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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: UFO Sphere/Orb' over Brooklyn, NY

From: **Bruce Maccabee** <brumac@compuserve.com>
Date: Tue, 17 Feb 1998 23:10:58 -0500
Fwd Date: Wed, 18 Feb 1998 09:25:41 -0500
Subject: Re: UFO Sphere/Orb' over Brooklyn, NY

>From: Brian Straight <brians@mdbs.com>
>To: "'UFO UpDates - Toronto'" <updates@globalserve.net>
>Subject: RE: UFO UpDate: Re: 'UFO Sphere/Orb' over Brooklyn, NY
>Date: Mon, 16 Feb 1998 12:42:33 -0500

>>Date: Fri, 13 Feb 1998 22:59:35 -0500
>>From: Bruce Maccabee <brumac@compuserve.com>
>>Subject: UFO UpDate: Re: 'UFO Sphere/Orb' over Brooklyn, NY
>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>

>>There is science in ufology... although it is not always
>>obvious. However, to see wat I mean, consider the "reverse
>>Situation."

>><snip>

>>However, rarely if ever does a skeptic "test" the explanation'
>>against the available sighting data. Instead, what usually
>>happens is that the skeptic finds an explanation for one part of
>>th sghting and then "publishes". (I can cite specific examples in
>>my own experience if anyone is interested.) The general
>>public/press/scientific community then assmes the sighting has
>>been explained and goes on its merry way.

>I've experienced this first hand. While living in the UK, I
>investigated a sighting made by a reliable witness (a
>coastguard), who saw, in al clear evening sky, a bright light
>over the sea. Its reflection in the water could be clearly seen,
>and occasionally a beam of some sort seemed to strike tha water's
>surface. The local college physics prof. dismissed it (rather
>predictably) as the planet Venus. The problem? Venus was not at
>elongation and therefore not visible. Add to that the fact that
>the witness was looking due east, and the explanation falls
>apart. When I politely tried to point this out to the prof, he
>told me to stop wasting his time with crackpot nonsense.

Ah, yes. Don't look through the telescope because you might see
something you don't like.

I investigated sightings that occurred in late December, 1978 in
New Zealand. These sightings were big news 19 years ago because a
TV film crew saw the unexplained lights and filmed them. I
don't have space to go into all the details of this sighting
which involved an airplane crew of 2, two reporters, a cameraman
and a sound recordist, a radar operator and a radar technician.
The sightings occurred between 1 AM and 3 AM on Dec. 31.
Because a reporter was involved and he got his story out
immediately, the sighting was reported on that same day in
morning papers in NZ. Theories proliferated like the funny
mushrooms after a spring rain. I think some of the explainers
had been eating those mushrooms!

An astronomer in Christchurch N.Z., was 99% certain that what they saw and filmed was Venus.

Problem: Venus didn't rise until after 3 AM

OK, go back to astronomer who is now confident that what they saw was Jupiter (nowhere near as bright as Venus, of course). Jupiter was up, but at such a high angular elevation that the cameraman couldn't film it and besides the lights were reported as at the altitude of the aircraft or lower. Another explanation was that one of the lights was a squid boat. This was no good because bright lights on squid boats create reflections in the water which appear immediately beneath (from the point of view of the observer at some altitude) the bright lights. Yet the film clearly shows no reflection (squid boat had to be at least 3000 ft high to have its reflection out of the field of view of the camera). Sir Bernard Lovell of Jodrell Bank Radio Observatory identified the lights as "unburned meteorites," a dumb comment if there ever was one in that one light, in particular, was seen for over 10 minutes.

Anyway, SCIENCE IN DEFAULT:

In May 1980 a Canadian scientist, Wm. Lehn, published a paper in the Journal of Atmospheric and Terrestrial Physics in which he argued that the lights were mirages of other distant lights.

He stated:" notably absent from all the reported theories was any consideration of atmospheric refraction phenomena." He based his opinion and analysis solely on newspaper reports of the sighting.

In July 1980 I responded with a 6 page paper that criticized Lehn for using only a few Canadian newspaper accounts and also pointed out a number of reasons for rejecting atmospheric refraction (mirages). I also pointed out that New Zealand newspaper HAD carried discussions of refraction phenomena.

The journal editor sent my paper to a referee who wrote:

"....This article unlike that of Lehn, contains no real science and as such cannot be accepted for the journal. Sightings of unidentified objects are unfortunately often vague and imprecise and sometimes contradictory. I do not consider that this article contributes in any way towards a true scientific explanation of the phenomena described. It may be suitable for a newspaper but not for a scientific journal."

His second sentence (Sightings of UFOs are often vague....) is, of course, correct. But so what? The only "vagueness" in this case was in the explanation. The "hard data" consisted of eyewitness accounts by good observers backed up by color movie film, ground radar, airplane radar and something that was quite unique in ufo history until the Gulf Breezesightings, tape recordings made during the sightings.

Anyway, I responded in October 1980 by rewriting and resubmitting my paper along with a letter to the editor as follows:

"I wonder what the referee considers to be 'real science.' Is it real science to allow an incorrect explanation to stand unchallenged in a respected, refereed journal? I dare say that if a published paper contains errors in logic or mathematics, experts in the particular field addressed by the paper do not hesitate to write articles pointing out the errors, and the journals do not hesitate to publish the articles."

I also pointed out that Lehn's paper seemed to be largely speculation based on a small amount of information from newspapers whereas my paper was based on much, much more information and contained the results of a calculation of brightness based on photographic data. It therefore seemed unfair for the referee to "bestow upon Lehn's paper the accolade 'real science' " and to reject my paper as unscientific.

In December, 1980, the journal editor informed me that a second referee had rejected my paper. The second referee had written that it was unlikely there would be "an agreement on an explanation of the N.Z. 'sightings' and until the experimental facts are sorted out more clearly, arguments and

counter-arguments should be dealt with by correspondence between the contestants themselves and not in the open literature...I support without hesitation the rejection of this paper."

In other words, so what if an incorrect explanation had been published. The incorrect explanation was "scientific" and it would be unscientific to publish a counter-argument.

My paper was never published.

SIC TRANSIT GLORIA SCIENTIA.....

or something like that!

(There is a lot more to the New Zealand sightings story. Papers were published in the journal APPLIED OPTICS... but only "by accident.")

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