

s Out To Be ISO

The Miner

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While hundreds of onlookers, the nation and The Miner staff waited anxiously . . .



The diver, fins in the air, dove into the murky depths . . .



and up it came . . . "The Lantern."

Albert Mazza was manning the phones when a veritable deluge of calls came in from all over the country from interested persons who had heard on the national news of the possible existence in Carbondale of a Lantern.

At the site, local fire companies from up and down the valley began to arrive in preparation for the pumping of the pond, while a backhoe from a local construction company was utilized to clear a channel out of the basin.

T.V. film crews arrived from as far away as Philadelphia, and excitement mounted as two scuba divers from the Syracuse area stood by waiting for the order to dive.

Acting Chief Dottle gave the order at approximately 3:00 p.m. on Monday after the water in the pond had dropped to an acceptable level.

Tension filled the air as the diver attached himself to a safety rope. Learning a lesson from the fate of Ike Balforio, he wishes to take no chances just in case a Lantern was actually was found. He boarded the rowboat and was taken to the site where the glow was last seen. As he disappeared into the acidic waters the whole crowd gasped in expectation. The experts awaited the find. The police and Civil Air Patrol stood by in case of any emergency.

The diver emerged in about five

minutes holding an object. As hundreds looked on, it soon was apparent that the worst fears of the populace had come to pass. In the diver's hand was a Lantern.

Surprisingly little panic was exhibited by the throng. Some ran. Some broke down and cried. Most stayed calm but kept their distance behind the 7-foot chain link fence in the outfield of Russell Park.

The authorities declared the case closed, wrapping up the affair with a new conference that evening at City Hall. The UFO was declared officially an ISO (Identified Sunken Object), and a collective prayer was uttered that nothing had come of the incident.

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UFO ??

This has been a week that Carbondale won't soon forget. The Pioneer City was "put back on the map" by a fantastic incident which had all the makings of an H. G. Wells' thriller, but ended up as a three-act farce.

Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately for the sake of humanity, the dramatic expectations which brought UFO buffs from all over the Middle Atlantic states proved unfulfilled. A railroad lantern of recent vintage was the only "alien" object found in the Russell Park pit, and that was only "alien" to the extent that it didn't match the rotted tires and rusted auto hulks that grace this cesspool which the media was courteous enough to label a "pond". Then again, any "little green men" would surely have been eaten up by the sulfuric acid which permeates the water.

There is still rampant speculation in the general public, however, that the full story of the UFO has yet to be told. This skepticism has even affected us here at The Miner, as part of our staff firmly maintains that there's still something up there. The credibility of the Carbondale officials is being questioned by a large segment of the public that is convinced that the lantern was planted in the pond in order to diminish the public curiosity.

At a time like this it would be logical to identify the sources of such skepticism. Part of it must surely be the general excitement of the weekend that breeds conflicting accounts of the same story, and the universal law of rumor that states if the first person sees a big black dog bite a small girl, by the time that news reaches the tenth person it has been distorted to a small brown cat scratching a teenage boy. These are natural tendencies in a society that places importance on sensationalism, where people would rather tell someone a rumor they just heard without waiting for verification.

But these natural tendencies toward distorted rumor can be amplified or played down depending on the situation. Letting people in a crowded movie theater know that there is a foolproof sprinkler system in use will deter panic if some wise guy yells "Fire." Likewise, being open and honest from the very beginning will help discourage rumor and speculation in an inflammatory situation such as we had in Carbondale over the past weekend.

It is in this respect that the Carbondale Police Department made several mistakes, although overall their performance was exemplary. At various times during the weekend, and on Monday, certain actions were taken that could easily be interpreted by a suspicious populace as accompanying a "cover up." Perhaps the major mistake involved the expulsion of the press from the pond site. This action, although probably the legitimate result of general frustration with controlling the large crowds, was nonetheless unwise and certainly counterproductive to the overall goal of "getting the thing over with as quickly as possible."

First of all, the press has a right to be on the site at all times. It is easy to see where the general public should have been restricted for safety reasons, but the press had a responsibility to be on hand as the eyes and ears of the people. By excluding the press for a short period the police were obstructing the traditional role of the media in a free society.

But even more important, keeping the press out could only lead to speculation as to what was going on at the site when nobody was there to watch. Already rumors have sprung up to the effect that someone saw a police officer throw the lantern into the water, that the lantern was planted in order to get public attention off the story of the century.

We don't believe that any hanky-panky did take place, and we think that any reports of anybody planting the lantern must be looked at with suspicion, but we also believe that the police left themselves wide open for the spread of wild rumor when they cleared the area so arbitrarily.

This was the main fault that we found with the handling of the Russell Park incident, but the indiscretion was magnified by other examples throughout the weekend. These include the acting chief of police explicitly stressing that no shots were fired at the glowing light in the pond, when witnesses clearly state they saw an officer draw and discharge his revolver. Examples such as these, although very insignificant alone, create a definite credibility gap which could eventually lead to mass suspicion and hysteria.

Beyond these minor faults, however, we feel that the police must be commended. They directed operations on a site at which was focused the attention of the world, while at the same time performing their regular jobs of maintaining peace and order in the community as a whole.

No one was hurt at the scene, thanks to the Carbondale police, and especially thanks to the Civil Air Patrol. Let us not forget the various fire companies who performed excellent service and proved that the Valley is ready for any kind of situation that might spring up, no matter how bizarre or unusual.