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### UpDate: Military Disputes Strangeness of Maryland Silver Balls

From: **Kenny Young** <[ufo@fuse.net](mailto:ufo@fuse.net)>  
Date: Sat, 05 Aug 2000 14:48:36 -0400  
Fwd Date: Sat, 05 Aug 2000 21:42:00 -0400  
Subject: UpDate: Military Disputes Strangeness of Maryland Silver Balls

"In Sky Over City, Multiple Mysteries"  
By Steve Vogel  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Friday, August 4, 2000; Page B01

OCEAN CITY, Md., Aug. 3□□The mysterious silvery balls came first--pretty, 12-inch-diameter spheres that floated down from the sky in and around this resort town, amid rumors that they had been dropped by black helicopters.

This was followed by widespread alarm when word spread that the City Council--meeting behind closed doors--had granted the military permission to test the Patriot missile's radar at the municipal airport.

Toss in a few sonic booms from military jets in recent days, and some Ocean City residents are up in arms.

"They have no business putting this on in a resort community," said Hollis Martin, a homeowner in nearby South Point. "Go out to the desert and do your testing."

Even Maryland's Democratic senators, Barbara A. Mikulski and Paul S. Sarbanes, have weighed in, sending a letter last week to Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen asking for information about the radar testing.

"We are also requesting that the report include information on any . . . helicopters in the West Ocean City area and the launching of 32-ounce spheres," the letter said.

Margaret Pillas, a City Council candidate helping spearhead the resistance, puts it more simply: "Just tell us what's happening to us, not 30 years from now, when we learn they've done God knows what to us."

What's happening is: Next week, at the height of the beach season, the military will start a series of tests designed to improve the performance of the Patriot antimissile system, known for its decidedly mixed results 10 years ago in the Persian Gulf War.

No missiles will be fired--or even brought to Ocean City.

Instead, jets will fly in circles far offshore, and technicians will assess how well the Patriot's radar system tracks them, in conjunction with radars on nearby Wallops Island and a Navy cruiser at sea.

Ocean City makes a convenient spot for testing because of the possibilities for triangulation and integration among the three

radar sources.

"We surveyed north and south, and the bottom line is, the best geometry was the Ocean City airport area," said an official from the Ballistic Missile Defense Office. The military wants to do the tests now, during the peak summer season, to avoid delaying missile firing tests scheduled elsewhere this fall.

Of course, none of that explains the silvery balls.

They do, in fact, exist. Pillas has one hidden in a secret location. "It's the only actual evidence we have so far," she said. "We don't have a helicopter yet.

This is the first thing we've had that everybody said we didn't see."

A resident named Wendy Garliss first spotted one of the silvery balls during the winter in a field off Route 50 near the new Wal-Mart. She kept it in her back yard, where her dog and children played with it. She gave it little thought until the radar controversy erupted, when she turned it over to Pillas.

Pillas drove it around town in her Jaguar for several days, trying to get someone to identify it. "Source of Mysterious Balls Unknown," read a headline in a local paper.

Last week, the Patuxent River Naval Air Station identified the balls, saying they are harmless aluminum spheres routinely released from P-3 aircraft to calibrate radar at the Southern Maryland installation. They have nothing to do with the planned Patriot radar testing, according to military officials.

Phillas remains skeptical about the explanation, and today she took a reporter and photographer to see her sphere on condition they keep its location confidential.

"I have it buried until we know exactly what it is," Pillas said of the ball. "I want it to be analyzed by a group independent of the government."

The Navy has no problem with that. "Anyone who finds a sphere is welcome to keep it or put it in with other aluminum recyclables," read a statement released by the naval air station.

The source of the sonic booms remained unclear. Spokesmen for several East Coast installations said they knew nothing about them. As for the black helicopters, no one is claiming them, either.

City officials acknowledge that residents are not imagining things, or at least not everything.

"I'm not going to say that the silver balls, black helicopters and sonic booms don't exist," Mayor James N. Mathias Jr., clad in a golf shirt and shorts, said in an interview today in his office.

But the mayor said he is convinced that the radar tests do not pose a danger to residents or wildlife and are important for the national defense. "Who knows when the next time our sons and daughters will need these weapons for protection," he said. "This is the least the town can do."

A book-length environmental assessment conducted by the military--released Wednesday and rushed to Ocean City by courier early this morning--concludes that there would be "either no impacts at all or minimal impacts that could be readily mitigated."

"People who are at the beach or in a residential area a half-mile away will be more hazardously affected by the sun or a cell phone than from this radar," said the official at the Ballistic Missile Defense Office.

The radar operation is scheduled to start Friday, though the radar equipment probably will not arrive at the airport until Monday and actual testing is not expected to start until Thursday. "All systems are go," said Jennifer Canaff, a spokeswoman for the ballistic missile office.

Officials say that the radar emits no hazard beyond a 400-foot zone, which will be restricted, and that the testing will not interfere with airport flights. The testing proposal got off to a bad start May 30 when military officials briefed the City Council on the plan behind closed doors, which angered residents once they found out.

The council approved the proposal unanimously.

"To be quite frank, and no pun intended, I thought it would be the patriotic thing to do," said council member Vincent Gisriel. "Little did I realize how this would fester in the public."

Military officials said the closed meeting was the city's idea.

At a July 17 public meeting called to quell the controversy, military officers were bombarded with questions from residents, who also raised the issue of the silvery balls and black helicopters.

"It's not like I'm a Greenpeace person or anything," Garliss, a former commercial fisher, said in an interview this week. "I don't want to see military. We're not at war. For Ocean City to decide this whole thing without consulting the public is really rotten."

End of article

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