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THE DOWNFALL OF CORPORAL VALDÉS

Eight soldiers in the north of Chile see two small lights. The corporal in charge of the group disappears, to later return speaking incoherent words. This is the plot of the "Valdés case". Twenty-seven years after the best-known Chilean UFO story was first reported, some still try to revive it despite the lack of new reports. Nevertheless, multiple incoherencies in the account make the "abduction" of Cpl. Armando Valdés Garrido a complex and dubious story.

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"AN ARMY corporal disappeared for almost fifteen minutes after a visual contact with a UFO, when, with a patrol consisting of seven men, he was carrying out guard duty near Putre. The UFO came down and almost landed at the place called Pampa Llussuma". (1) That is how the news article began that was published Monday, 16 May 1977, by the daily newspaper *La Estrella de Arica*, in the first press appearance of the overexposed case of the "Putre UFO", or, as it has come to be known, the "Corporal Valdés" case.

This report already spoke of extraterrestrial vehicles and ships, making futile any subsequent effort to claim that there was no ufological contamination. For example, the article spoke of "the young soldiers confirm[ing] the presence of these extraterrestrial vehicles inland from Arica" (2) and said that the supposed conversation between the "kidnapped" corporal and the crew members of the

UFO includes "words that could well represent the dialogue of an extraterrestrial being". (1)

That report presents the body of what was to become the case to this day. And not only does it tend to pro-ETH fantasy, but it also begins to outline the spectacular embellishments, brimming with the ufological subculture, that today its spoiled narration shows with impunity. And, clearly, it possesses all the essential elements: an Army corporal disappears in sight of his subordinates, to reappear minutes later with several-days' growth of beard and a watch that showed an advanced date.

Here we will tell the story, to later examine it closely to find its multiple incongruities. We will begin with a summary of what was published in the press back then. It is the most faithful, detailed account that exists with respect to what happened that early-

morning Monday in autumn.

Let us go to the Pampa Llussuma, a place located five kilometres (three miles) from Putre (a town of fewer than 400 inhabitants at that time, and now just under 2,200), in the first region of Chile and some 150 kilometres (93 miles) north-east of Arica, near the far northern border with Peru. Let us set our mental clocks to the early morning of 25 April 1977. Like any night in the Andes foothills, the thermometer showed several degrees Celsius below zero (between 5 and 20 degrees Celsius below zero [between -4 and +23 degrees Fahrenheit]).

A "patrol" of eight soldiers, belonging to the Huamachuco Regiment mountain detachment, (3) sought to escape the nocturnal freeze by taking refuge in the stables that the regiment had in the area. They started a fire, around which remained Second Corporal Armando Valdés Garrido and conscripted soldiers Julio Enrique

Rojas Suárez, Germán Riquelme Valle, Iván Robles Mella, Humberto Rojas Véliz, and Raúl Salinas Vásquez, while soldiers Juan Reyes and Pedro Rosales Arancibia mounted guard (4) some ten metres (33 feet) away, at the doors of the stables to keep the horses from escaping. This was a prudent distance to maintain contact by voice, as the night was too dark for the troops to see each other.

The soldiers not on guard sang and joked with each other. Suddenly, shortly before four in the morning, Pedro Rosales ran to Valdés to tell him, "My corporal... come and see a light on the hill...!" Curious, the eight soldiers began to watch the spectacle: in front of them, halfway up the hill, was a powerful light. Valdés wanted to know how those "light bulbs" had got to that place. "We suddenly saw that two stars began to slowly come down from the sky... One of them went down on the other side of the hill and the glow is still seen there...", said Rosales and Reyes. The stronger light positioned itself about five hundred metres (1640 feet) from the soldiers, and was described as an oval shape, some 25 metres (82 feet) in diameter and with a violet colour with two luminous points of a deep red colour.

Before the events, Valdés had ordered the covering of the fire with a blanket. Supposedly the light reacted, moving away and approaching almost at once, always in the most absolute silence. Valdés, a little agitated by the situation, shouted, "Approach and identify yourselves!", without obtaining a response. Then, in the name of God, he asked the light to withdraw. Nothing happened.

Then he advanced a few metres toward that luminosity, disappearing suddenly. It was exactly 4:15 in the morning. (5) The soldiers, surprised, supposed that the non-commissioned officer had walked toward the other side. They passed fifteen minutes like

that, after which they called to Valdés and looked for him in the stable, without results. Until, the same way he had left, he returned. They did not hear steps, but could hear Valdés saying "boys...", before collapsing unconscious.

The conscripts picked him up and carried him over to the fire, or rather to what was left of it. (6) There Valdés stood up, stared at his men, pop-eyed, and told them, "You do not know who we are or where we come from... but I tell you that we will return". He laughed and according to the soldiers he had spasms and struggled for them to let him loose, until he fell asleep. Soon after, while they were covering him with a blanket, his subordinates noticed that the soldier had a beard about five days old, even though everybody had just shaved. (7) Valdés finally recovered at seven in the morning.

When he woke up, the non-commissioned officer felt better. His beard remained as the only vestige of the strange experience of the day before. His beard and his digital watch, which was supposedly stopped at 4:30 a.m. on April 30, but which soon after would again function normally. At least, this is what was claimed. It could not be verified if the watch actually backed up to again show the correct date, and Valdés says the watch was lost.

The light had disappeared when day dawned, at about six in the morning, and Valdés now claimed "not to remember anything from the moment when I moved away from you" (1). Different testimonies gathered later claim that Valdés, once recovered from the impact, asked them to saddle up a horse for him to inform the regiment what had happened. He made the half-hour trip between the stables and the regiment alone.

The news of the sighting reached the ears of Pedro Araneda, a crafts

teacher deeply interested in the subject of UFOs. The soldiers went to the ufologist's house to tell him what had happened to them, primarily because Araneda was recognised for his involvement in other cases in the area. So at about 9 in the morning he spoke with the conscripts and showed them a book with pictures of UFOs, for them to pick out the one most similar to what they had seen (!).

It is striking that the news - which made a big splash in the press - was published only in the middle of May, no earlier than 23 days after the events. Why such a delay, if Araneda was a "correspondent" on that subject for the newspaper *La Estrella de Arica*, and he knew the story the very same day it happened?

Pedro Araneda made a recording - 180 minutes long, according to the press - with the testimony of the soldiers, in which Valdés claims that he did not remember anything and only knew what his subordinates told him. (8) But he added that he felt as if he had fallen into a deep well, and showed how contaminated he was by extraterrestrial mythology when he indicated, "There was not a word that was directed to me... If it is that those beings really exist".

At *La Estrella de Arica* they took great pride in having always published exclusives on UFOs in the area. Even today they continue using Valdés in their feature stories, as a way of keeping in mind the "news high spot" of 27 years ago. The zeal reached the point of publishing that "the exclusivity of the news is, has been, and will be *La Estrella de Arica's*.... Other versions are absolutely invented based on the data published by us, save for those emanating directly from our daily newspaper". (9)

By the same token, it is not surprising that a couple of months later the appearance of the case in the *National*

Enquirer attracted attention. The reporters of this US tabloid submitted Araneda's tape recording to the Psychological Stress-Evaluator (PSE), a "truth-detecting" device. (10) The editorial line of *La Estrella de Arica* sought pro-UFO sensationalism, as is confirmed by their giving space to supposed UFO photos every now and then.

VIRGIN WITNESS?

At the time the Valdés case came out, Chile was experiencing a real UFO effervescence, and the news media were responding to popular interest with surveys, jokes, historical reviews of the history of flying saucers, and other information about the phenomenon. No one could say that the information about Valdés and his subordinates is clean, ufologically virgin. Especially not after establishing that already in *La Estrella de Arica's* edition of 17 May, its reporters attributed to "the presence of the craft" (11) the supposed physical effects, both in Valdés and in his watch.

It is also necessary to stress that the protagonist of the story was previously interested in the UFO subject, at least as an indirect witness to a true psychosis awakened by the "flying saucers". This is because of all the talk about UFOs in the newspapers and on radio and television - everyone was talking about them. The reporters themselves proved this when they wrote that "for him [Valdés]..., the movements of the brightly-lit Unidentified Flying Objects are not a mystery".

This contradicts some of his statements: "I know that I expose myself to being laughed at... But I was one of those who thought that I had to 'see to believe' in UFOs... Now the conscripts and I have seen and we believe that behind that light that visited us that night there is

'something' intelligent that comes from another planet". (12) It is striking that Valdés should then request to be submitted to hypnosis to remember the lost fifteen minutes (perhaps because of the pleas of some "investigators" to do it, for the purpose of knowing what he had experienced during those supposed fifteen lost minutes. Though other investigators warned him that hypnosis could be dangerous). In the face of this kind of statement, and especially because of pressure from the news media, eager to know more details about such a spectacular piece of news, the Provincial Government found itself obligated to respond.

OFFICIAL AND OTHER REACTIONS

On 17 May 1977, one day after the case was made known in the daily *La Estrella de Arica*, the Provincial Governor in that city, Colonel Óscar Figueroa, sent Circular No. 21 to the news media, asking them to forward articles to him for approval before publication, and requesting moderation in the tone of the information. Figueroa ordered the texts to be subjected to his scrutiny, making use of Decree Law 12/81 of Dec. 11, 1975 (see Box 1).

This should not be surprising. The country was under the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, and the news media always had to pass prior censorship, in most cases under the charge of DINACOS, the Dirección Nacional de Comunicación Social (the National Administration of Social Communication), an entity created by the government for such purposes. It did not involve a specific example of censorship for fear of the Martians, but rather the confirmation of a regular policy of the regimen.

On the 18th, the Office of the Commander in Chief of the Army handed out an official report (see

BOX 1

INSTRUCTIONS OF THE MILITARY REGIME

Circular No. 21 of the Provincial Governor, Colonel Óscar Figueroa Márquez

Relative to the multiple articles disseminated in the local daily newspapers on the appearance of Unidentified Flying Objects - UFOs - in various localities of this province, the undersigned Provincial Governor believes it necessary to transmit to the Editor the following instructions:

All acts of publication and declaration referring to this subject, should be made known to the undersigned Governor prior to their publication, taking care that such information be edited in a prudent tone, avoiding excessive comments lacking scientific basis that misrepresent the reality of the facts.

Which I communicate to the Editor for his knowledge and fulfilment in accordance with the precepts established in D.L. [Decree Law - Author] 12/81 of 11 Dec. 1975.

Greeting you respectfully [Yours truly],
(s) Óscar Figueroa Márquez,
Army colonel, Provincial Governor of Arica.

Box 2) that declared that what had appeared in the press was approximately the same thing that the soldiers had said, and that the Army was not going to make a statement with respect to the events. That was all. To be enthusiastic about such a declaration is manifestly excessive. Despite this, many ufologists see in this communication a historic landmark, a demonstration not only

BOX 2:

THE ARMY OF CHILE RESPONDS

Press Bulletin No. 59 of the Department of Public Relations of the Army and of the Chief Commander's Office.

In the face of numerous inquiries from the commercial communications media with respect to the events that took place in the vicinity of Putre on 25 April 1977, to a military patrol, the following is clarified:

- 1- The Army does not go on record with respect to the events related by the members of the patrol;
- 2- From the moment the event occurred until it was made known by the press, no official account on the part of this Institution has been given;
- 3- In accordance with the consultations undertaken officially, it is clear that the versions given by the press to date are in general consistent with the accounts of the members of the patrol;
- 4- Statement transmitted Wednesday, the 18th of May, at 16:30 hours.

that "They [the ETs] are here", but also that the military knows it, and hides it from us. Nothing could be more absurd.

But the fuse was already lit, and the news rapidly crossed the borders of Chile. The information appeared in the newspapers of Uruguay, Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Canada, the United States, and several other countries throughout the world, where it reached thanks to the dispatches of various news agencies (ANSA, Latin, Agence France Press, EFE, AP, UPI, etc). With some variations, they

reproduced the "official" story, which has also appeared (again with variations) in the books of Antonio Ribera (who spoke of the case to the House of Lords All-Party UFO Study Group in 1979), Jenny Randles, and several others.

The account was also told in various UFO magazines, among them the February 1978 issue of the well-known *Flying Saucer Review*.

THE FIRST SIGNS OF ALARM

A few weeks after the encounter, Armando Valdés Garrido was sent to the capital of Chile, Santiago, for the purpose of being admitted to the Military Hospital, though some examinations were done in the Psychiatric Hospital. There he was seen by psychiatrist Raúl Molina Bravo, who has declined to answer questions, on the basis of doctor-patient confidentiality.

Even so, in a short interview granted to the Santiago daily *La Tercera de la Hora*, Molina indicated that Valdés suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, which is a "psychosis with loss of a sense of reality, which is produced with a lucid consciousness". He added that what Corporal Valdés had was "a typical lucid psychosis".

As the years passed, more elements were added to the original account, which did not give cause for the ufologists of the period to question the veracity, or at least the credibility, of the version given by the principal witness.

On Monday 11 February 1980, Valdés was working as an instructor in the Regimiento Chacabuco, in Concepción, in Chile's VIII Region. There, along with other soldiers and Captain Rodríguez Brunner, he sighted a strange phenomenon in the sky. Years later the soldier would say that it was a triangular UFO, but he

clarified that "the UFO is not the triangle. That is only the beam of light that they [the UFOs] emit". He added, in addition, that "wherever I am, strange things always happen, related to UFOs". (13) The fact is that Armando Valdés did not have reason to know that the "UFO" was nothing more than combustion gases from the last stage of Cosmos 1164, which had taken off from Plesetsk, in the Soviet Union, according to information from US researcher James Oberg.

In those days, the same as now, some in the press claimed that to interview Valdés one had to go to the President of the Republic himself, a post that at that time boasted Augusto Pinochet. That is not true. The following sentence is extracted from a letter sent in 1983 by the Vice Commander in Chief of the Army, Julio Canessa, to reporter Juan Jorge Faundes, who went through channels to get a conversation with the "abducted" soldier: "There is no restriction on the part of the institution for Corporal Valdés to make his experience known. Nevertheless, this Army officer has made manifest his desire not to be interviewed".

In the face of that letter, the protagonist of this story granted an interview to Faundes in the city of Temuco, in the IX Region of Chile, where he was assigned at that time. In the conversation, Valdés acknowledged that he did not want to appear in the press and that he did not want any more to be "Corporal Valdés who had that experience with a UFO in Putre. I want to be simply Armando Valdés". Time would remove the veracity from that claim.

In 1993, now a sergeant, Valdés reappeared in the news media, this time indicating that the "extraterrestrials will come back". Still in Temuco, the city where he was to settle down for good after the end of his military career, Valdés told a regional cable television channel that

"They [meaning the extraterrestrials] are going to arrive and it will be necessary to be at peace with God", adding that when his daughter Angélica was sick, he called upon the aliens, who healed her. (14)

THE SHOW MUST GO ON: TELEVISION AND THE BOOK

As a way of preparing the ground for the supposedly imminent publication of a book with his testimony, on Wednesday 16 June 1999, Armando Valdés Garrido appeared on the programme "De pe a pa" (something like "From A to Z") on Televisión Nacional de Chile, which reaches the entire country. Interviewed by the host of the programme, Valdés indicated that he was going to speak now because "it is the moment, it is the peak. It is the end of the millennium; something serious could happen, and I think that now is the moment". On that occasion, many of the "details" that Valdés had to add to the case to fit the times, would be in evidence. We shall see.

Asked how long he had been inside the "space ship", the ex-soldier responded fifteen minutes. "In that thing that I had in front of me, it had a subhuman [sic] intelligence, a not our human intelligence [sic]", said a confused Valdés to explain his feelings at the moment of facing what everybody now characterises as the "ship".

As with any story, this one also has its moral. "There is a message. In the universal order, under the powerful hand of the creator, who is God, nothing happens just because.... The message will be good or bad according to the point of view from which humanity takes it", indicated the supposed UFO abductee, at the same time that he said he feared for the future of humanity. Let us not forget that Valdés is a member of a fundamentalist evangelical religious

sect, the "Unión de Centros Bíblicos". At any rate, this is not the most surprising part. There is still the main course: the Ummite connection (yes, Ummite) and the men in black (yes, men in black). And the most curious thing is that the two things are connected, as the men in black visited Armando Valdés in his military office in Temuco (15) to tell him a secret that only he knew. And what was the secret? The fear that the letter H provokes in the "abductee".

Valdés indicated that he avoided the H on heliports, and that on his billfold and on his brief case was a metal stamping of an H without his being able to explain the motivations that caused him to do that (Sic --this would seem to contradict his previously-described fear of the letter H). These H's would be a symbol, "The name of a planet", he maintained. The letter H... on the bottom of the UFO of San José de Valderas... The H of the Ummites... Who provides information about UFOs to Valdés? Can we trust his testimony now?

Before leaving the television cameras, Armando Valdés promised to publish a book with his version of the events by the end of 1999... We are still waiting. At one time he thought to publish it on an Internet Portal, but he had no luck. And until May 2003 he had a web site (www.cabovaldes.com, not available now), he was advised by an agency, and had his own representative, though all this seems to have fallen apart.

One month before the appearance of the soldier on "De pe a pa", the program "OVNI" ("UFO"), on Televisión Nacional, showed the interview of two of the conscripts who had been present on the night of the encounter. They were Raúl Salinas (now a construction worker) and Humberto Rojas (now a retired non-commissioned officer of the Carabineers, which is the uniformed

police), both 42 years old at the time of the interview (1999). On that occasion, Salinas showed that he was not going to be a secondary character in this story, and indicated that he saw Valdés fall from the sky: "As he is little [Valdés is a very short man, just over 1.60 m. (5' 3")], I thought it was one of them", he said, referring to the extraterrestrials. Salinas was the only one who saw Valdés fall from the sky.

A STRANGE CHARACTER: RAÚL SALINAS

Raúl Salinas appears on the scene for the first time on the television program "OVNI". Since then, ufologists have set their eyes on this simple construction worker, whose account, by moments incoherent, is plagued by extraordinary elements, which include the visit of a strange woman called Amalia and trips in flying saucers to other planets. But let's start from the beginning.

According to what Salinas said in an interview with members of the now-defunct Equipo Superior de Investigaciones Ovnológicas (ESIO, Superior Team of Ufological Investigations), after leaving the military service that he was fulfilling in Putre, he returned to his home some six months after the UFO experience of April 1977 and fell into a deep depression. "At that time, when I was like that, I opened the window [of the bedroom], looked upward, and spoke with 'Them'. There was something intense with 'them'", he indicated in a passage of that conversation. Obviously, when he spoke of "Them", he was referring to the aliens.

Salinas recovered from his depression and began to have, in the early '90s, strange dreams about flying saucers that took him to the Andes Mountain Range, in the company of a woman called Amalia,(16) who is moreover the queen of a planet, with an

Ummite-like symbol on her breast. According to Salinas, the ship in which he travels is the same one that he claims to have seen on the Pampa Llussuma in 1977. He describes it as gigantic, the size of a football stadium (i.e., a soccer stadium; he was referring specifically to the immense Estadio Nacional de Chile).

Salinas, who calls himself the messenger of this strange civilisation, claims to have travelled to Amalia's world, where he has seen nuclear explosions that could also affect our planet. In several passages of the interview the ex-conscript repeated that he was waiting for the time to go away with his friends, for whom he was ready to leave his family.

It is not surprising that Salinas thinks that the symbols he has seen on and near his space companions are "Ummite words". The H, in effect, would be a symbol that, according to the aliens, will protect him if he draws it on the door of his house. His escorts, tall, with short white hair, blue eyes, and with the lower part of their bodies similar to a kangaroo's, have predicted to him that the year 2004 is going to have "something big", possibly the explosion of an atomic bomb.

Certainly, as is common in this type of situation, the narrators are capable only of cooking up a story to the extent of their possibilities, and Salinas's account is rather basic, poor in nuance, and somewhat rough.

ATTEMPTS AT AN EXPLANATION, AND EXCESSIVE IMAGINATION

The stories woven around the "Valdés case" have their basis in the contactees and the unwillingness of some ex-conscripts or persons connected to the subject to speak about it. There has been much speculation about the motivations for this silence, and much has been

written trying to explain the phenomena that supposedly took place that cold early morning in the Pampa Llussuma. Some enlightenment in this respect has been offered by researchers such as Argentine psychologist Roberto Banchs.

After investigating the case, Banchs expressed some considerations, such as that Pedro Araneda was known for being a fervent believer in flying saucers and extraterrestrials. He also reminded us that the "strange" aspects put forth as proofs, that is to say the watch that stopped and the beard that grew, "do not amount to any kind of scientific evidence".

The first hypothesis that I considered as a possible explanation for this case was that the early morning of 25 April 1977, had the brilliant presence of Venus and Mars, which could have caused confusion among the soldiers. This is based on the fact that the conscripts themselves, as part of the account, compared the light to stars. (17) Also, let us not forget that a similar error ended up explaining part of the famous case of Betty and Barney Hill. (18) Nevertheless, with the invaluable help of Manuel Borraz, it was determined that that was impossible. Venus was not visible until almost an hour after the time stated by the soldiers, and Mars was practically imperceptible in the area that day. Moreover, their positions in the sky do not match the UFOs', which were described by the witnesses as being toward the north-east. So we are obliged to flatly discard this alternative.

Others, such as Chilean ufologist Jorge Anfruns, prefer more colourful versions, and do not bother to look for explanations. Anfruns is convinced that there were other military detachments nearby, and that those soldiers experienced electromagnetic effects in their radio transmitters (which in fact they did not have).

Then it came out that Valdés was allowed to stay in the Army to take military advantage of the "parapsychological faculties that all abductees have", and kept in guarded places so that the extraterrestrials would not try to take him away again. No comment.

VALDÉS FALLS TO PIECES

At the end of 1993, Argentine journalist Alejandro Agostinelli (ufologist, editor of various UFO bulletins and then of *El Ojo Escéptico* ["The Sceptical Eye"]) was able to speak with Valdés, whom he sought out to re-investigate his story. Agostinelli recalls: "At that time, Valdés insisted that he did not remember anything of what happened during the lapse when he lost consciousness, added the curious detail according to which those beings were somewhat demonic, and asked me to negotiate with Editorial Atlántida, where I worked, for the disbursement of three thousand dollars, if I remember correctly, in exchange for an exclusive report and the publication rights for a book that he said he had begun to write".

Beyond the apparent commercial interests behind Valdés's delayed intention to make his experience known by means of a book, there are aspects of the account that were never made known, were omitted, forgotten, or obviated by those who initially had the job of investigating the story. One of the points most overlooked by the works that have pretended to shed some light on this experience is that of the social and historical context in which Chile lived at the time.

At a historic level, it is possible to point out that Chile suffered a complex political-military situation. Not only was the country under a dictatorial regimen and a brutal repression, but also ties with neighbouring countries were at a

dangerously low level. For example, Chile had had no diplomatic relations with Bolivia since 1962, and only in 1974 and 1975 was there some rapprochement between the two governments.

This did not bear fruit, complicating Chile's international outlook, which turned dark when, at the beginning of 1977, Peru made public a military treaty with the Soviet Union for more than 700 million dollars, at the same time that Argentina threatened Chile's southern borders. This obliged the Chilean military to give notice that, if there were to be a conflict, it would be under the variables of the HV-3 (Hipótesis Vecinal 3, or Vicinal [pertaining to the neighbourhood] Hypothesis 3), for dealing with a possible bellicose confrontation with the three bordering countries: Peru, Bolivia and Argentina.

This prospect made Chile reinforce the northern front militarily, mining the borders and augmenting the personnel in the area. Retired Army Brigadier General Pedro Durcodoy (a captain at the time of the Valdés case) indicated to the television program "OVNI" that the northern front was reinforced "in secret, as we were not going to give information to the adversary". This explains why it was said that the group of soldiers that accompanied Valdés (an unarmed squad) was a "patrol" and not a "guard": simply because a patrol is armed, and a guard could be armed, but not necessarily. It was reported that they were an armed patrol because once the matter was made public, it was necessary to take advantage of the opportunity to give the impression that all the Chilean soldiers in the north were armed.

Antonio Flores, a soldier who was in the regiment when the Valdés case occurred, indicated that "at that time Valdés did not own his own weapon, nor did the service require a weapon. It is not like the guard, where the commander goes around with his

pistol and the soldiers with rifles". Flores even goes further and confirms what was mentioned earlier: "The patrol is what has to go out to travel over a specific place. What Valdés had was not a patrol but a squad on duty in the stables. And their mission was to wet down a quantity of sacks of oats, distribute them to the horses, and then clean up after them. They did not carry weapons for that".

From what was said above about the political-military situation in Chile, it is not wild to say that UFOs arrived at the best moment, as they helped to loosen the tense atmosphere that abounded at an official level. In this manner, the population could be distracted from foreign conflicts, keeping them uninformed of the problems on the borders. The military regime on more than one occasion used paranormal or similar subjects to distract the public.

At the beginning of the 1980s a campaign was undertaken to make people believe that the Virgin Mary was appearing in an area in the V Region. The front pages of the newspapers were devoted to it, taking space away from the economic crisis that was eating up the resources of the nation.

Without in any way affecting the attractiveness of the well-known "Valdés case", it is true that a critical spirit in dealing with the central aspects of the account has always been lacking. These include the subject of the beard and the story of the watch. Unfortunately, they are both fundamental pillars, and, nevertheless, there is no proof at all to verify the claims. Likewise, it must be stressed that the work undertaken previously by ufologists and interested persons was rather poor, to the point of never even including details as basic as the cardinal point where the UFOs appeared or the day of the week on which that 25 April fell.

In addition to this analysis, it is worth the trouble to point out two fundamental facts in the development of the story of Cpl. Valdés:

- The roles of Pedro Araneda and *La Estrella de Arica* were of vital importance. Araneda showed pictures of UFOs to the soldiers and ended up submerging them in saucer imagery, while the daily undertook to inflate the case and take it to unsuspected limits.

- Valdés and UFOs: his multiple testimonies in the press show that Cpl. Valdés, 23 years old at the time of his UFO experience, did know about UFOs, contradicting those who have attempted to present him as a "virgin witness". He is, strictly speaking, a "repeater".

If the Valdés case were truly the appearance of an extraterrestrial ship as they have tried to make us think, would it be necessary to adorn it with so many mystifying elements? The obvious answer is no. Not only is there a question if the soldiers actually saw something that night, which is not at all certain, we have been able to establish some facts that go toward weakening the credibility of some of the witnesses and, therefore, muddying the case as a whole. Did they see an undefined stimulus in the sky or was it all a sham? The only thing that is clear in all this imbroglío is that, if a case is real, it does not need any embellishments. And the Valdés case is full of embellishments that have been forgotten by believing ufologists. Let each one reach his own conclusions.

NOTES:

1. Luis Maturana, Luis Daroch, and Pedro Araneda, "Patrulla Contactó Con OVNI en Putre", *La Estrella de Arica*, Monday 16 May, 1977, p. 10.

2. Ibid, p. 11.
3. There are now in the area two regiments, that of Infantry No. 4 "Rancagua" of the city of Arica and the "Huamachuco" Regiment of Putre. The latter is where, at the date of the "UFO encounter", the horses for military use were cared for.
4. In subsequent testimony, ex-conscript Raúl Salinas assured that he was on guard. This claim, to judge by the initial testimony and some later testimony, must be discarded.
5. One must now wonder who saw the time, and who would worry about a detail like that under the circumstances. When the subject is seen like that, the most prudent thing would be to take this detail as just another claim.
6. Wouldn't the fire have gone out when they covered it with the blanket? Perhaps they carried him to next to the remains of the fire, but how could they see if there was no moon, there was no fire, and there was certainly no electric light? Maybe with the luminosity radiated by the UFO? A mystery.
7. There are disparate versions about the beard. Sometimes it is claimed that the soldiers had shaved in the morning, though Raúl Salinas says that Valdés shaved in his presence at 6:00 p.m. For his part, ufologist Antonio Huneeus maintains that Valdés had shaved at 9:00 p.m. on April 24. It is certainly difficult to think that Valdés would have shaved in the desert, with the cold there and with frozen water.
8. This makes it clear that Valdés does not have anything to tell us, or at least nothing that he did not hear from his own soldiers.
9. See Luis Maturana and Luis Daroch, "Algo Me Atraía... Era Como una Comunicación Interna Con la Luz", *La Estrella de Arica*, Thursday 19 May 1977, pp. 8 and 9 (p. 8 for this information).
10. Michael J. Hoy, "Soldier Snatched by UFO Loses Five Days of His Life—In 15 Minutes!" *National Enquirer* (Lantana, Florida), 28 June 1977, p. 33. Reproduced in the Aerial Phenomenon Clipping & Information Center's monthly newsclipping compilation (Cleveland, Ohio), July 1977, pp. 10-11. See the *Enquirer's* defence of this report in an article by John Holusha for the *Washington Star* (datelined Lantana, Fla). Reprinted under the headline "Enquirer thrives on 'good' news" in the Appleton (Wis). *Post-Crescent*, 24 July 1977.
11. Luis Maturana and Luis Daroch, "Ahora Creemos Que Hay Alguien Inteligente en Otros Planetas," *La Estrella de Arica*, Tuesday 17 May 1977, p. 8.
12. See *La Estrella de Arica*, Tuesday 18 May 1977, p. 8. It would be nice to know the basis for these statements.
13. See Juan Jorge Faundes, "He Estado Huyendo Todo el Tiempo", Santiago de

- Chile *La Tercera de la Hora*, "Revista Buen Domingo" section, in the series "Los Extraterrestres", Sunday 2 October 1983.
14. The girl had a problem with her blood, which was treated in the Hospital Naval de Talcahuano, VIII Region.
 15. This was in his office of the Tucapel Regiment, in Temuco. This caused many to raise their eyebrows in doubt: the aliens would have eluded the heavy military guard.
 16. Salinas is inconsistent about the name of the woman, as sometimes he calls her "Amalia" and other times "Malla".
 17. Of course, neither Venus nor Mars are stars, but that term is commonly given to any point of luminosity in the sky. Hence the connection. See Luis Maturana and Luis Daroch, "Patrulla Militar Vio Otros OVNIS Antes del Contacto", *La Estrella de Arica*, Friday 20 May 1977, p. 10.
 18. Robert Sheaffer, *The UFO Verdict/Examining the Evidence*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y., 1981. Chapter 5, "Close Encounter of the Third Kind: Abduction!" pp. 33-49. Specifically p. 35 for passage attributing the "UFO" to Jupiter.

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