitical, and I am sure they will agree that it is not written in French.

MULTIPLE WITNESSES AND UNEXPLAINED SIGHTINGS

Evidence wanted

When I started this publication I hoped that proponents of the ETH would submit examples of unexplained UFO reports, accompanied by convincing evidence that psychological and social explanations were untenable. So far the response has been disappointing. Believers in the ETH are plainly very reluctant to have particular reports subjected to detailed scrutiny. The obvious reason for this is that someone would inevitably point to serious flaws in the evidence and testimony and provide a convincing, non-ETH explanation. Not all are easily explained, though, but ETHers often disagree over which reports should be accepted as genuine. If they are not genuine, then they don't need to be explained.

Migraine

In the previous issue I suggested that migraine auras should be considered as a possible factor in the generation of some close-encounter UFO reports. When this was posted on the Internet it was immediately jumped on by Mark Cashman (mcashman@ix.netcom.com), who denounced it as unscientific as if it purported to be a fully developed, rigorously argued hypothesis, which it was plainly not. It was simply an essay which drew attention to the apparent similarities between migraine symptoms and descriptions of the experiences of witnesses in some close-encounter reports. I was certainly not trying to prove anything and I hoped it would attract the attention of medically qualified readers who could tell us if they thought that it was worth considering as a possible factor in some cases.

Multiple witnesses

One of Cashman's objections to the migraine hypothesis is that there are similar reports which cannot be explained in this way. He writes: 'Yet there are many UFO reports, identical to those indicated to be explained by the migraine hypothesis, which have multiple witnesses, physical trace effects, and even photographs. In some cases there are headaches, in some not. Why are these accounts not caused by migraine similar in nature to those which presumably are?'

Multiple witnesses? If we had unexplained close-encounter cases with multiple independent witnesses, then we could forget about psychological or neurological explanations, and we would have to

take the ETH very seriously. But where are these convincing cases? ETH proponents tend to get rather stropy when pressed for examples. Could this be because many so-called multiple-witness cases are not what they seem? What usually happens is that one witness claims that there were other witnesses, but the other witnesses cannot be traced by investigators.

In the following case, dated 8 November 1954, there seem to have been enough witnesses to satisfy any sceptic:

In Monza (Italy) a man saw a light in a stadium and soon a crowd of 150 people gathered, destroyed the barriers and rushed to get a closer look. They saw a disc set on three legs, emitting a blinding white light. Figures dressed in light colours and wearing transparent helmets were standing close by. They seemed to communicate with 'guttural sounds'. One of them had a dark face and a sort of trunk, or hose, coming up to his face. The craft flew away without noise. (1)

How strange it is that this case is not one of the great UFO classics. 150 witnesses! What happened to them, I wonder. Perhaps they were as unreal as the UFO and its occupants.

Aliens at the bus stop

Brazil is the source of many close-encounter reports. However, most of the multi-witness cases involve members of the same family. But here is a multi-witness case to convince the most ardent debunker. Or at least that's what it looks like at first glance.

On the evening of 21 November 1968, a young woman was a passenger on a bus travelling between Guarulhos and Vila Barros (São Paulo). At 9.30 p.m. the bus halted at a rural stop near Macédo. It was still quite light and the woman saw, at an estimated distance of 40 metres from the bus, a shining metallic object about the size of a car which was standing or hovering close to the ground. She was telling this story to Willi Wirz, managing director of the *Brazil Herald* (described as Brazil's only English-language newspaper) when, by an amazing coincidence, Nigel Rimes, *Flying Saucer Review's* Brazil representative, just happened to walk in. The witness drew a rough picture of the saucer as an object with flashing or rotating lights around it, and a door with three steps leading from it. Wirz and Rimes then showed her pictures of various types of saucer (which they just happened to have handy) for comparison and they were able to link it with an earlier Brazilian report.

Standing in front of the UFO were three men about 2 metres tall wearing skin-tight shining black clothes. One of them was holding a tube-shaped gadget. Now we get to the interesting bit. The strange entities were confronted by three policemen with a crowd of about 20 people grouped behind them. After a time the entity with the gadget sprayed the policemen and the other people with a beam of silver-coloured light, which seemed to paralyse them. A few of them fell over. The beings then walked back into their saucer and it took off. This episode is estimated to have lasted for about 15 minutes.

In their excitement at hearing this story, Wirz and Rimes apparently forgot to ask the young woman what the bus driver and the other passengers had made of this startling incident. They also subsequently failed to trace any of the other alleged witnesses. Rimes suggested that 'the military authorities have clamped down on other witnesses' but did not offer the slightest evidence to support this claim. (2)

Levelland

Many ETHers tend to reject reports involving occupants, particularly if, as in the above-mentioned cases, there is no corroboration obtainable from other witnesses. However, Mark Cashman has recently drawn attention to a very interesting series of observations of what appears to be the same, or a similar, phenomenon. This is the famous Levelland case, which involved sightings of a bright object which allegedly caused temporary failure of electrical systems on motor vehicles. (3)

Dr J Allen Hynek pointed out that these sightings began just one hour after the launch of Sputnik II on 2 November 1957 and states that the witnesses could not have heard the news so soon after that event. (4)

Captain Gregory, then head of Project Blue Book, explained the sightings as ball lightning, based on information that there were thunderstorms in the area at the time. Hynek at first hastily concurred in this evaluation as he was too busy tracking Sputnik II to pay any attention to the case. Later he discovered that the weather at the time was reported as overcast and mist, but no thunderstorms. This would presumably rule out astronomical explanations, such as bright stars,

planets, or meteors, as well as ball lightning. So far as ball lightning is concerned, it has been pointed out that to introduce it as an explanation for UFOs is simply to substitute one mysterious phenomenon for another.

A number of similar reports were made to the local police station on the night of 2/3 November and 15 phone calls relating to the UFO were logged. All of these reports appear to have been made independently of one another, at different times by different witnesses in the Levelland area.

Holloman Air Force Base

In his summary of the Levelland reports, published on the Internet, Mark Cashman writes: 'The reporting of the concentration was not followed by a drawn out series of similar accounts over the following days, as would be expected if psychosocial theories of UFO report generation were true.' Cashman gives his sources as a privately published pamphlet by Loren Gross and Hynek's *UFO Experience*. However, other sources give accounts of similar reports occurring later in November. For example, Coral Lorenzen gives details of a few cases, including one which brings us back to the problem of the crowd of witnesses who cannot be traced by investigators.

The witness, named as James Stokes, was driving between Orogrande and Newman, New Mexico at about 1:10 p.m. on 4 November when the radio in his car faded and the engine faltered and stopped. Ahead of him he saw several cars pulled off the road with the occupants standing on the highway and pointing towards the north-east. Stokes looked up and saw an oval object coming towards the highway. The object then turned to the north-west after buzzing the highway, made another pass at the cars and then disappeared to the north-west.

Stokes said that he felt heat as the object passed over and, while being interviewed by Coral Lorenzen, he complained that his wrists and his face were itchy. She noticed that his face appeared sunburned. (She met him again the following day and noted that the sunburn had disappeared.)

Stokes worked at Holloman Air Force Base as an electronics engineer. At first the Air Force co-operated with demands by the media for interviews and news conferences and said that he was a competent observer. A few days later, according to Lorenzen, the Air Force was attempting to discredit the sightings. Stokes's sighting was included in a group of three labelled as 'exaggerations or misunderstanding of natural phenomena' and on 17 November a story was put out listing the Stokes case as a hoax, 'presumably suggested by the Levelland reports'. Needless to say, the other witnesses to the Stokes sighting were never traced.

More about Holloman

The Stokes report bears a curious resemblance to another one connected with Holloman Air Force Base which, if true, should be one of the great unexplained classics, and constantly touted by ETHers. Perhaps, though, it didn't really happen and is all a pack of lies. Ralph and Judy Blum describe it as follows:

Shortly before eight o'clock on a fine New Mexico morning in September 1956, at a point twelve miles west of Holloman Air Force Base (White Sands Proving Grounds) a domed, disk-shaped UFO landed not fifty yards from U.S. 70. Radios and ignition systems of the nearest cars went dead. Morning commuter traffic backed up as stunned witnesses - including two air force colonels, two sergeants, and dozens of base employees - watched the unusual craft for over ten minutes before it took off with 'a whirring sound'. (5)

We are told that 'all base employees were assembled in a hangar, questioned, and sworn to absolute secrecy regarding the incident'. Then who was the blabbermouth? Who was the witness who somehow managed to establish that two air force colonels and two sergeants were among those in the traffic jam caused by the grounded saucer? As you might have guessed, this story never got into Blue Book files.

Interesting if true

Another interesting-if-true case, extracted from the Blue Book files by Hynek is dated a few weeks after Levelland - 23 November 1957. A US Air Force Lieutenant, who had just completed advanced survival training, was driving between Tonopah, Nevada and Las Vegas when his car engine suddenly stopped. He couldn't restart it and got out of his car to investigate. He heard a high-pitched whining noise and saw four disc-shaped objects on the ground about 300-400 yards from the highway. He

walked to within 50 feet of the nearest object and he described them as identical and about 50 feet in diameter and glowing brightly. Each was equipped with the usual dome and landing gear. The noise became louder as he approached and the objects took off and flew away over a nearby hill. The sighting took place in daylight, just before sunrise.

Blue Book was not very grateful for this report. A memo in the file on the case reads:

The damage and embarrassment to the Air Force would be incalculable if this officer allied himself with the host of 'flying saucer' writers, experts, and others who provide the Air Force with countless charges and accusations. In this instance, as matters now stand, the Air Force would have no effective rebuttal, or evidence to disprove any unfounded charges.

The case was dismissed, after consultation with a psychologist, as probable 'road hypnosis'. (6)

Car-stopping puzzle

If it is accepted that cars really can have their electrical systems rendered temporarily inoperative by some unusual phenomenon, then we are faced with the challenge of trying to explain how it is done. In the Condon Report, Roy Craig wrote: 'Reports of temporary stalling of automobile motors by UFOs constitute one of the more puzzling aspects of UFO reports. the automobiles are invariably reported to operate normally after the UFO leaves the vicinity, and no permanent damage to the car's ignition or lighting system is indicated.' Tests were carried out which showed that powerful magnetic fields had little effect on car ignition systems. Phenomena which could cause ionisation of the air in the vehicle were also ruled out because the resulting short circuits would damage the cars' electrical systems.

Conclusions

If we accept that some of the cases involving the sighting of mysterious luminous phenomena associated with the temporary failure of car electrical systems, then we need to seek an explanation. If we attribute such phenomena to the ETH then we can just say that such effects are demonstrations of the superior technology of the aliens and we do not need to bother with the difficult task of looking for the true explanation. At least, with incidents such as those at Levelland, we seem to have something that just cannot be dismissed as delusion or misperception.

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SPY BALLOONS

Files concerning a US Air Force project to send spy balloons over Russia have recently been made available in the Public Record Office. The balloons, equipped with cameras, were launched from bases in Scotland, Germany and Turkey and the plan was that the instruments would be recovered from the Pacific after they had passed over the Soviet Union. Attempts were made to keep the project secret, using the cover story that they were meteorological research balloons. The project began in 1955 and was abandoned in March 1956, because the percentage of successful recoveries was too low. The balloons caused a spate of UFO sightings in Scotland and Germany.

MAGONIA ETH Bulletin: All correspondence, articles etc., should be sent to the Editor:
John Harney, 27 Enid Wood House, High Street, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 1LN UK

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