

MAGONIA ETH Bulletin

Editor: JOHN HARNEY

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EDITORIAL

It is very difficult to find any really interesting and mysterious unexplained UFO reports, which are worth careful analysis to see if they indicate whether there might just be a possibility that the ETH should be taken seriously. However, recent signs are encouraging. Brad Sparks's re-examination of the RB-47 case, published in Jerome Clark's latest encyclopedia, and a revival of interest in the Travis Walton case, both indicate the possibility of interesting developments in the foreseeable future.

EXETER CE1

In 1965 the following statement was made to Project Blue Book:

I, Norman J. Muscarello, was hitchhiking on Rt. 150, three miles south of Exeter, New Hampshire, at 0200 hours on the 3rd of September. A group of five bright red lights appeared over a house about a hundred feet from where I was standing. The lights were in a line at about a sixty-degree angle. They were so bright, they lighted up the area. The lights then moved out over a large field and acted at times like a floating leaf. They would go down behind the trees, behind a house and then reappear. They always moved in the same sixty-degree angle. Only one light would be on at a time. They were pulsating: one, two, three, four, five, four, three, two, one. They were so bright I could not distinguish a form to the object. I watched these lights for about fifteen minutes and they finally disappeared behind some trees and seemed to go into a field. At one time while I was watching them, they seemed to come so close I jumped into a ditch to keep from being hit. After the lights went into a field, I caught a ride to the Exeter Police Station and reported what I had seen.

Patrolman Eugene Bertrand accompanied Muscarello back to the field where he had seen the UFO. At first he saw nothing, but when they walked into the field the flashing lights reappeared and staged a repeat performance. Before the lights finally moved off in a south-easterly direction, the two men were joined by Patrolman David Hunt, who also saw them.

There was a great wave of sightings in New Hampshire in 1965, but this incident was the most impressive and is the best known. Most of the others were, quite reasonably, attributed to sightings of aircraft lights, bright stars and planets.

As this incident got a lot of publicity, the US Air Force was keen to provide an explanation to reassure the public that it was really nothing to get excited about. However, Blue Book made rather a mess of it. In a book published some years after the event, Dr J. Allen Hynek wrote:

Not only is this a fine example of a Close Encounter of the First Kind, but it is a showcase illustration of Blue Book negligence, put-down of witnesses, attempts to explain away the testimony of responsible witnesses with a parade of 'official' explanations, and of capitulation on the part of the Pentagon which, months later, had to admit that the case should have been carried as 'Unidentified'. The file folders in Blue Book, however, still have the original evaluation of 'Astro-Stars/Planets' and 'Aircraft from Operation Big Blast'. (The astronomical evaluation is completely untenable and Operation Big Blast terminated more than an hour before the incident at Exeter began, according to official records.) (1)

Ufologist Raymond Fowler carried out thorough investigations of the case, as did journalist John G. Fuller, who wrote a book about it. (2) After conducting a correspondence with the Air Force about the case, Bertrand and Hunt finally received a letter from Lt. Col. John P. Spaulding, grudgingly admitting that ' . . . we have been unable to identify the object that you observed on September 3, 1965.' (3)

It was suggested that an advertising plane could have generated the sightings, but investigators, knowing that such aircraft often generated CE1 reports, checked and found that none of these were flying at the time. It is, anyway, unlikely that an advertiser would pay for a plane to fly around at such an unearthly hour.

One of the main sceptical attacks on the case came from Robert Sheaffer, in his demolition job on ufology, entitled *The UFO Verdict*. (4) To soften up the his readers before launching into possible explanations, he uses one of the favourite ploys of CSICOP sceptics, the denigration of ufologists and witnesses. He tells them that John G. Fuller ' . . . has recently written *The Ghost of Flight 401*, in which he asserts that one major airline has managed to fill some of the empty seats on its jumbo jets with spirits from the beyond.' (5) Not only that but, ' . . . officers Bertrand and Hunt both told NICAP that they had previously read UFO literature, although Fuller fails to mention this interesting fact.' (6)

Sheaffer suggests that some of the New Hampshire sightings were probably observations of Jupiter, including, by implication, those made by Muscarello and the two patrolmen. He notes that some close-encounter reports have proved, on investigation, to be sightings of astronomical objects.

If this seems unlikely, we should perhaps consider a case investigated by Allan Hendry. A waitress arriving home at 3:37 a.m. saw a saucer 25 feet in diameter, with red, green and blue flashing lights and a cloud haze around it. She called two other persons who also saw it. There were two lights next to the object which looked like stars, but pulsed in different colours like the saucer. The objects were viewed for 50 minutes. When Hendry checked the part of the sky the witnesses were looking at on astronomical charts he found that, on the morning in question, a crescent moon was visible and nearby were Mars and Jupiter in close conjunction. The witnesses had not reported seeing the moon in spite of having described the sky as clear, apart from a haze around the objects. (7)

Although somewhat exaggerated, the description of the objects was compatible with an observation of the moon and two planets seen through haze. However, in the case of the Exeter sightings, it is difficult to see how Jupiter could be perceived as a row of five brilliant red lights blinking on and off in sequence. If these reports were not generated by misperceptions of an advertising plane, a US Air Force exercise, or bright stars or planets, then it is difficult to imagine what the true explanation could be.

References

1. Hynek, J. Allen. *The Hynek UFO Report*, Sphere Books, London, 1978, 154
2. Fuller, John G. *Incident at Exeter*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1966
3. Hynek, op. cit., 165
4. Sheaffer, Robert. *The UFO Verdict: Examining the Evidence*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 1981
5. Ibid., 111
6. Ibid., 112
7. Hendry, Allan. *The UFO Handbook*, Sphere Books, London, 1980, 77-78

BOOK REVIEWS

Jenny Randles. *Something in the Air*, Robert Hale, London, 1998. £16.99

This book is a plea for aircraft encounters with UFOs to be taken more seriously. To this end Jenny Randles appeals to her readers to avoid the extremes of dismissing such reports as nonsense, or attributing them to the activities of ETs in their flying saucers.

Some reports of aerial encounters with UFOs cannot be attributed to stars or meteors, or atmospheric optical phenomena. This leaves two main causes of such reports, if we leave out the ETs. These are: atmospheric electrical phenomena, such as ball lightning and other electrical phenomena not often observed, so unrecognised by science, and; sightings of secret military aircraft on test flights.

Apart from the classic cases which are discussed, there is much interesting and original material, particularly concerning British sightings. Jenny manages to explain some of the British reports as natural phenomena, or false impressions caused by unusual formations of aircraft, such as fighter

planes being refuelled at night, giving the impression of a giant triangle. However, the theory that many sightings are of secret aircraft, manned or remotely piloted, being developed by British Aerospace at Warton, Lancashire, based to a great extent on the work of Tim Matthews, is highly controversial among British ufologists.

Jenny's work has confirmed the general impression that aircrews and air traffic controllers are reluctant to file official reports of strange aerial encounters. As she rightly points out, such an attitude is not beneficial to the cause of air safety.

This is definitely a book for the nuts-and-bolts ufologists to read and criticise, but it is not written to please the ETHers.

Bruce Rux. *Hollywood Vs. the Aliens: The Motion Picture Industry's Participation in UFO Disinformation*, Frog, Ltd., Berkeley, California, 1997. £16.99

Any readers who have enjoyed Martin Kottmeyer's articles in *Magonia* on the influence of science fiction films on UFO close-encounter and abduction stories will appreciate this book. It is rather like a very long Kottmeyer article.

Rux takes the opposite view to that of Kottmeyer. He tells us that, instead of UFO stories aping SF films, the SF films imitate real UFO accounts as part of a government-inspired disinformation project. Although the blurb warns us that he is writing tongue-in-cheek, by mentioning his 'mock-serious tone', some of his ideas are interesting.

For example, he asserts that films about alien invasion were either serious or ridiculous, depending on the impression the government or the intelligence agencies wanted to create at the time. For example, he points out that Ed Wood's notorious *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959) was so bad that it had to be deliberately bad, and his analysis of the film certainly seems convincing on that score.

Anyone who wishes to investigate the connection between SF films and the content of UFO reports will find this book a very useful reference manual.

LETTERS

In your 'Walton Again' article (No. 7, September 1998), you assert one of the sticking points for those who think the Walton incident was a hoax is the behaviour of his fellow woodsmen in the wake of his disappearance. You suggest they would have to have been brilliant actors to fool the lawmen who investigated, implying such folks aren't likely to have such talent.

The truth is, however, highly credible performances by ordinary people are quite common in criminal/hoax situations, even high-profile ones. For example, recently the US television magazine show *20/20* reported on the rapid burgeoning of hoaxed hate crimes - ethnic, race, and gay bashing and the like. This is a growth field for people perpetrating insurance fraud, promoting a cause, seeking attention and sympathy, etc., because of our mutual reluctance to call into question the veracity of victims of such despicable crimes and the revulsion civilised people feel for those who commit them.

20/20 illustrated the problem with four cases - a Jewish couple whose home (ultimately torched), car, and other property had been repeatedly defaced with swastikas, etc., over a period of months; a black man whose car had been spray-painted with anti-black slurs; two gay room-mates whose apartment had been trashed and defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti; and a black-white couple whose home and other property had been defaced with hate slogans and set afire. Television news clips and other video were shown, the 'victims' tearful, shaken, indignant - tremendously convincing. Similar clips of investigators were aired, leaving no doubt they were certain of the sincerity of these people. Neighbours and friends were equally convinced, and lavished donations of food, clothing, money and more on them. The defaced-car crime sparked a major anti-hate demonstration.

In the first case, FBI agents launched an investigation and were stunned when they caught the couple on surveillance video setting fire to their own home. (These two are in prison, and she's now quite convincingly claiming they were framed.) The defaced car case was solved only when the perpetrator bragged to an associate that he'd done it himself so he could get his car repainted at insurance company expense. A similar gaffe exposed the allegedly bashed gays, and the other arson case was cracked only when a sharp-eyed insurance investigator noticed a strong similarity to previous cases and discovered the couple involved had pulled the same trick before.

Believable behaviour by crime victims and UFO witnesses is one of the weakest elements of supporting evidence. While its absence is a warning flag, its presence should never be given any great

weight. Yet it's all too easy to fall into that trap - and I speak from experience, for example, having fallen into it with Glenn Dennis of Roswell fame.

That said, however, I agree it's highly unlikely all six of Walton's fellow woodsmen could have been in on a hoax and yet appeared so convincing, not to mention keeping their stories straight under the close scrutiny they received. If - IF - the Walton incident was a hoax, at least most of them were among the hoaxed.

Karl T. Pflock, Placitas, New Mexico

Thanks for sending me the *ETH Bulletin*. I have certainly enjoyed the debate it has encouraged. The striking thing about the issues you have raised is that people tend to think in terms of PSH versus ETH yet, as your September editorial notes, the PSH helps us understand popular beliefs about the subject. Even keen ETH supporters must acknowledge that the PSH can be a useful tool in separating the 'signal' from the 'noise'. Instead of that appreciation, ETH supporters tend to dismiss any PSH out-of-hand as ridiculous, yet they can believe that abductees can be transported through solid walls!

People who should know better refer to an abductee being "'clean" i.e., was not directly familiar with the abduction phenomenon' (John E. Mack, *Abduction*, Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 18). That is like saying a US citizen is not familiar with the appearance and characteristics of a motor vehicle. It is also noteworthy that out of Mack's 76 abduction cases he had only 4 extensively tested by PhD psychologists because such work is 'time-consuming and expensive' (ibid., p. 17). Out of the 4, 1 of the abductees had to be hospitalised and the other 3 tested within normal ranges. If 1 out of 4 of his better cases is dismissed in this manner it doesn't say a lot for the other 72 cases.

Mack concludes that he is dealing with a phenomenon that 'could not be explained psychiatrically' (ibid., p. 20) yet this is on the basis of 4 thorough tests. Furthermore, what are the similarities and differences between 'normal' abductees and those who are suffering from some sort of psychiatric disorder? Mack insists that you have to 'stretch and twist psychology beyond reasonable limits' (ibid., p. 20) to explain the abductee phenomenon, yet, on the basis of a few verbal accounts, that have not been subjected to rigorous testing, he is willing to discount the whole of prevailing Western science.

Psychology and sociology can at least be used to deal with our world in a scientific and testable manner; the ETH is just a belief system that, as the controversy stirred up by this bulletin has shown, is not inclined to accept explanations or even detailed examination of hallowed UFO cases.

Nigel Watson, Plymouth

Christopher Allan is fully right in rating the Gill case the best multiple-witness case on record in the sense of it being to all appearances reliable and a hard one to construct a prosaic explanation for that will be satisfying and compelling. When he asks if this is 'really unanswerable evidence of ETH', however, he is confusing insolubility with evidence for aliens. In the documents of the case Gill clearly states of the figures on the craft, 'no doubt they are human'. When Crutwell probed for details, Gill indicated that the parts he could see had the 'outlines of normal human beings'. Similarly problematic, the beings are walking on top of the craft while apparently aloft. This runs counter to all the cases in the literature that have the beings inside their craft behind doors and windows instead of up on deck. The upward-angled beams of the craft have no close parallel to other alien craft reports and they have no obvious function. They don't seem to be tracking birds or aeroplanes. Nothing of the case makes sense from an ETH perspective. Parts of the case involve misinterpretations of astronomical objects, but the parts of the case that involve multiple witnessing of figures on the deck of some sort of craft cannot reduce to such an explanation without invoking some hefty improbabilities about suggestibility. I advanced a theory in an earlier *Magonia* that it probably involved a boat involved in night fishing. It did not go down well with a number of UFO buffs and criticism by one fellow has been endless. At the end of the day when all the thrashing of minutiae is over, this idea may not convince, but it still seems to me better than the alternatives.

Martin S. Kottmeyer, Carlyle, Illinois

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