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The Rendlesham Forest Incidents 1/3

From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>
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Subject: The Rendlesham Forest Incidents 1/3

It was just after Christmas 1980, a quiet period of inactivity at the twin-base complex of RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge in Suffolk, England. They were American bases on British soil and played an important role in NATO's front-line defence.

The extraordinary events which were to occur on two separate nights, would soon however dispel that calm and pose one of the UK's strangest riddles.

Although rumours soon travelled outwith the base, it proved difficult to determine the true nature of these events and there was infinitely more speculation than facts.

However, as both incidents centred on Rendlesham Forest, which separated the airbases and as this was outwith the jurisdiction of the US Air Force, the Deputy Base Commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Halt, had submitted a report for the Ministry of Defence to investigate.

Although the Ministry had indicated there was no relevant information in their files, in early 1983, US researcher Robert Todd successfully obtained a copy of that document under the Freedom of Information Act, a copy which he was informed had been obtained directly from the Ministry.

That document, which became known as the Halt memo, was the first factual confirmation of the astounding occurrences over two years previously.

On 13 January 1981, Halt had informed the Ministry:

"Early in the morning of 27 Dec 80 (approximately 0300L), two USAF security police patrolmen saw unusual lights outside the back gate at RAF Woodbridge. Thinking an aircraft might have crashed or been force down, they call for permission to go outside the gate to investigate. The on-duty flight chief responded and allowed three patrolmen to proceed on foot. The individuals reported seeing a strange glowing object in the forest. The object was described as being metallic in appearance and triangular in shape, approximately two to three meters across the base and approximately two meters high. It illuminated the entire forest with a white light. The object itself had a pulsing red light on top and a bank(s) of blue lights underneath. The object was hovering or on legs. As the patrolmen approached the object, it manoeuvred through the trees and disappeared. At this time the animals on a nearby farm went into a frenzy. The object was briefly sighted approximately an hour later near the back gate".

The Ministry were further advised that two days afterwards:

"Later in the night a red sun-like light was seen through the tree.

It moved about and pulsed. At one point it appeared to throw off glowing particles and then broke into five separate white objects and then disappeared. Immediately thereafter, three star-like objects were noticed in the sky. Two objects to the north and one to the south, all of which were about 10 degrees off the horizon. The objects moved rapidly in sharp angular movements and displayed red, green and blue lights. The objects to the north appeared to be elliptical through an 8-12 power lens. They then turned to full circles. The objects to the north remained in the sky for an hour or more. The object to the south was visible for two or three hours and beamed down a stream of light from time to time. Numerous individuals, including the undersigned, witnessed the activities in paragraphs 2 and 3".

Further details emerged and the story was the subject of major features in the US by both CNN and "Unsolved Mysteries".

Two books on the case, "Skycrash" and "From out of the Blue", were written by British researcher and author Jenny Randles, the first being co-authored by Brenda Butler and Dot Street, two local researchers who were amongst the first to hear the rumours.

"Skycrash" was published only in the UK and due to concerns about material which might conflict with the Official Secrets Act, "From out of the Blue" was published only in the US. Both books document the history of the developing story and the attempts to separate fact from fiction.

Two key witnesses were then to come forward, Staff Sergeant Jim Penniston and Airman First Class John Burroughs, who both served with the 81st Security Police Squadron.

Together with Halt, who was subsequently promoted to Colonel before retiring from the services in 1992, their testimonies have become the foundation of the "Rendlesham Forest" case and on 9 December 1994, all three appeared in a landmark UK television documentary, produced for the ITN "Strange but True?" series.

The evidence was now much clearer and unless otherwise indicated, the following comments are taken from their videotaped depositions in the documentary.

On that first night, Burroughs was on security patrol with a colleague. He recalled:

"There were strange lights out in the forest. To me, it almost looked like Christmas lights at first, a Christmas display. At that point we looked at each other and we decided that we'd better go out and take a closer look 'cause we weren't sure what we were dealing with.

What we were looking at wasn't real".

Burroughs contacted the Security Controller and he in turn contacted Penniston, who takes up the story.

"I received a call from the Control Centre to go on down to the East Gate and contact John Burroughs. And I asked them what was the nature of the problem down there and they said that they'd rather not tell me, they'd rather have me go down there and talk to the patrol man on the scene.

The first thing that came to mind was an aircraft crash".

Penniston contacted the Control Centre again and reported a possible crash: "They notified me that they were tracking an unidentified bogey about 15 minutes ago and they confirmed it with contact with eastern radar and Heathrow in London and the approximate location was about 5 miles off base when they lost contact with it.

It was Christmas time and there was no scheduled flying for that night. I got permission to proceed off base to investigate".

Approaching the presumed crash site, Penniston continued, "I started to see a defined shape and at that point I realised it wasn't an aircraft crash, a fire, or anything of that sort. The air was filled with electricity. You could feel it on your skin as we approached the object". Burroughs concurred: "You felt like you were moving in slow motion, your hair on the back of your head was standing up, you felt like you had very little control over your body".

Sensing no hostility, Penniston approached the object and examined it further:

"It was about the size of a tank, it was triangular in shape. Underneath the craft, was a high intensity white light emanating out of it and it was bordered by red and blue lighting, alternating". "On the upper left side of the craft, was an inscription. It measured six inches high, of symbols. They looked familiar, but I couldn't ascertain why".

He observed the enigmatic object for what seemed some twenty minutes, and then, "It slowly started moving back, weaving in and around the trees... it raised up into the air and it shot off as fast as you could blink". The following day, Penniston and Burroughs examined the area. The local Suffolk police had also received a call concerning lights in the forest and were investigating the scene. On seeing indentations, one of the police officers advised that he would be recording these as rabbit diggings. Penniston disagreed: "I asked him why and he said, because he's not going to put anything other than that in his report. We found that just totally absurd. The ground was frozen and it was just impossible for that to happen".

Burroughs and Penniston measured the distance between the ground markings and claim that the area formed a perfect triangle.

Lieutenant-Colonel Halt was by this time aware of the reported events and although somewhat sceptical, insisted that an appropriate entry be recorded in the security police log.

"I personally knew the individuals that had reported and I knew they were very credible people. I was sure something had happened, there was obviously something".

In readiness for any further activity, large portable floodlights, know as light-alls, were positioned in the forest.

Two nights after the initial incident, Lieutenant Colonel Halt was interrupted at a base Christmas dinner. He recalls, "The duty Flight Lieutenant came in and he was quite shaken and insisted upon speaking to myself and the Base Commander about a matter of utmost urgency.

He said, 'It's back'.

I assembled a small team of experts and we set off in the forest, ready to debunk it".

Halt had taken with him a portable tape recorder and noted, "I'm certainly glad we made the tape, because if we hadn't made the tape, even I would have trouble believing what happened that night".

"We had time to put this thing to bed. I knew there was something there, there had to be something there, but I was also firmly convinced there was a logical explanation for what was going on".

"It's very unusual to have a problem with the light-alls. That night, the light-alls wouldn't work, even when they swapped out and got other ones from the base. In addition, we had problems with our radios. All three frequencies we were using were intermittent and did not work properly that night".

An extract from Halt's tape recording was subsequently released and is testimony to a range of seemingly anomalous phenomena.

An unidentified flashing light was seen to be apparently moving through the forest and Halt reiterated:

"It pulsated, although it were an eye winking at you and around the edges, it appeared to have molten metal dripping off it, just like falling to the ground, but I didn't see any evidence of anything on the ground. I just couldn't believe what I was seeing, none of us could.

Here I am, a senior official that routinely denies this sort of thing and diligently works to debunk them and I'm involved in the middle of something I can't explain".

"The object suddenly exploded. A silent explosion and broke into three to five white objects and rapidly disappeared".

Around a mile from this scene, Burroughs was with the broken-down light-alls, but was to reportedly experience yet another bizarre incident.

"All of a sudden, out of the distance, a blue light streaked past us. Passing the light-alls, they came on. It passed through the open window on the truck, going off into the distance, and the light-alls went out".

But perhaps the most remarkable and disconcerting event was to follow.

Halt explained: "As we moved out of the forest, we noticed three objects in the sky. The objects in the sky were moving about, sharp angular movements, very high speed.

I kept getting on the radio and calling the command post. I wanted to know if they were finding anything on the radar scope. One of the objects in the sky was sending down beams, beams of light, beams of energy, I'm not sure what they were. At that same time I could hear on the radio, voices talking about the beams coming down on the base".

Suddenly, a beam of light came down directly in front of Halt's party.

"At this stage, my scepticism had definitely disappeared. I was really in awe".

Just as suddenly, the beam disappeared.

Until recently, this was the general understanding of what had reportedly taken place on those cold and dark December nights, almost 17 years ago.

Now, in a research program carried out by "PROJECT: watchfire", both Halt and Penniston have spoken in more detail about their experiences. Utilising the latest Internet technology, in conjunction with the Microsoft Network, it was possible to broadcast interviews with Halt and Penniston over the Internet and also provide a live forum for discussion.

The "watchfire" site can be found on the World Wide Web, at URL:

<http://watchfire.msn.com/watchfire/>

The interviews were carried out by award winning journalist A. J. S. Rayl, the project's Executive Editor and a former contributor to OMNI magazine. She also now writes for OMNI Internet.

Penniston went over his story with Rayl:

"There is some confusion about the date. There are two duty rosters, both of which are dated December 26th, but it was either that night, the 26th, or the 27th".

"Since it was just after the Christmas holiday, we expected it to be a slow, quiet night".

"About 12:02 am - I remember that distinctly - I was dispatched to the East Gate, which was sometimes referred to as the back gate at Woodbridge. There, I was told to contact Police 2, which was Airman First Class John Burroughs and Staff Sgt. Bud Steffans, and that I would be briefed when I got there.

Penniston confirms that Steffans told him about a "problem" out in the woods.

Believing it was an aircraft crash, Penniston asked Steffans if he had heard the plane go down.

"He told me there had been no sound, that it didn't crash, that it had landed".

Discounting this, Penniston called the Bentwaters Centre for Security Control (CSC) and spoke with Master Sergeant J.D. Chandler, the

on-duty flight chief for both bases.

Chandler contacted the Control Towers at Bentwaters and Woodbridge. Having confirmed details with Heathrow Airport's control tower in London and RAF Bawdsey eastern radar in East Anglia, Penniston was informed of a 'bogie' with which contact had been lost some 15 minutes previously, over Woodbridge.

Receiving permission to investigate, Penniston, Burroughs and Airman Ed Cabansag proceeded to the East Gate, where the terrain forced them to dismount their Jeep.

As radio transmissions were breaking up, Cabansag was stationed there as a communications link.

When it became apparent there was no air crash, Cabansag was informed and relayed that information to CSC. Even transmissions to Cabansag were now deteriorating.

Penniston's story from this point remains relatively consistent, as it always has done, and he adds some significant details.

"I found it very strange that there was no sound coming from the object, but the animals around us were in a frenzy. We had wildlife running by us, and lots of birds. Outside that noise, however, there was no other.

That was when I decided to have Burroughs stay there as a radio link. He did not seem calm. He didn't acknowledge what I was saying, but I thought he understood. I was more concerned at that moment with what was going on in front of me".

"I had my notebook and camera while I was out there, so I began taking notes. This is what I wrote:

'Triangular in shape. The top portion is producing mainly white light, which encompasses most of the upper section of the craft. A small amount of white light peers out the bottom. At the left side centre is a bluish light, and on the other side, red. The lights seem to be moulded as part of the exterior of the structure, smooth, slowly fading into the rest of the outside of the structure, gradually moulding into the fabric of the craft'.

"As I was taking notes, I also memorized what was in front of me for what seemed like hours, but was in fact only minutes. Finally, I unleashed my camera-case cover and brought the camera up to focus. The air was electric. It made my hair and skin feel as if I were surrounded by static electricity or some type of energy. I began snapping photo after photo. It was still eerily quiet".

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