

1

00:00:30,000 --> 00:00:38,680

Good evening. In life there is one certainty, and that is that it ends. Fear of dying is

2

00:00:38,680 --> 00:00:44,360

a fear of the unknown, of taking a journey into uncharted waters. But is it a leap into

3

00:00:44,360 --> 00:00:49,680

the abyss? There are people who claim to have glimpsed what lies beyond. They're not psychics

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00:00:49,680 --> 00:00:55,280

or mystics, but normal, everyday people who've had what is known as a near-death experience.

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00:00:55,280 --> 00:01:10,960

It was so brilliant. The feeling of love, joy, knowledge, super. And off we went.

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00:01:10,960 --> 00:01:17,760

The fact that it seemed likely that I was going to die in a strange country away from a family

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00:01:17,760 --> 00:01:24,200

and friends was totally unimportant. In some ways it was a rather wonderful experience because it

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00:01:24,200 --> 00:01:31,920

brought about such an enormous transformation in my life. I felt some peace and contentment. I

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00:01:31,920 --> 00:01:38,800

seemed happy. After all the noise and explosions and the flames and sparks I'd gone through,

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00:01:38,800 --> 00:01:44,880

it was so peaceful. The near-death experience is a phenomenon that has been widely recognised

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00:01:44,880 --> 00:01:50,000

for many centuries. When people have been on the brink of death recover, they report

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00:01:50,120 --> 00:01:56,160

remarkably similar experiences. Neuropsychiatrist Dr Peter Fennick is Britain's leading clinical

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00:01:56,160 --> 00:02:07,760

authority on the subject. I've studied over 400 cases, but at the moment I can't see

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00:02:07,760 --> 00:02:14,960

a satisfactory scientific explanation which really explains the data. At the age of 17

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00:02:15,040 --> 00:02:20,960

David Whitmarsh was in the Navy serving on a frigate in the Far East. Part of my duties

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00:02:20,960 --> 00:02:38,960

was testing sockets. All of a sudden big flash, like an explosion in the mind of my brain.

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00:02:38,960 --> 00:02:46,480

And I realised that I'd taken the full 415 volts. David then entered a state which had

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00:02:46,480 --> 00:02:52,440

all the classic features of the near-death experience. You become very frightened and then

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00:02:52,440 --> 00:03:00,640

suddenly you're transfused by calmness and then you start to lose consciousness. I felt

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00:03:00,720 --> 00:03:10,720

myself in a beautiful darkness. It was lovely, peaceful. I'd gone to go down, down a tunnel.

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00:03:10,720 --> 00:03:17,160

The tunnel you usually float down, it's black, then you see a speck of light at the end and

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00:03:17,160 --> 00:03:21,680

you float towards the speck of light, get bigger and bigger and as you enter it you

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00:03:21,680 --> 00:03:27,840

enter into a feeling of universal love and compassion. I found myself standing in this

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00:03:28,400 --> 00:03:36,480

beautiful yellow cornfield and I appeared to be wearing a blue gown and then I saw from

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00:03:36,480 --> 00:03:42,640

the corner of my eye what appeared to be a train on the horizon. Then I felt myself

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00:03:44,080 --> 00:03:50,080

go, going towards the train, moving towards it as though it was zooming into it. There seemed

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00:03:50,080 --> 00:03:56,480

to be figures in the train. I couldn't see their features, they were misty, shadowy.

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00:03:57,280 --> 00:04:02,160

Then they appeared to be beckoning and all of a sudden I was in the train. I was sat there with

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00:04:02,160 --> 00:04:11,920

them. It was just a babble of excitement, happiness, contentment and then my happiness appeared to

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00:04:11,920 --> 00:04:19,200

be shattered. I felt a pressure on my shoulders. I couldn't understand what was happening. I wanted

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00:04:19,200 --> 00:04:24,800

to stay here and for some story and reason I felt myself going up, always being pushed down

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00:04:25,600 --> 00:04:28,960

within a period of a few seconds I was back on the deck of the ship again.

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00:04:30,160 --> 00:04:36,720

I was so angry. I just didn't want to leave, I just wanted to go back.

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00:04:38,960 --> 00:04:44,240

What baffled scientists is that David Whitmarsh like many others has a precise memory of his

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00:04:44,240 --> 00:04:51,200

near-death experience even though he was unconscious. An unconscious state is when the brain ceases

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00:04:51,200 --> 00:04:57,120

to function. For example, if you faint, you fall to the floor, you don't know what's happening

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00:04:57,760 --> 00:05:04,160

and the brain isn't working. The memory systems are particularly sensitive to unconsciousness

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00:05:04,160 --> 00:05:10,960

so you won't remember anything but yet after one of these experiences people come out with clear

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00:05:10,960 --> 00:05:18,400

lucid memories. It was so clear and so it wasn't mixed up like a dream or an hallucination could be.

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00:05:18,960 --> 00:05:27,280

It was the same as I'm talking now. Now this is a real puzzle for science and I've not yet seen

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00:05:27,840 --> 00:05:34,400

any good scientific explanation which can explain that fact. One theory is that the near-death

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00:05:34,400 --> 00:05:39,520

experience is simply a function of anoxia, the condition when the brain is starved of oxygen.

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00:05:40,320 --> 00:05:45,360

Alan Pring is a former Royal Air Force pilot who knows what it's like to be without oxygen.

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00:05:45,440 --> 00:05:54,000

I was rather stupid and I went far too high without oxygen. You get light-headed, euphoric and

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00:05:55,360 --> 00:06:01,520

nothing seems terribly important. But Alan has also had a near-death experience which he recalls

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00:06:01,520 --> 00:06:06,560

with absolute clarity. He insists it's quite distinct from the mental confusion of oxygen

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00:06:06,720 --> 00:06:15,600

deprivation. It's there like no other memory. It began during a routine operation. I knew

48

00:06:16,560 --> 00:06:24,400

that I was dead. I wasn't bothered and I felt as if I was waiting for something to happen

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00:06:25,040 --> 00:06:37,280

and it did. In a flash the whole of my life passed before me. Everything that I'd ever done,

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00:06:38,640 --> 00:06:48,320

ever thought, ever said was there and I floated off through this darkness and

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00:06:48,400 --> 00:07:02,160

drifted down into a large, very large room. And in each corner there was a figure.

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00:07:04,080 --> 00:07:10,960

They all seemed to have like a monk's cowl and they all had their faces turned away from me.

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00:07:11,920 --> 00:07:19,520

And then they started to ask me questions. What do you regret about your life?

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00:07:20,640 --> 00:07:25,520

I suppose the times I've hurt people. What is the most important thing you've learned?

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00:07:26,640 --> 00:07:33,520

To be wise with humility. Alan Pring found himself being judged, a familiar feature of

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00:07:33,520 --> 00:07:39,360

the near-death experience. It's very moral and very judgemental and but the person who's judging

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00:07:39,440 --> 00:07:44,720

is you. You judge yourself and all those nasty little grabby things you've done you don't like

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00:07:44,720 --> 00:07:54,320

very much. And now I was in a place that words cannot describe. Just a wonderful

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00:07:55,040 --> 00:08:08,000

aurora of light. All embracing love, compassion, knowledge or pouring in.

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00:08:08,960 --> 00:08:15,520

What happened next was the worst moment that I'd ever known.

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00:08:18,800 --> 00:08:24,320

I realized I couldn't go on. I had to turn around and come back.

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00:08:27,280 --> 00:08:34,640

The reason I had to come back was that I felt was that I was very much in love with my wife.

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00:08:38,480 --> 00:08:47,840

And I wanted to be able to tell her that you can't die. It's impossible to die.

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00:08:49,600 --> 00:08:54,640

So what accounts for Alan Pring's visions of a possible afterlife if it's not a lack of oxygen?

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00:08:55,360 --> 00:09:01,120

Drugs, whether taken medicinally or recreationally, often lead to similar states. Could this be the

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00:09:01,120 --> 00:09:07,360

answer? The difficulty with those theories is that when you create these wonderful states by

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00:09:07,360 --> 00:09:13,760

taking drugs you're conscious. In the near-death experience you're unconscious. And one of the

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00:09:13,760 --> 00:09:21,280

things we know about brain function in unconsciousness is that you cannot create images and if you do

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00:09:21,280 --> 00:09:27,040

you cannot remember them. Drugs certainly had no part to play in the experience of psychologist

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00:09:27,040 --> 00:09:33,760

Margo Gray. On holiday in India in 1982 she caught typhoid and felt her life ebbing away.

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00:09:34,480 --> 00:09:42,320

I found myself out of my body and I was very surprised you know how Eli looked but I felt

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00:09:42,320 --> 00:09:48,720

totally detached from the whole experience. Margo's experience was not immediately one of joy and

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00:09:48,720 --> 00:09:56,960

peace. She first faced a battle with death itself. With a young girl who looked very familiar.

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00:09:58,080 --> 00:10:02,560

In a curious kind of way it was rather like a doppelganger experience. It was rather like

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00:10:02,560 --> 00:10:11,200

looking at myself at that age. I looked on the other side of the pool and I could see this dark

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00:10:11,760 --> 00:10:18,960

murky patch on the bottom of the pool and I knew that it was a dead body without it being told

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00:10:18,960 --> 00:10:28,800

and I didn't want to go over but somehow I was compelled. It came up from the bottom and grabbed

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00:10:28,800 --> 00:10:35,680

me in a vice-like grip and started dragging me down and just as I felt I couldn't hold on any

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00:10:35,680 --> 00:10:44,240

longer I did actually just my head came out of the water and with my free arm I said to it oh no

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00:10:44,240 --> 00:10:50,560

you don't I said you have no power over me I'm stronger than you are and with that it let go

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00:10:51,520 --> 00:10:57,920

and at that moment I found myself back in my body and in my bed but the extraordinary thing was at

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00:10:57,920 --> 00:11:04,560

that moment the temperature broke and after that I started to make really quite a speedy recovery.

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00:11:05,120 --> 00:11:10,560

I think the interesting point about the near-death experience is that it tends to make you more

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00:11:10,560 --> 00:11:15,520

moral in other words more concerned for other people less concerned for yourself and of course

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00:11:15,520 --> 00:11:21,120

most importantly it takes away the fear of death. I think the most important thing it taught me is

86

00:11:21,120 --> 00:11:27,360

not to be afraid of life and once you cease to be afraid of life then the whole quality of life

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00:11:27,360 --> 00:11:35,360

changes. I'm not afraid not afraid anymore of death I know where I'm gonna go now if it is the same

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00:11:35,360 --> 00:11:42,320

as that I've been through then I should be very happy. I truly believe that the world would be a

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00:11:42,320 --> 00:11:50,320

better place if more people had had the experience than I had and they considered the possibility that

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00:11:51,280 --> 00:11:56,880

death is not the end and that existence consciousness or whatever goes on.

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00:12:00,320 --> 00:12:07,040

Dylan Thomas eloquently described fear of death when he wrote do not go gentle into that good night

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00:12:07,040 --> 00:12:13,440

old age should burn and rave at close of day rage rage against the dying of the light.

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00:12:14,720 --> 00:12:18,560

Well whatever actually happened to our witnesses in near-death encounters

94

00:12:18,560 --> 00:12:25,280

they now have no fear of the dying of the light. In part two the hoax of order World War two bumper

95

00:12:25,280 --> 00:12:34,480

that takes a chilling twist.

96

00:12:40,720 --> 00:12:45,920

Just another school choir photograph at least it would be if it went for this mysterious

97

00:12:46,480 --> 00:12:51,600

gatecrusher. The children are from St Hugh's school in Woodhall Spa the Lincolnshire village

98

00:12:51,600 --> 00:12:57,120

once home of 617 Danbuster squadron. They were marking the laying of a memorial to the airman

99

00:12:57,120 --> 00:13:03,040

who died during the mission to bomb the Ruhr Valley Danes. No one knew who the dog was or how he got

100

00:13:03,040 --> 00:13:08,640

there. Some say he was the ghost of Wing Commander Guy Gibson's black Labrador the squadron's

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00:13:08,640 --> 00:13:14,640

mascot. It's not the only strange story linked to wartime bombing missions. Tonight we visit

102

00:13:14,640 --> 00:13:22,000

Cosford in Shropshire to consider just such a mystery. The brooding presence of the Lincoln

103

00:13:22,000 --> 00:13:27,920

B2 the last of the Second World War bombers. In the 1970s this plane was the focus for an

104

00:13:27,920 --> 00:13:34,400

elaborate and highly successful hoax but the prank had a bizarre twist. Nearly 20 years ago

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00:13:34,400 --> 00:13:40,080

a team of engineers arrived at Cosford Aerospace Museum to carry out restoration on the bomber

106

00:13:40,080 --> 00:13:46,640

number RF 398. Before completing their work they were told the plane was to be transferred to a new

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00:13:46,640 --> 00:13:53,360

museum opening in Manchester. The star of the the museum should always remain there and when we found

108

00:13:53,360 --> 00:13:58,480

out she was on the movement roll to go to Manchester we were literally horrified. We wanted 398 to stay

109

00:13:58,480 --> 00:14:03,600

at Cosford. Yeah all right. The engineering team came up with the plan to prevent the bomber being

110

00:14:03,600 --> 00:14:10,400

transferred. Right what are we going to call it then? Don't know what about Pete the poltergeist?

111

00:14:10,400 --> 00:14:14,320

How often does it come around once a week once a day what? Well I think he's here now.

112

00:14:15,200 --> 00:14:22,240

I can feel him. We actually invented a ghost on the aircraft and the more people that came to

113

00:14:22,240 --> 00:14:25,280

see the aircraft at Cosford the more chance the aircraft actually had at Stain here.

114

00:14:25,840 --> 00:14:33,760

Hello. Hello. I'm Carol Hardy I'm from the Gazette. I spoke to Jim about the plane.

115

00:14:33,760 --> 00:14:38,880

Oh that's right hello. What's been happening then? Well I wouldn't believe it's been extraordinary.

116

00:14:39,840 --> 00:14:43,440

Once the the local newspaper got in on the scene we then had local radio

117

00:14:43,440 --> 00:14:48,880

that the jokers we saw actually got out of control. Hey Jim you never guess what's happened?

118

00:14:48,880 --> 00:14:53,120

The local vicar's been on the phone he's only offered to exorcise the place.

119

00:14:53,840 --> 00:14:57,840

We can't get rid of Pete now. I know. Well just sign him up for the union.

120

00:14:59,600 --> 00:15:04,320

Lee was about 1980 or 1981 where we were informed that the Lincoln would be staying at Cosford

121

00:15:04,880 --> 00:15:10,000

and as such our task with the funny ghost was completed. The hoaxing seized because there was no

122

00:15:10,000 --> 00:15:16,320

need we had saved the aircraft. Today the plane remains at Cosford. Of course we've discovered

123

00:15:16,320 --> 00:15:21,600

now that the so-called hauntings were a hoax but there is something we can't account for. The

124

00:15:21,600 --> 00:15:27,840

plane has become the center of a new mystery. For nine years paranormal researcher Ivan Spensley

125

00:15:27,840 --> 00:15:32,080

has been investigating a series of unexpectedly strange noises in the bomber.

126

00:15:33,120 --> 00:15:40,000

I decided to do some sound recording so I placed a microphone near the radio operator's position

127

00:15:40,800 --> 00:15:44,560

and set the machine running and the hangar was evacuated.

128

00:15:45,520 --> 00:15:51,520

Ivan returned to the hangar and played back the tape. He was staggered by what he heard.

129

00:15:52,240 --> 00:15:56,080

This is his actual recording from the empty plane in the deserted hangar.

130

00:16:04,640 --> 00:16:09,920

The first recordings I made here I didn't know whether it was the sound of the hangar changing

131

00:16:09,920 --> 00:16:16,080

as as the heat of the day left the building. I really wasn't sure and I didn't know what to

132

00:16:16,080 --> 00:16:22,080

make of them. What I needed to do was do some more recording and also observe the the natural

133

00:16:23,120 --> 00:16:31,200

ambience of the hangar. During his many visits to Cosford Ivan has always meticulously ensured

134

00:16:31,200 --> 00:16:38,160

that nothing can contaminate his recordings. I seal all the outdoors with a strip of paper which I sign

135

00:16:38,960 --> 00:16:46,480

and if that paper is broken then I know somebody has gained entry but since I've been doing it

136

00:16:46,480 --> 00:16:52,720

I've never found any broken seals. To ensure the sounds aren't caused by faulty equipment

137

00:16:52,720 --> 00:16:58,080

Ivan uses several different recorders and microphones. When the time came to publicize

138

00:16:58,080 --> 00:17:03,760

his findings he invited radio fore producer Gwyn Richards to join him for an all night vigil on

139

00:17:03,760 --> 00:17:11,680

board. It was about half past midnight and we'd been sitting there for some time. I looked down

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00:17:11,680 --> 00:17:20,320

to the Red Gunners compartment and I thought I saw a pinprick of light and I nudged Ivan and said

141

00:17:21,200 --> 00:17:29,440

can you see what I can see and he said yes and this tiny pinprick of light by this time seemed

142

00:17:29,520 --> 00:17:34,000

to have been getting nearer and it was moving slightly from one side to the other and we looked at

143

00:17:34,000 --> 00:17:42,880

each other and we thought well we did see it. After making a radio program about his experiences

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00:17:42,880 --> 00:17:48,080

on board the plane Gwyn received a sack full of letters. I mean there is no explanation really

145

00:17:49,360 --> 00:17:56,720

but one letter only at the end gave me something which I thought was possible. It said that when

146

00:17:56,720 --> 00:18:02,160

the crew was on night flying they used to reverse the little concave reflector in their torches

147

00:18:02,160 --> 00:18:08,720

and cover the bulb with them so that only a tiny pinprick of light was emitted from the torch in

148

00:18:08,720 --> 00:18:16,880

order to save the pilot's night vision and that seems to me to be something which approximates

149

00:18:16,880 --> 00:18:23,360

what I saw. But what about the noises? Ivan and Gwyn made further recordings on that occasion.

150

00:18:23,360 --> 00:18:30,080

I didn't expect to hear anything and then suddenly on the tape was this incredible bang.

151

00:18:30,080 --> 00:18:35,760

I said my god I play that again and he fooled you that played it again.

152

00:18:42,000 --> 00:18:46,720

This is absolutely ridiculous I just don't believe but it's there.

153

00:18:47,200 --> 00:18:54,080

Also on the tape was a sound that Ivan's recorders had not picked up before. This is the actual sound.

154

00:19:01,600 --> 00:19:05,760

Could the tape simply have picked up radio signals from atmospheric interference?

155

00:19:06,800 --> 00:19:13,040

I wanted those sounds verified by somebody who might know what caused them.

156

00:19:13,120 --> 00:19:16,960

Which was the worst part? Landing or takeoff? From my point of view it's landing.

157

00:19:18,080 --> 00:19:24,160

Ivan contacted the former 398 crew. Among them pilot Phil Pritchett and navigator Gary Lewis.

158

00:19:25,360 --> 00:19:30,240

We climbed aboard and took up our positions. I was a pilot so I took the captain to the seat.

159

00:19:30,880 --> 00:19:37,040

Gary was up in the nose in the navigator seat and we went through all the drills that we have to do

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00:19:37,040 --> 00:19:39,360

before we start flying.

161

00:19:43,600 --> 00:19:53,040

The noises we heard on the tape they certainly sounded like the normal noises that we get on an

aeroplane but somewhat modified.

162

00:19:57,920 --> 00:20:02,640

The noises on the tape resembled the clicks made by the switches during the cockpit drills.

163

00:20:03,440 --> 00:20:06,400

As for the whistling sound Gary has his own theory.

164

00:20:07,360 --> 00:20:12,000

Eventually we worked out that it was a navigation aid called Consul.

165

00:20:12,960 --> 00:20:19,520

This surprised us because as far as we knew the navigation aid had been out to service for about 25 or 30 years.

166

00:20:19,520 --> 00:20:23,920

I thought it was very strange to get these noises in the middle of the night.

167

00:20:23,920 --> 00:20:29,760

Hangar doors locked, nobody on the aeroplane, just tapes recording. Very strange indeed.

168

00:20:31,520 --> 00:20:35,440

The last Consul navigation unit was decommissioned in 1956.

169

00:20:36,880 --> 00:20:40,800

Thinking about it since then I still can't find any logical explanation.

170

00:20:42,480 --> 00:20:44,000

It just defeats me completely.

171

00:20:48,880 --> 00:20:53,600

But could the recording simply be the sound of the hangar contracting as it cools down at night?

172

00:20:55,440 --> 00:20:59,920

The roof of the hangar creaking and that kind of thing. It's an easily distinguishable sound.

173

00:20:59,920 --> 00:21:01,440

It can't be mixed up with anything else.

174

00:21:01,520 --> 00:21:06,160

So what do the original hoaxers make of the strange noises Ivan has recorded?

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00:21:06,160 --> 00:21:12,160

There are noises which may need further investigation but there is probably a logical answer to those noises.

176

00:21:12,160 --> 00:21:14,000

But what that is I don't know.

177

00:21:14,000 --> 00:21:18,800

I've listened very carefully to the noises I've recorded on that plane.

178

00:21:18,800 --> 00:21:23,040

I've tried to find natural causes for those noises.

179

00:21:23,040 --> 00:21:26,560

After nine years I haven't been able to do so.

180

00:21:26,560 --> 00:21:30,000

But Ivan does know of one theory linked to the plane's history.

181

00:21:30,000 --> 00:21:39,360

The story on record here at Cosford is that RF-398 was flown by master pilot Hila on its final flight.

182

00:21:40,640 --> 00:21:47,520

It said that he liked the plane so much that he would haunt it when he died.

183

00:21:48,400 --> 00:21:53,360

The strange thing is that Hila was taken off Lincoln Bombers

184

00:21:53,440 --> 00:22:00,720

and transferred to a Dover aircraft which crashed not too far away from Cosford and he was killed.

185

00:22:00,720 --> 00:22:07,440

The other thing is that part of that crashed aircraft was brought back and housed at Cosford.

186

00:22:09,440 --> 00:22:15,440

When we tried to trace the operational history of the bomber we found gaps in some of the plane's official records.

187

00:22:15,440 --> 00:22:19,840

One explanation it's believed to have flown on secret missions.

188

00:22:19,920 --> 00:22:23,840

All together it seems there are more questions than answers about RF-398.

189

00:22:23,840 --> 00:22:25,840

Good night.

190

00:22:49,840 --> 00:22:52,080

you