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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Pres. Carter

From: DRudiak <DRudiak@aol.com> [David Rudiak]
Date: Mon, 25 May 1998 01:55:52 EDT
Fwd Date: Mon, 25 May 1998 03:08:22 -0400
Subject: Re: Pres. Carter

> Date: Sat, 23 May 1998 09:52:58 +0100
> From: Don Ledger <dledger@istar.ca>
> To: updates@globalserve.net
> Subject: Re: UFO UpDate: Re: Pres. Carter

> > To: "UFO UpDates - Toronto" <updates@globalserve.net>
> > From: "Jerome Clark" <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
> > Subject: Re: UFO UpDate: Filer's Files #20
> > Date: Fri, 22 May 98 10:30:09 PDT

> >Re your remark that no serious ufologist disputes that Carter saw Venus.

>> I wonder about that. I remember writing his sighting off as well,
>> but then some time afterward wondered if I might have been hasty
>> in light of his education and naval experience [which for the
>> life of me I can't recall, but remember at the time as being
>> impressive]. Was Carter not a scientist of some sort, physics
>> perhaps. He was not only a peanut farmer.

Correct. Carter had a degree in nuclear physics and served as an officer on US nuclear submarines. I suspect he had also seen Venus a few times down on the peanut farm.

>From: "Jerome Clark" <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
>Date: Sat, 23 May 98 11:24:41 PDT
>Fwd Date: Sat, 23 May 1998 21:45:48 -0400
>Subject: Re: Filer's Files #20

>Here is my entry "Carter Sighting" in The UFO Encyclopedia:
>2nd Ed., p. 174:

>As they stood outside waiting for a Lions Club meeting to start,
>Gov. Jimmy Carter and 10 residents of Leary, Georgia, noticed an
>unusually bright light at about 30 degrees' elevation in the
>western sky. Carter was to recall it appeared slightly smaller
>than the apparent size of the moon., It "came close, moved away,
>came close, then moved away," he reported. He estimated it to be
>"maybe 300-1000 yards" away. It "moved to [a] distance[,] then
>disappeared" ("Jimmy Carter's," 1977). The sighting took place on
>January 6, 1969, between approximately 7:15 and 7:30 p.m.

>Except for this sketchily rendered last detail, this object
>sounds very much like Venus,

Venus?! Did Jerry Clark say Venus? There are many details in this report that don't sound anything like Venus:

1. Venus never appears to be the "size of the moon" or "slightly smaller than the apparent size of the moon."
2. Venus doesn't loom dramatically in size as described by Carter.
3. Venus doesn't disappear by seeming to move into the distance. At the reported time of the sighting, Venus would have remained well-elevated and visible in the sky. It would not have disappeared. In fact, it didn't set until about 9:20. You can't have it both ways, with Venus supposedly being brilliantly bright and otherwise highly visible (to supposedly account for the report), yet supposedly disappearing as well.

Lesser discrepancies are:

1. Venus was in the southwestern, not western sky (between 237 and 240 degrees azimuth, not 270).
2. If the time was correct, the elevation was between 21 and 24 degrees, not 30 degrees.
3. According to my planetarium programs, Venus wasn't even at its brightest on this date, much less an "unusually bright light." Carter's report said that the "10-12 men all watched it. Brightness attracted us." None of these people had never seen Venus in the sky before?

>frequently mistaken for a UFO in
>part because of an optical illusion which causes stationary
>objects to appear to move back and forth.

What Jerry Clark is describing is the autokinetic effect, but this does nothing to explain the Carter report. The autokinetic effect has an isolated point of light in a dark background appearing to move erratically. It occurs when there is a lack of surrounding visual cues.

But what Carter described was something that seemed to dramatically change in size and/or distance. Or as his UFO report described it, "came close, moved away, came close, moved away," changed in size from "brighter/larger than planet to apparent size of moon," and eventually seemed to move to the distance and disappear.

Furthermore, the very fact that Carter compared the thing's apparent size and brightness to visible planets, such as Venus (Saturn was also visible), suggests that he wasn't confusing it with Venus. He felt this thing was both brighter and larger even when it was at its SMALLEST.

Now there are only two visual physiological things I can think of that might cause a virtual point of light like Venus to appear to change in size like that. One is a disruption of the central visual brain, in which the person loses their ability to maintain size constancy. Objects seem to be constantly changing in size.

There are a few extremely rare cases of organic brain damage causing this (such as in a small stroke), and perhaps some hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD can cause this as well. Jimmy Carter dropping acid? I think we can safely rule this explanation out.

The other would be very extreme fluctuations in the focus of the eye. I could imagine this happening with somebody who was falling down drunk. But Carter was not intoxicated. Except for maybe an occasional Billy Beer or glass of wine, he was a teetotaler, if anything. Furthermore Carter was about 45 at the time. He didn't have a whole lot of accommodation (focusing ability) left (as people in their mid to late 40's can attest). So it becomes very questionable whether Carter, even if straining mightily, could have defocussed Venus into a blur that appeared to be about the size of the moon.

Frankly, a better case for Venus probably could be made by dusting off one of Menzel's old standbys -- the atmospheric lens. But darn, even if you buy that, it still doesn't explain how Venus could seem to move off into the distance and permanently disappear when it was still up there for another two hours.

In any case, forget autokinesis. There is no way it could have

anything to do with it. Autokinesis has to do with perceived lateral motion, NOT perceived changes in size, distance, or brightness.

> Indeed, the only real
> investigation of the incident, conducted by debunker Robert
> Sheaffer, established Venus' presence in the section of the sky
> Carter was observing.

As we all know, Venus is visible in the evening or early morning most of the year, making it a convenient debunking explanation for just about everything (e.g., Sheaffer also used it to "explain" the 1966 Portage County high-speed police chase). Just because Venus is up there in the general vicinity doesn't mean it automatically explains a case. In the Carter report (or Portage County), it certainly does not.

>In common with an earlier reporter (Tiede,
>1978), Sheaffer found that the other witnesses scarcely
>remembered the incident (Sheaffer, 1981).

Just because the others didn't care doesn't mean the incident wasn't worthy of note or anomalous. Certainly Carter went out of his way to later file a UFO report and pursue the matter of UFOs when he became President a few years later.

It would be interesting to know how the other witnesses remembered it.

David Rudiak

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