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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re:

From: **Jenny Randles** <nufon@currantbun.com>
Date: Wed, 21 Jul 1999 11:50:26 +0100
Fwd Date: Wed, 21 Jul 1999 21:57:40 -0400
Subject: Re:

>Date: Tue, 20 Jul 1999 13:25:23 -0700 (PDT)
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>,
>From: Jim Deardorff <deardorj@proaxis.com>
>Subject: Re: Sheffield UFO Incident 2?

>Hello Jerry,

>I'd like to step in here to second your last two sentences
>above, and to say that it seems more than just "possible" that
>future science will make this judgment. It's a virtual
>certainty, judging from the number of firm unexplainable UFO
>reports.

>As a corollary, it will very likely be similarly decided that
>the figure one often hears, that 90% or 95% of all UFO reports
>have prosaic explanations, was part of the dream. It has never
>been good science for a ufologist to claim an IFO solution to a
>UFO report on the basis that it *might possibly* have been
>Venus, a weather balloon, aircraft, etc., over and against the
>objections of witnesses who claim to know better. However, this
>tactic made the dream easier to maintain, and made it easier for
>the one-way "skeptics" to claim that if 95% of the cases can be
>explained away, then surely the other 5% can be also. I suspect
>the true percentage of IFOs lies somewhere between 50% and 75%.

>Jim Deardorff

Hi,

I can see your argument, Jim, but I cannot agree with it. I
certainly don't work that way.

I have been investigating UFO sightings first hand for 25 years
as both a local researcher (who gets cases channeled regularly
from Jodrell Bank to 'trouble shoot' for them) and as a
coordinator of national UFO teams. At the start I estimated
maybe 90% were solvable. I have raised my estimate to 95% as a
direct result of experience across several hundreds of cases
(probably in fact well into four figures by now).

You are right that at times there is a conflict between what a
witness thinks happened and what you believe was the cause. I
can also see the merit in the 'they were there, you were not'
approach. With close encounters I tend to give that benefit of
doubt. But the simple truth is that 99% of UFO sightings are not
a close encounter. They are LITS and other poorly observed
events. In that case years of experience by any investigator
doing their job gives them an edge over a witness. We know how
perception works. We know how many phenomena can be mistaken for
UFOs. We can make a reasoned deduction.

Re:

You are right that in maybe only 60% of cases can we do more than provide reasonable certainty that a UFO is really an IFO. But this is no attempt to make it easy or seek a cosy solution, as you suggest. It is a factor of how UFO investigation takes time, money and cooperation from sources like the police, airports, weather stations etc. In ufology, very often, most or all of those things don't exist. Our investigators are doing this work in their spare time at their expense often with the ridicule of the public or at best cursory assistance. It simply isn't practical to investigate every case to the point where a verdict between proven IFO and 'still unsolved' is conclusively possible. Moreover, investigators should (and at my suggestion always would) focus their limited resources now on cases that are likely to be IFOs (as most certainly are) but on the few that offer some real prospect of not being. This inevitably reduces the opportunity to be certain about many of the rest. But it's a fact of UFO life.

However, I do not regard it as bad science to adopt a probable solution that makes sense when it stretches no evidence to be able to do so. I'd love to know why you think it is - since science, in my experience, properly accepts the most feasible solution to a problem unless and until it is contradicted by strong observational data.

If someone, for instance (A real recent case) sees a high flying, slow moving, amorphous jellyfish like shape in the sky is that a UFO or IFO? I believe, based on the physical parameters of the case, that the witness saw a partly deflated weather balloon. I base this verdict on previous cases that were proven to be such a thing and the degree of consistency between this sighting and these other cases. I made efforts to find a candidate balloon, but this was not possible and its origin could have been from hundreds or thousands of miles away so is essentially untracable. As such we are left with this choice. Do we tell the witness, in my experience this was a weather balloon? Or do we say it was a UFO, implying as that will some extraordinary origin? The witness has never seen a weather balloon (or a UFO) and so they cannot honestly decide. You have at least seen how weather balloons behave and can reasonably argue this was probably one of them. In my view the decision is easy. You tell the witness the facts. I did. I don't know if they will now regard what they saw as a balloon or a jellyfish design spaceship. That's up to them. But I do know that I consider it better science to trust my judgement here and say this case is probably solved as a balloon than to work by the (not impossible but rather less likely) judgement that it is unsolved.

Technically, you are right. This case is unsolved. Very few cases are proven beyond doubt. And it is appropriate not to forget that we do do this assignment of probabilities much of the time. But practically speaking, I believe it is best to err on the side of caution with such cases. After all we are seeking to persuade science and you don't do that by leaps of faith. You did it by good evidence. A case that looks like a weather balloon, acts like a weather balloon, but you cannot prove was one, is not good evidence even if there is a chance it was a UFO.

Now had this witness said that the UFO was a disk, with windows, that swooped down, hovered and sped off again, whilst I know witness misperception can still be a factor, I would have been quite unjustified in assigning a weather balloon explanation here and I would not have done it.

To me this differentiates the ufologist from the sceptic - how willing you are to regard cases as unsolved. I am perfectly willing and regard it as wrong to disregard evidence for that purpose just to make a solution easier. In my opinion, sceptics often don't have that problem. Rendlesham Forest is an example. Here, you could, by disregarding a relatively small part of the testimony (the close encounter phase with physical effects) reasonably argue the whole thing is explained away. I can see that which is why I have never ignored the possibility. Sceptics don't merely not ignore it. They embrace it and are willing to call it the answer by disregarding the uncomfortable bits. I'm not, because I find it improper research and bad science to wish away even a small (but essential part) of the evidence because it happens to sit uncomfortably with the most feasible conclusion otherwise available.

Re:

But I am not saying this approach is right and the sceptics are wrong. Often truth about a case emerges somewhere between the rock of scepticism and the hard place of good ufology crunching up against one another.

This is never an easy area and we are making judgements with cases all the time. But I assure you I don't just conjure stats out of thin air in some attempt to evade the issues. Apologies if that was not what you were implying.

Best wishes,

Jenny Randles

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