

# IUR

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AND ABDUCTIONS**

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# THE WASHINGTON, D.C., JET CHASE OF JULY 26, 2002

BY JOAN WOODWARD

**O**n July 26, 2002, in southern Maryland near Andrews Air Force Base, just outside of Washington, D.C., independent witnesses eight miles apart became aware of highly unusual and persistent aircraft activity between the hours of 1:00 a.m. and 2:00 a.m. Witnesses in both locations saw a light or object that they could not identify and which was being pursued by one military jet. The witnesses independently alerted the media.

A North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) spokesman said two F-16s were scrambled from Andrews AFB at 1:00 a.m. to investigate a radar track that subsequently faded. They found nothing and returned to the base. However, we know that two pairs of fighters took off around 1:00 a.m., remained airborne for 50 minutes, flew at low altitude using afterburners over residential areas of southern Maryland, and pursued an unidentifiable light or object on three occasions. The four fighters returned to base around 1:50 a.m.

The events described in this article took place five miles or more outside of the 15-mile-radius restricted air space around Washington, D.C., but within easy striking distance of the center of the city. They are especially noteworthy because of the increased attention to unauthorized flights in or near the nation's capital.

The sightings of July 26, 2002, continue a long tradition of military aircraft chasing unknown objects.<sup>1-2</sup> Radar tracks of unknown targets are almost always involved in cases of military scrambles. In the best scenarios, the radar tracks are supplemented by eyewitness observations.

A complex sighting that met these criteria occurred just after dark on August 12, 1953, near Rapid City, South Dakota. A spotter for the Ground Observer Corps observed a bright, blue-white light. It was also detected by Air Defense Command radar and by Air Force personnel on the ground, all of whom were soon in contact with one another so there was no doubt they were tracking the same object. An F-84 interceptor was guided to the light by the radar operator. The pilot spotted it and attempted to close in repeatedly,

but whenever he got within three miles of the light, it pulled away in a burst of speed. The jet followed the light 120 miles north and, running low on fuel, had to return to base. At this point, both the light and the fighter had moved off the radarscope. Soon the radar picked up the F-84 returning to base, and in a few minutes, it detected the light following 10–15 miles behind. A second F-84 was scrambled and chased the light but was unable to get closer to it than three miles. At one point, this pilot turned on his radar gunsight and its red warning light blinked on, indicating a solid object was in front of him.<sup>3</sup>

Andrews Air Force Base, the area of activity on July 26, 2002, has had some interesting encounters over the years. On November 18, 1948, about 9:45 p.m., the pilot of a T-6 combat trainer approaching Andrews noticed an odd white light over the base and flew toward it. In the next 10 minutes, the light performed evasive maneuvers, flew in tight circles, and accelerated rapidly. Finally, the pilot maneuvered to a position where he could shine his landing lights on it, and he saw an oblong object with no wings or tail. The object made a sharp turn and headed east at an estimated speed of 500–600 mph. Air Force personnel on the ground also saw the light.<sup>4</sup>

In July 1952, UFOs made national headlines in the Washington, D.C., area around National Airport (now Reagan National) and Andrews AFB. At 11:40 p.m. on July 19, multiple unidentified targets were detected at several radar facilities. The unknowns moved until they were in restricted air space over the White House and Capitol. Some airline pilots saw a blue-white, fast-moving light, and an orange-red sphere was reported near Andrews. Base runways were under repair, so interceptors were sent from Delaware. When they arrived, the anomalous radar targets were gone. After the interceptors left, the unknown blips returned.<sup>5</sup>

In 1952, I was 14 years old and lived six miles northwest of Andrews. Already interested in the UFO subject and stimulated by the headlines, I spent the following week sitting on my front steps looking for what might come by. One evening after dark, a pair of orange-red lights approached from just west of Andrews. They appeared identical, with clear edges and a slightly oval shape (as opposed to being perfectly round), and looked like glowing metal

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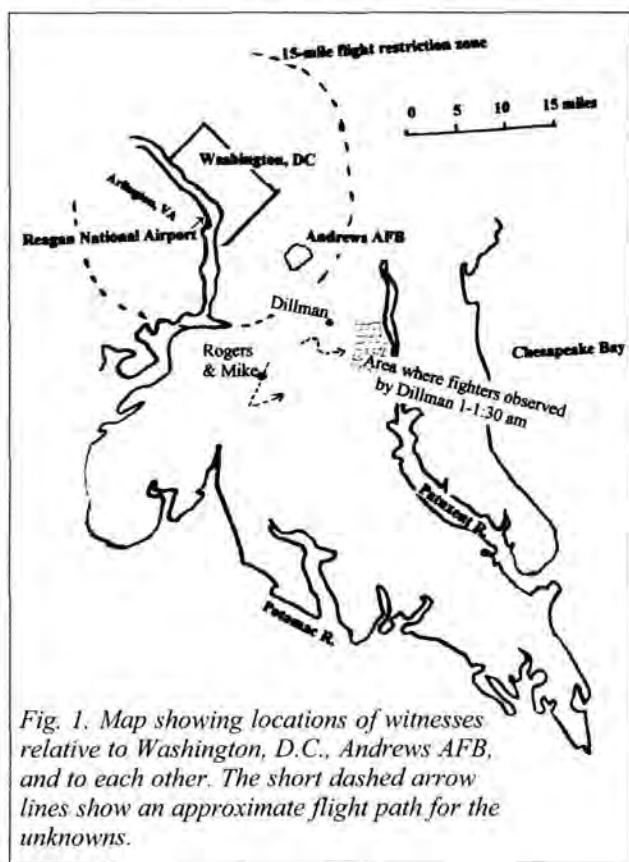
rather than a light source. They flew silently, with one slightly in front of and to the side of the other heading downtown; after passing overhead, one swung around in an arc and headed roughly in the direction from which it had come. The other continued straight, but then it too swung around in a looping U-turn and was able to catch its companion before disappearing from sight.

On July 26, 1952, the targets were back on the radar screens at National Airport and Andrews AFB. The blips moved at about 100 mph, reversed direction occasionally, and sometimes streaked off, once at an estimated 7,000 mph. An airline pilot reported slow-moving objects that resembled the glow of a cigarette. F-94 interceptors arrived and were directed toward the targets, and sometimes the pilots saw lights but could not close on them.

Amazingly, on the 50th anniversary of this second event, the unknowns were back within 20 miles or less of the Capitol and White House. Our military, on high alert in this post-September 11-era of concern about national security, are still chasing them but apparently not catching or identifying them.

## THE INVESTIGATION

On the morning of July 26, 2002, Renny Rogers called the Fund for UFO Research about jet activity and the pursuit of a blue light over his house in Waldorf, Maryland. While investigating Rogers's sighting, I was given the phone number for Gary Dillman, an independent witness located



near Brandywine, Maryland, by WTOP News Radio reporter Brennan Haselton. Both men have been interviewed numerous times for this report.

A neighbor of Rogers also saw part of the fighter/blue light pursuit. He requested anonymity and will be referred to as "Mike."

**Background of the witnesses.** Rogers is in his thirties and is a nonmilitary government employee. His neighbor Mike is in his twenties and a cable installation contractor. Dillman is in his sixties, a retired D.C. policeman, private investigator, and MUFON field investigator. He currently works as a security guard at a large sand-and-gravel operation. All three witnesses are long-time residents of southern Maryland in the area of Andrews AFB and all are familiar with air traffic coming in and out of Andrews. Both Rogers and Dillman have strong, long-lasting interests in the UFO subject, but this is the first time either has seen an object they could not identify.

**Background to the events of July 26.** The map in Figure 1 shows Andrews AFB, Reagan National Airport, the location of Rogers and Mike in Waldorf some 12 miles south-southwest of Andrews, Dillman's location near Brandywine about seven miles southeast of Andrews, and the restricted air space around D.C. Waldorf is about 8.5 miles southwest of Brandywine. Of these locations, only Andrews and Reagan National are located within the restricted air zone. Also indicated on this map are the approximate areas where the fighters were observed by Dillman between 1:00 and 1:30 a.m., and the estimated flight paths of the unknowns pursued by fighters as reported by Dillman and Rogers.

The weather conditions between 1:00 a.m. and 2:00 a.m. at Reagan National Airport were as follows: surface temperature, 70° F.; relative humidity, 76%; the wind, 7–8 mph from the east-southeast. A few scattered clouds were at 3,500 feet (sky 25% or less to 50% sky coverage at 3,500 feet) with an overcast at 5,500–6,000 feet (100% sky coverage). Equivalent data from Dulles International Airport, about 22 miles west-northwest, indicates that these weather conditions were widespread and consistent.<sup>6</sup> A nearly full moon was visible through small gaps in the overcast, having risen shortly before 10:00 p.m. on July 25.

## SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

The following timeline describes who saw what, where, and when. The events have a complicated sequence since multiple witnesses and multiple aircraft are involved. I have included information obtained from NORAD and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

**1:00 a.m.**—The 113th Air National Guard (ANG) fighters were scrambled at NORAD's request. According to NORAD spokesman Major Barry Venable, "Two F-16 jets from Andrews Air Force Base were scrambled approximately 0100 hours 26 Jul 02 after radar detected an unknown aircraft. The unidentified aircraft's track subse-

quently faded from the radar. The F-16s investigated, found nothing out of the ordinary, and returned to base.”<sup>7</sup>

**1:00 a.m.**—Reagan National Airport tower log (FAA Form 7230-4) noted a scramble from Andrews. Altitudes between 4,000 feet to 6,000 feet were blocked for the jets to use. Further comment indicates no aircraft were seen in the CAP (Combat Air Patrol) area or TFR (Temporary Flight Restriction area) area.

**1:00 a.m.**—Gary Dillman, working a late shift at the sand-and-gravel operation about six miles southeast of Andrews, heard and then saw two pairs of fighters take off from Andrews in quick succession. The first two flew by him curving to the east or east-southeast, and the second two curved to the southeast. The fighters were using short bursts of their afterburners, which he could see and hear. He estimated their altitude as they flew over at 2,000–5,000 feet. Because their departure was so unusual, he continued to watch them in the distant east and southeast sky, tracking them by a white strobe on the tip of the tail. On a humid night such as this one, these strobes can be seen over an estimated distance of 10 miles.<sup>8</sup> Dillman could not hear their engines.

**1:00 a.m.**—A report of loud aircraft flying “way too low” in the Waldorf area was sent to the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC). Witness did not go outside.<sup>9</sup>

**1:00–1:30 a.m.**—Dillman watched the strobes on the fighters that continued to fly around in the east to southeast about 20–25 degrees above the horizon. He was convinced that something very unusual was going on. Most of the time he could see only one fighter strobe at a time in the distance, sometimes two, but the aircraft were circling, turning right, turning left, flying back and forth. He could not hear them. Occasionally one pair of fighters returned to the Andrews area, and then flew back to the east-southeast again. When asked whether he thought these fighters landed and were replaced by another fresh pair, Dillman thought they had not, because he would have heard their takeoff sounds—with which he is very familiar—but he could not totally rule out the possibility.

**1:30 a.m.**—Dillman called WTOP news radio and informed them that something extraordinary was going on involving fighters scrambled from Andrews.

Just after his call to WTOP, Dillman looked toward the southwest (toward Waldorf) and saw a glowing, round, hard-edged, orange object 25–30 degrees above the horizon coming toward him on a downward path (moving southwest to northeast). At first he thought it was a meteor as it became brighter and larger. When the object was at about 20 degrees elevation, a fighter appeared out of the clouds coming from either north or east of the object. The fighter turned toward the object, which responded with a smooth, curving, banking turn to the south, away from the fighter that was now following it. They both flew south, then curved toward the east, maintaining the same distance between them until the object was lost into the clouds in the southeast sky, still at about 20 degrees above the horizon. As he watched, Dillman could hear the sound of the fighter but could detect no sound

from the orange object. This entire sequence took from 10 to 15 seconds. The distance between the unknown and the fighter was estimated as 17–18 times the length of the fighter.<sup>10</sup>

**1:30 a.m. (approximate)**—In Waldorf, Renny Rogers had recently returned home from work, was in his living room, and heard distant but distinct aircraft noise that he interpreted as fighters taking off. In reality, this noise must have been from fighters already in the air.

**1:35–1:37 a.m. (approximate)**—Jet noise increased in the Waldorf area. Normally, when Rogers hears aircraft noise, the airplane flies by and leaves the area. In this case, the jet noise stayed in his area, which is extremely unusual, day or night. Rogers was sure he was hearing more than two fighters. When the walls of his house started rattling, he went outside to find out what was happening. He saw a single fighter flying away from him to the south-southeast. The fighter was using its afterburner for 2–3 seconds. After it disappeared, Rogers went back inside.

**1:40 a.m.**—Dillman called WTOP a second time, describing what he had just seen. As he talked, he could still see the white strobes from a couple of jets to the east.

As he finished his call, Dillman saw the orange object again in the same area of the southwest sky as earlier. This time it was about 25 degrees above the horizon and was moving from the southwest to the south in a slow, level, smooth, banking turn. It appeared as a slender oval that became rounder as it headed south. It was already being followed by a fighter when Dillman saw it this time, and the distance between them was about the same as before. The pair continued to fly south or southeast, still turning, and then they curved to the east again, disappearing into the clouds in the same area of the sky as before and once again at about 20 degrees elevation. The entire flight path of this second pursuit appeared level, and as before, the sequence lasted 10–15 seconds and was nearly a repetition of the 1:30 a.m. sequence. Again, Dillman could hear the engine of the fighter but could hear nothing from the orange object. An estimate of the distance between Dillman and the unknown with its pursuing fighter was one or two miles based on the duration of the sighting and arc of sky covered in that time.<sup>11</sup>

Dillman e-mailed me on August 31 that he had belatedly remembered a moment in this second sequence when the orange object appeared a medium-blue color for an instant. First he thought it occurred when the orange circle turned into an ellipse as it turned south, then he thought it may have been as it disappeared into the clouds. He is certain he saw the blue color for only an instant.

**1:40 a.m. (approximate)**—In Waldorf, the jet noise was increasing again. Rogers went outside and saw nothing to the south where the fighter had disappeared earlier, so he moved to where he could see the northern sky. He saw a bright, pale-bluish light in the north-northeast moving at what he considered a phenomenal rate of speed. The light was about 35 degrees above the horizon when first seen and its path dropped precipitously an estimated 2000 feet and

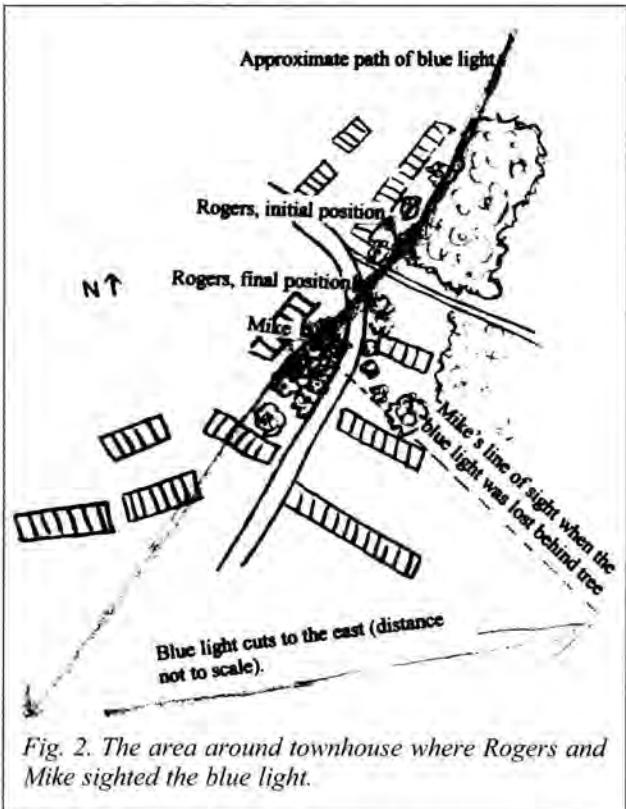


Fig. 2. The area around townhouse where Rogers and Mike sighted the blue light.

came back up slightly after which it flew in a fast, straight line from north-northeast to east-southeast, where it was lost high in the sky behind the top of a nearby tree (elevation about 80–85 degrees). It moved in an effortless, floating manner but at very high speed, and it was silent. Distant jet noise was heard but nothing was nearby. The light appeared to be just a light source, more starlike than not, and it was constantly brightening and dimming on a 1.5-second cycle (bright-dim-bright).

Rogers ran toward the south and in about seven seconds he found the blue light in the southwestern sky at an elevation of about 45 degrees and moving toward the southwest. Rogers saw his neighbor, Mike, who had come outside, and called to him. A fighter came from the north over Rogers's house in level, straight-line flight in obvious pursuit of the light. The fighter was now on the same flight path as the light, both heading southwest. The aircraft was dipping its wings from side to side as it flew and continued to do so as it followed the blue light, and Rogers's impression was that the aircraft was constantly correcting its course. The fighter was not using its afterburner. The blue light was much faster than the pursuing jet, and Rogers estimated that the jet was 1,000–2,000 feet behind the light (1,000 feet would be 20 times the length of the fighter) and had no chance of catching it.

These events took place beneath the cloud cover at 5,500–6,000 feet but above the scattered clouds at 3,500 feet. The scattered clouds at 3,500 feet sometimes briefly obscured or partly obscured the blue light and/or the fighter. The fighter, being so much larger than the light, could still

be seen as it passed above these clouds, but the much smaller blue light was intermittently hidden.

Rogers estimated he could see the light for five or six seconds as it flew southwest and that he could see the fighter much longer. His impression was that they continued to fly southwest until they disappeared into the distance. However, he was in the street and his view was blocked by two rows of trees along the street in front of him. Mike was on the opposite side of the rows of trees and he had a narrow but unobstructed view to the southwest.

Mike saw Rogers running in his direction and calling to him, and then he saw the brightening and dimming pale-blue light and then the pursuing fighter. Their flight path took them over his head or nearly so. Mike thought the light appeared to be slowing as it flew southwest and that the fighter was able to draw closer to it. About 25 degrees above the south-southwest horizon, he thought the light paused for a second, and then took off to the east at a sharp angle at extremely high speed. The light moved in level flight from about 220 degrees in the southwest sky to about 150–160 degrees in the southeast in about one-half second, at which point Mike's view was blocked by a tree about 75 feet from him. The fighter also turned and flew east, but was now far behind the light.

Figure 2 is a drawing of the Waldorf townhouse development showing the complex natural and artificial topography, the estimated flight path of the blue light, and the locations for Rogers and Mike.

Mike reported a very bright, ice-blue light with a steady rhythm of dimming and brightening that never altered. He was surprised by its brightness and by its silence as it flew over.

Mike and Rogers heard a lot of jet noise to the southeast as they talked for a couple of minutes before going back inside their respective homes. Rogers called the Charles County sheriff's office, which said they had no other reports, and Andrews AFB, who first wanted to know who he was and then said they knew of nothing going on.

**1:51 a.m.**—The Reagan National Airport tower log noted the scrambled fighters returning to base.

**1:50–1:55 a.m. (approximate)**—Dillman saw a pair of fighters coming from the southeast, followed by a second pair. They were flying sedately and approached Andrews as if for landing, and no more was seen or heard. These were the first fighters to approach the Andrews area since he saw the orange object at 1:30 a.m.

## THE SEARCH FOR ADDITIONAL WITNESSES

An effort was made to find additional witnesses, but none were found. Both Rogers and Dillman called WTOP and reported their observations. During that day, WTOP repeated that "residents were shaken from their beds" and that "several people called WTOP Radio reporting seeing a bright blue or orange ball moving very fast, being chased by jets."<sup>12</sup> However, when I contacted Amy Morris, the re-

porter who handled this story, she said the only people who called the station were Dillman, who called twice, and Rogers, who called once to report what he and Mike had seen. The WTOP coverage implied many witnesses and this was carried widely in the media.<sup>13-15</sup>

In the search for additional witnesses, local authorities were contacted, sometimes repeatedly, by myself and others. This included the Charles County sheriff's office and the Maryland state police. Neither reported calls about unknown lights or low-flying jets.<sup>16-17</sup> I contacted the sheriff's office for Calvert County, located to the east, and reviewed their log which showed nothing of interest. The Patuxent Naval Air Test Center, about 33 miles southeast of Waldorf, had no records of any calls about low-flying, noisy aircraft, or other sky activity. In addition, they had nothing in the air at the time.

The National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC) posted media reports and a report by Rogers. In addition, NUFORC had one report of low-flying jets heard over Waldorf around 1:00 a.m., and another of two lights seen over Arlington, Virginia, around 1:15 a.m. These will be discussed later.

## WITNESS DESCRIPTIONS

**The fighters.** In some of the witnesses' initial reports, the military aircraft are identified as "F-16s." This identification came from the almost immediate public acknowledgment by NORAD that they had scrambled two F-16s and the assumption that these were the aircraft over southern Maryland. None of the witnesses did a field identification of the aircraft they saw as F-16s. All of the witnesses referred to the aircraft as fighters, military jets, or jets. All noticed different things about the external lighting on these fighters. No one reported sonic booms, so the fighters could not have been traveling faster than Mach 1 (about 750 mph at sea level). Afterburners were seen and heard, but they were used briefly.

The 113th Air National Guard (ANG), based at Andrews, is the unit that maintains F-16s on strip alert in the D.C. area and responds to NORAD's requests for scrambles.<sup>18</sup> I spoke with Capt. Smith of the 113th ANG. At my request, he researched the navigation lights on the F-16s currently flying out of Andrews with the following results. There is a highly visible bright-white strobe on the top of the tail that is always used. The red and green wingtip lights may be flashing or constant, as there is a variable control on them. There is a white navigation light on the bottom of the aircraft that does not flash. And there are other smaller lights that are not highly visible that may or may not be used.

The witnesses' observations are compatible with this information. The white strobe on the top of the tail is what Dillman observed and used to track the aircraft at a distance. Rogers remembers seeing a red wingtip light and used that to estimate the apparent size of the unknown blue light. The fighter was low and almost overhead, so the lower-intensity wingtip lights were easily visible. Likewise, Mike, who

reported the fighter as overhead, remembers red and green wingtip lights and at least one steady white light on the bottom of the aircraft, again an accurate description of the lighting reported by Capt. Smith. Rogers and Mike were looking up at the aircraft during the closest part of their encounter, and neither noticed the white strobe, probably consistent with their position relative to the aircraft. These descriptions increase our confidence in the memory and visual abilities of the witnesses.

**The unknowns.** The evidence is strong that there were two unknowns present. Dillman described the object as a hard-edged, solid, round shape the color of an edible orange. It had a steady glow and he compared it to glowing metal rather than to a light source. As it flew in a curved path, it appeared as an ellipse and an oval before returning to a round shape. The only change reported in its luminosity was an initial brightening as it descended toward Dillman at 1:30 a.m., and a moment of medium blue as discussed above. Dillman judged the orange object to be about the same size as the jet fighter following it. The fighter is about 49 feet long and has a 32-foot wingspan.<sup>19</sup> Due to the distance and darkness, he could not see the body of the fighter, but could observe its strobe, but he has no doubts about his size estimate. Clearly the orange object was large enough to have a shape (oval, ellipse, round) visible to the observer. It never demonstrated any flying ability beyond that of the fighter following it. The distance between the two remained the same on both pursuits and the turns were the types of turns that an airplane would make. The orange object basically flew like an airplane but did not look like one.

Rogers described a pale-blue light and compared its brightness to that of a light or beacon on the top of a radio tower. It was not a strobe light but constantly brightened and dimmed on an unchanging cycle of 1.5 seconds the entire time it was in view. He estimated its apparent size as about three times larger than the red wingtip light of the fighter. It was only a light source and no edges could be seen. Rogers frequently referred to it as an "orb." No dark body was detected behind the light, and Rogers was sure there was none. The Waldorf area is a highly developed commercial area that throws an enormous amount of light into the sky. Standing with Dillman in Brandywine, the Waldorf area eight miles away could be clearly seen as it lit up the sky. On July 26, with the overcast at 5,500–6,000 feet, thus capturing the ground light, and with a near full moon above the overcast, one could speculate that if the blue light were on a dark object of any size, the witnesses would have seen it. Rogers described the light as amazingly fast but also having an almost floating or effortless quality to its movement. He felt the fighter had no chance of catching it.

Mike described the light similarly. He said it was the pale blue of a distant halogen headlight and referred to it as ice blue. He also described a brightening and dimming cycle that never changed its timing, no matter what the light was doing. He said the light went over his head and he was

(continued on page 22)

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# TIMMERMANIA: A STEP TOO FAR INTO THE TIMMERMAN FILES?

BY MICHAEL D. SWORDS

**A**s *IUR* readers are aware, I have presented two previous articles (*IUR*, Winter 2001–2002 and Summer 2002) featuring handfuls of interesting and unusual UFO phenomena from the case files of John Timmerman, collected at his many UFO exhibits at malls. There are nearly 1,200 transcripts in these files. The lengthy extracting process has been completed, and I am now writing a monograph describing these cases for the Fund for UFO Research. This, then, may be the last *IUR* article on John's files before you can buy the "full story" in the months to come.

So let's have a little fun with the stories. John certainly had a lot of interesting tales told to him during his decade on the mall circuit, and I've selected a few of them which will, in their different ways, stretch you a little. Are any of these stories true? Who knows? All we can say is that these folks told them to John earnestly, and so, just maybe they are. Welcome to the Timmerman Twilight Zone.

## THE MUSEUM EXHIBIT

*Medford, Oregon.* August 1976, during the day.

The witness was working on his cabin (a mobile home) in the forested hills. It was a clear, bright day with no clouds. He was distracted by an intensely bright light "like burning magnesium" coming across the sky. He squinted at the lights as he realized that there were two of them, side by side, and saw that they were moving towards him and would pass over his home. He heard no noise, which was puzzling, but not as puzzling as what he saw next. These intensely lit objects were discs, curved on the top and more or less flat on the bottom, and in between them was a third, dark-gray object. It was a World War II-vintage bomber.

The plane had two propellers, which were not turning, and a bubble-like gunner's hatch on the front. The tips of each wing seemed to rest on the luminous discs on either side, as if they were ferrying it. The trio of objects moved silently overhead, over the hill behind him, and was gone. John didn't ask him how he spent the rest of the day.

*Michael D. Swords is professor emeritus of the Environmental Institute, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.*

## WISHING MAKES IT SO

*Swift Current, Saskatchewan.* May 1967, in the evening.

A woman saw a light shining through her basement window. Outside and across the street, some large object was beaming three colors of lights and rotating. "I got all excited. I ran upstairs and the lady upstairs, her and I went outside and we watched it." They watched the big tri-colored light as it silently spun over the top of the neighbor's house for about 20 minutes. Her sense of adventure was not strong enough to get her to cross the road, but she decided that she should go inside and call the neighbors to tell them about the big UFO over their house.

She couldn't get in contact with them. "I tried to get through and the line was busy, busy, busy." After trying several times, she looked out and the UFO was gone. The next morning she called and reached the neighbor. When told the story, the neighbor said, "Well, the line wasn't busy." She explained that they had gotten together for a card game, and spent all the time talking about UFOs. Our witness then said to John, laughing, "Isn't that weird?" Yes, that seems very weird indeed.

## THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

*Paxson, Alaska.* Winter 1976, on a gloomy, snow-packed day.

A former Alaskan state trooper told John about how he and his coworker tried to catch a mysterious L-shaped array of three lights using snowmobiles. They never succeeded. When he finished with that report, he mentioned the following, different incident, almost as an afterthought.

"This is something totally different. . . . I don't know what to make of it, but I was on an emergency run in my patrol car." He was doing about 80 mph; even on the dry snow his auto had good traction, and the road was empty. Suddenly, a pulsing globe of light came directly at the vehicle. He jerked the wheel slightly, but the light swerved away at the last moment. And then again, and again, always in his driving lane. Thoroughly boggled, he pulled into the empty left lane and drove on. Just then, he roared around a curve, and there was a moose in the road . . . in the right lane.

And they avoided the inevitable collision.

"If I would have stayed where I should have been . . . I would have hit him. Dead center . . . I would have hit that moose, and . . . if you hit one it will kill you."

So, what was that light? "It was just kind of a—the way I describe it is it looked like it was alive. It didn't look like just a light shining. It looked like it was a pulsing, breathing type thing. . . . Again, you know those long Alaskan nights, sometimes you imagine things, so I don't know. All I know is there's something out there that I don't know." Amen.

## YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING

*A plateau near Camp Hood (now Fort Hood Military Reservation), Texas.* Sometime in 1949, about 1:00 a.m.

The witness told John that as a young man he had joined the Army and was in the 2nd Armored Division of the Tank Corps. One of the tasks that he and many others at Camp Hood was given was designated "division guard." This duty involved being taken out to a plateau and standing guard over the apparently vacant, fenced-off area. "Why they sent us to guard a plateau was beyond me, at the time."

This guard duty lasted about a month, and ultimately one morning, about 1:00 a.m., something happened. Lights were seen in the sky, very bright and very silent. They approached the plateau and came down slowly. "All of a sudden, the end of the plateau opened up and we could see light coming out of the inside. And these other bright lights just came down inside the plateau. And the door closed."

John wondered what they were. The witness said, "Whatever they were," in confused agreement. As to UFOs he said, "At the time I was ignorant about such things." We're not a whole lot better off 54 years later.

## THE DOORWAY TO MAGONIA

*Near Indianapolis, Indiana.* In 1977 and 1978, on two strange evenings.

Whenever someone begins talking to John with statements like the following, you know you're in for a lulu:

This one is very different and it's sort of difficult to try and explain this to anybody and have them not think you are making it up, or you're from the loony bin.

John said something grandfatherly to him, so the witness went on. He was standing in his living room, he reported, when he got a tingling all over his skin and the hair on the back of his neck stood up. "I could feel a charge in the air." He instinctively felt that he had to look behind him. Though frightened, he turned and saw a shoulder, upper arm, and part of the torso of some nonhuman creature. The rest of it wasn't there—or wasn't *fully* there, as it seemed to be emerging into his room along a line. This line did not seem to be physical (although there may have been a small colored glow to it), but rather just a geometrical delineation of a boundary between here and "there." Almost immediately,

the creature disappeared back beyond the line. About one-and-a-half years later, it happened again.

What did the creature look like? Well, the next time you see John, rap him on the head for me, because he never asked. Maybe he didn't want to know what might be lurking just inside his closet, or coming up from under the bed.

## DON'T MAKE THE BALL MAD

*Furnace Creek, Death Valley, California.* Sometime in the early 1970s, about 2:30–3:00 a.m.

Two young men in their twenties were walking back to the small house that they roomed in while working on the staff of a desert hotel. Their shift had ended at 2:30 a.m. They saw a cactus-like shape off the left side of the road, but nothing should have been there. There was a green flash, but no noise. Then another green flash. And another. This was getting freaky, when a red ball of light appeared about 15 feet behind them. It floated at about head height and was the size of a beach ball. They ran.

The ball followed. One man fell, cut his knee, and scrambled up to follow the other into their house, where they slammed and locked the door. The ball stopped at the boundary of their yard and waited. It oscillated in size. When it grew large, it would be transparent and faint. When it shrank, it would get to the size of a grapefruit and blaze so brightly that the mountainside behind it lit up. The red light was so strong that it made all the dust in the inside air sparkle, adding to the eeriness.

Macho behavior gradually began to emerge as one man said: "Why don't you go out and try to communicate with them? This is the chance of a lifetime." The other man replied: "Why don't you? You're bigger than me." But actually, what was going on in his mind was the impression that the ball was impatient with them for not coming out, and was getting angry.

After four or five minutes of waiting, the ball backed away. Across the road, it began creating a vortex at the base of the mountain.

The rocks started rising into the air. . . . They would shake from side to side. There were hundreds of them [the largest about the size of melons]. They started going around in a circle, like it had complete control over them. . . . Then the thing went way up in the air and it looked kind of like a tornado and it was all red. . . . The only noise you could hear was this clickety-clack, clickety-clack when the rocks hit together.

Then the light blinked out, and everything crashed down the mountainside and onto the road. The ball blinked back on again at the top of the mountain and meandered away. One man spent a sleepless night peeking out from the covers; the other spent it staring out the window. The next day they both quit their jobs. I suppose an encounter with hell's tornado is as good an excuse for unemployment as any.

(continued on page 26)

# ATTITUDES TOWARD ETI, UFOS, AND ABDUCTIONS

BY MARK RODEGHIER

**A**s most readers of *IUR* know, the Sci-Fi Channel aired a miniseries in December 2002 about UFOs and abductions. Titled *Taken*, it was produced by Steven Spielberg and was nominated for a Golden Globe Award in the category of best TV miniseries. As a promotion for the series, and because of what executives from Sci-Fi say is a serious commitment to ufology, they have also sponsored a number of other events and programs, including two forums on ufology and abductions.

A related project involved contracting with RoperASW, a leading market research firm, to ask a national sample of adults a series of questions about UFOs and abductions. This poll, conducted by telephone, was completed in August 2002 and had a sample size of 1,021, with a margin of error of 3%.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Sci-Fi Channel was interested in demonstrating that there is enormous interest and belief in the UFO phenomenon. Thus, the questions they asked are not always identical to other questions previously asked on national polls. But even given this, it is still possible to use the results from their poll to gauge current attitudes and make some comparisons to previous polls.

The miniseries *Taken* uses the abduction phenomenon as a central theme (hence the title). As a consequence, the Sci-Fi Channel included the set of 10 questions developed by Budd Hopkins and Dave Jacobs to investigate the prevalence of the abduction experience. Five of the questions are indicators that can, the authors claim, be used to determine whether someone is likely to be an abductee. This survey becomes the third time this set of questions has been administered to a national sample (the others were in 1991 and 1998). I will compare the results among these three instances to see what we can learn about the questions and the positive responses to same. (The poll results can be viewed at [www.scifi.com/ufo/roper/](http://www.scifi.com/ufo/roper/), but I have supplemented that information with analysis of the original data.)

## BELIEF ABOUT ETI

Perhaps the best place to begin is not with UFOs but with what American adults believe about extraterrestrial intelligence (ETI).

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gence (ETI). On an overall question about the existence of ETI, fully two-thirds think, "there are other forms of intelligent life in the universe."<sup>2</sup> Males are somewhat more likely than females to hold this belief. Those with more education are more likely to agree (over 72% for those who attended graduate school compared to 57% for those with less than a high school education).

The solid majority who believe in the existence of ETI is not an unexpected result to those of us in ufology. Although I am unaware of any current survey results where the same question has been asked of scientists, I would expect that at least 80% would answer affirmatively. Still, the percentage in the Sci-Fi Channel poll who believe in ETI is higher than in previous polls. For example, in a 1982 poll by Audits and Surveys, 47% agreed that "some form of intelligent life does exist in outer space."<sup>3</sup>

Although it is always questionable to make inferences based on one new poll, the increased belief in ETI is consistent with the general trend in society toward more interest in the topics of space and life beyond earth that we have all witnessed recently. Astronomers continue to find extrasolar planets at a growing pace (see Michael D. Swords, "Discovering the New Extrasolar Planets," *IUR*, Spring 2001, pp. 29–30), and scientists openly speculate about where we might find evidence of life, including in our own solar system on Mars or Europa. All of this information, readily reported by the media, may well be having a positive effect on belief in ETI.

How would people feel if ETI was discovered? Are they psychologically, or otherwise, prepared for such a momentous event? Of course, we will never really know until we find ETI (or they find us), but we can ask people how they *think* they will react, and this is what the Sci-Fi Channel did. When asked whether they are "psychologically prepared for an official government announcement regarding the discovery of intelligent extraterrestrial life," about three-quarters said they are either "very prepared" or "somewhat prepared." Males and, again, those with more education are more likely to claim they are prepared for such an announcement. (Males are more avid readers of science fiction, so perhaps more have simply considered the possibility of the discovery of ETI.) Those who believe in ETI are much more likely than those who don't (84% to 56%) to feel prepared, which makes good sense.

In 1999, the National Institute for Discovery Science (NIDS) asked a national sample of Americans several questions about UFOs, including their reaction to proof for the existence of ETI. The question read, "If undeniable evidence of the existence of advanced extraterrestrial life were confirmed, psychologically which of the statements on this card best describes how you would react?" (The phrase "on this card" was added because the interview was done in person rather than by telephone.)

This question is reasonably close in meaning to the Sci-Fi Channel question, so we can reasonably compare the two. The response choices provided, though, are not parallel, except for the first category, which is "I am fully prepared to handle it" on the NIDS question, and "very prepared" on the Sci-Fi. In the NIDS poll, 32% said they were fully prepared; in the Sci-Fi poll, 42% said they are very prepared. From this we can safely conclude that at least one-third of American adults feel quite prepared for the discovery of ETI. Conversely, 21% on the NIDS poll said they would either be "seriously shaken" or "extremely distraught." So not everyone is ready to welcome ETI with open arms.

For a quick lesson in survey research, I note that 30% of the NIDS respondents agreed with the statement, "I don't care one way or another" about the discovery of ETI. Before we react in stunned disbelief to that attitude, consider the following. First, there was no "no opinion" choice offered. Thus, many of this group are actually trying to say, "I don't know how I would react to the discovery of ETI," which is surely a reasonable opinion. And second, the five response choices did not provide something more moderate between "I am fully prepared to handle it," and "I would have to rethink my place in the universe" (the second choice). The Sci-Fi question had a better set of response options, though still hardly perfect. The lesson is that a wonderful question can be ruined by the wrong set of response choices.

Would the discovery of ETI lead to a change in religious beliefs? This is a very complicated question because it depends on so many factors, including, one supposes, what the ETI say about *their* religion(s), if any. Still, most adults were willing to provide an answer to the Roper interviewers, and a large majority (88%) says a discovery "would not change them at all." Older people, and those with more education, are more likely to agree that their beliefs would remain the same, though not by large margins over those younger, or with less education.

Okay, would you like to meet ETI (assuming that they are friendly)? About half of Americans (52%) say they would be very or somewhat interested in doing so. I'm certain that some would instead prefer to view ETI from a distance—on TV or the Internet—but this question wasn't asked. There were large differences by gender (males 63%, females 42%), and age, such that younger people were more likely to be interested in meeting ETI. Interestingly, those with more education were not more likely to be interested in a meeting. I suppose almost all readers of *IUR* would love

to meet a real, friendly ET, but we are hardly your average American when it comes to this topic.

## BELIEF ABOUT UFOs

Direct questions about the UFO phenomenon were also included in the Sci-Fi Channel poll. When asked whether "UFOs are something real or something in people's imagination?" 56% of the sample agreed. That is a majority and an impressive number on the surface. However, the percentage answering this question in the affirmative has not changed much since the early 1970s. When asked in 1973, about 52% of the respondents to a Gallup poll agreed that UFOs are real. Ever since then, the percentage has fluctuated around the 50% mark. Therefore, the Sci-Fi results are consistent with 30 years of poll data but indicate no shift in belief in the reality of UFOs today.

Unfortunately, although the Sci-Fi Channel used a question similar to other questions asking about the existence of UFOs, they chose a rather poor one. The question requires a forced choice between the alternative "UFOs are real" (which can have multiple meanings) and "something in people's imagination," which hardly exhausts the options for explaining UFO sightings with mundane phenomena. For example, even debunkers can answer "yes" to this question because they understand it to be asking whether there is a real, nonimaginary UFO phenomenon to be explained. They read the question as asking: "Do real objects and phenomena that are misperceived often cause UFO sightings?" (as compared to people seeing something that isn't there). Without doubt, most respondents interpret the question as it was intended, i.e., "Are UFOs alien spaceships?" because that is the context in which the question was asked.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, not all would do so.

As a result, the next question asked is superior: "Do you think that UFOs have ever visited Earth in some form?" Visiting Earth implies that UFOs are real, and visiting also implies that the UFOs are controlled by some type of intelligence (they could be remote-controlled probes rather than manned ships). To this question, 48% agreed that UFOs have visited here in some form. Now that's a percentage to write to your congressman about,<sup>5</sup> and it demonstrates how divergent are the beliefs of the mass public versus the elites.

This question, understandably, was only asked of those who said that UFOs are real. But the figure of 48% refers to the total sample. Among those who believe that UFOs are real, 90% say that UFOs have visited earth. Belief that UFOs have visited Earth, or that they are real, doesn't vary much by sex, education, or income, unlike belief in the existence of ETI. Why there is a difference is uncertain.

Even the question about UFOs visiting Earth has a caveat. Notice that it doesn't specify a timeframe. Followers of ancient-astronaut theories, who believe that extraterrestrials came here thousands of years ago but have never been back since, would presumably answer yes. They will be lumped together with those who believe in recent UFO visits

to Earth (and some will have both beliefs). That's fine, so long as this was the intent of those who constructed the question. As I have said in other articles in *IUR*, questions are not easy to write, and without careful thought, survey results are often ambiguous at best.

Among those who expressed belief in ETI, 63% say they agree that UFOs have visited Earth, greater than the overall 48%. You might, at first, be willing to judge this finding as unremarkable: Why wouldn't we expect a higher percentage of those who believe in ETI to also believe UFOs have visited here? But this type of link is exactly what establishment science, and specifically those working in the SETI field, caution us against. They argue that a belief in ETI—and everyone working on SETI believes in ETI, as a matter of faith—has no logical connection to a belief in UFOs. Aliens out there are very, very unlikely to come here.

However, for those of us not wearing blinders or bound by the limits of today's science, it seems quite sensible that belief in ETI would lead to greater belief in UFOs (or vice-versa). Without ETI there are no UFOs (again, excepting time travelers and other exotic possibilities). So there is a logical connection between the two attitudes, in my judgment.<sup>6</sup>

The questions get even more specific next, as the respondents were asked whether they "believe that humans have already interacted with intelligent life from other worlds." To my knowledge, a similar question has not been asked on other surveys. Given that about half the respondents think that UFOs have visited Earth, it won't be unexpected to learn that 37% agree that some humans have interacted with ETI (with the meaning of "interaction" unspecified).

## **UFO SIGHTINGS**

All surveys about UFOs, it seems, have to ask whether someone has seen a UFO, and the Sci-Fi one was no exception. However, they asked the question with a twist (and not a helpful one). The respondents were asked, "Have you yourself, or someone you know, ever seen a UFO at close quarters?"

This question is problematic because it is double-barreled, which means that it asks about two topics at the same time. It would be far better to ask separately about a respondent's experiences, and then those of people he or she knows. In this format, we can't distinguish between the two. Of course, it is interesting to know that about 11.6% of adults have seen a UFO at close quarters or know someone who has. It helps explain the high level of belief in UFOs, but it would still be better to separate the two.

Second, there had to be varying interpretations of the phrase "close quarters." This reduces the validity of the question because what is a close encounter to one person is not to another. Why was the question posed in this manner? Because, I suspect, the Sci-Fi Channel executives are interested in promoting the idea of close encounters, rather than

just UFO sightings, since the miniseries *Taken* is about close encounters, especially abductions.

Whatever the problems with this question, not unexpectedly, having a close UFO sighting, or knowing someone who has, greatly increases one's belief that UFOs are real (by about 30 percentage points).<sup>7</sup>

In two questions less fraught with complications, 2.8% of the respondents said that they, or someone they know, has "seen a UFO that caused physical effects to humans, animals, or objects." And 2.2% agreed that they, or someone they know, have "encountered an extraterrestrial life form in or near a UFO." While 2–3% may seem minuscule, saying that one in 50 Americans has had an encounter with ETI puts this in perspective. In a town with 10,000 inhabitants, about 200 would have had an encounter with ETI.

## **THE GOVERNMENT AND UFOs**

The survey included four questions asking about the U.S. government, UFOs, and ETI. When asked "... is the government telling us everything it knows about UFOs?" 72% of the sample said no. A parallel question about the government and extraterrestrial life found 69% saying no. These are high levels of distrust, and these were the first questions in the UFO section, so are not biased by previous responses. Those with less education are more likely to agree that the government is withholding information on these topics.

Generic information sharing was assessed by an earlier question that asked, "In general, do you think the government does not share enough information with the public?" to which 55% answered yes.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the public believes that UFO information is less likely to be shared than other types of information.

Those who think UFOs are real, not imaginary, are more likely to agree that the government is not telling us everything it knows about UFOs (89–64%). There is, though, no relationship between belief that UFOs are real and general trust in the U.S. government, compared to five years ago.

When asked whether the U.S. government should "keep UFO sightings classified if national security is not at risk," 60% say no. The equivalent percentage for a parallel question about "encounters with extraterrestrial life" is 58%. Males are more likely to say no than females. As expected, if a respondent agreed that UFOs are real, he or she is more likely to say that sightings should not be classified.

## **ABDUCTION BELIEFS**

Eventually, given the rationale for the Sci-Fi poll, the interviewers got around to asking questions about abductions. The first question asked whether "humans have ever been taken or abducted by other intelligent life forms?" (note that superfluous word "taken"). Rather astoundingly, about one-fifth of adults (21%) agreed that humans have

been abducted. And among those who think UFOs have visited earth, 39% think that abductions have occurred.

Sit back for a moment and really think about this result. It's one thing for those seriously interested in UFOs to believe in physical abductions; it's quite another for the average American, who hasn't necessarily paid that much attention to the evidence for the phenomenon, to believe in abductions to this extent. That one-fifth of Americans believe in real abductions is, in its own way, the most astounding finding of the survey (it must have pleased the Sci-Fi Channel folks), given what this implies about our situation on Earth. No wonder many people say they are psychologically prepared for an announcement that ETI exists: Believing that abductions have been occurring would tend to have that effect, wouldn't it?<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the interview moved to the questions that Hopkins and Jacobs constructed to study the potential proportion of abductees in the population.<sup>10</sup> Although 10 questions are asked (one of which is a control question), only five of these are used to determine whether someone might be an abductee. They are:

1. Waking up paralyzed with a sense of a strange person or presence or something else in the room.
2. Feeling that you were actually flying through the air although you didn't know why or how.
3. Experiencing a period of time of an hour or more, in which you were apparently lost, but you could not remember why, or where you had been.
4. Seeing unusual lights or balls of light in a room without knowing what was causing them, or where they came from.
5. Finding puzzling scars on your body and neither you nor anyone else remembering how you received them or where you got them.

Before reviewing the results, I note in passing that about 13% of the respondents had a "feeling that you left your body" (an out-of-body experience, a percentage matching findings from other surveys), 15% had seen a ghost, and 5% had "vivid dreams about UFOs."

## HOW MANY ABDUCTEES?

As mentioned above, these same questions were asked twice before, in 1991 and 1998. The table below provides comparison figures for the percentage who answered yes to the five key questions on each survey.

The most striking finding for 2002 is that the percentages are generally higher than the other two years. We must

remember that there is a margin of error on each value (about  $\pm 1.4\%$  for the first two years, and about  $\pm 3\%$  for 2002). Taking this into account, the percentages from 1991 and 2002 are not statistically distinct for waking paralyzed but are different for the other categories. For scars on the body, balls of light, and a feeling of flying, the 2002 percentages are greater, but for missing time the 1991 percentage is greater. So statistically, there is no clear trend between these two surveys.

On the other hand, the percentages from 1998 are significantly lower than those for 2002, except possibly for the missing time question (and they are lower than the same questions in 1991).

In all three surveys, waking up paralyzed was the most common experience. Otherwise, the rank of the experiences varies from one year to the next. But taking a broader perspective, the results are reasonably stable from one survey to the next. The range of percentages across the three surveys for any one question isn't too large. These five experiences are not very common, but neither are they very rare (as compared to having an encounter with extraterrestrial life, for example, which 2% answered in the affirmative in the Sci-Fi Channel survey, but see below).

According to Hopkins and Jacobs, the answer to any one question is unimportant in itself. Answering yes to at least four out of five of these questions, however, is very meaningful, and those researchers take that as evidence that a person is a "probable abductee." After dropping those who answered yes to a meaningless control question (which controls for acquiescence bias, or readiness to agree no matter the subject), the data show that 1.4% of the sample (14 people) answered yes to at least four of these questions. In 1991, the same estimate was 2.0%; in 1998, the estimate was 1.1%. Intriguingly, half of the 14 people believe that humans have been abducted, a much higher percentage than the 21% in the sample as a whole.

In summary, with results from three surveys, we see that this indirect estimate of the proportion of Hopkins/Jacobs probable abductees in the U.S. adult population is fairly stable, ranging between 1.1 and 2.0%. Although the estimates from 1998 and 2002 are lower than the initial figure, they are still quite large when projected to the complete U.S. population (the 2002 estimate suggests that 2.9 million Americans would answer at least four of these questions yes, and thus be considered probable abductees).

I have even more confidence in the stability of the estimate from the key questions because the 2002 survey, unlike the first two, was conducted by telephone, not an in-person interview. On sensitive questions of all types, or on questions about opinions, it is well known that the method of administering a survey can influence the results.<sup>11</sup> Generally, telephone interviews are the least likely to elicit information about sensitive behavior (e.g., drinking or drug use). Although there is no reason to suppose that seeing unusual balls of light or experiencing missing time are especially sensitive topics, it is encouraging that the esti-

Question	1991	1998	2002
Waking paralyzed	18.1%	11.6%	19.6%
Feeling of flying	10.8%	4.8%	13.8%
Missing time	12.6%	6.4%	8.4%
Balls of light	8.0%	5.3%	10.4%
Scars on body	8.0%	4.5%	11.7%

mate of 1.4% from the 2002 survey is so similar to that from the other two years. It reinforces the conclusion that, whatever these five questions are measuring, it has been basically stable in the U.S. population for the last decade.

Of course, stability aside, the key issue is the validity of the five indicator questions: Do they really tell us who might be an abductee? We don't know for sure what these five questions are measuring, as there is disagreement over the meaning of each and what they imply about an abduction experience. But we do have the result from the question that asked about whether the respondent or someone they knew had an encounter with extraterrestrial life. This question has the great advantage of being direct, although it includes both classic CE3-type encounters and abductions. And 2% of the sample answered yes. But, among the 14 potential abductees, 21.4% said yes to the encounter question.

Surveys can't tell us anything definite about the UFO phenomenon itself, but they are a reliable method for understanding how the public views and experiences the phenomenon. And what we have learned is that the public's belief in ETI and UFOs is large and consistent, even in abductions, and that there is great distrust in the government's openness about UFOs. This result is both ufologically and sociologically interesting.

## NOTES

1. The margin of error in surveys applies to the responses to one question. But when comparing the responses to one question between two groups of respondents, such as males and females, the margin of error will be somewhat larger. Specifically, this means that in this survey the difference in percentages between two groups must be greater than 3% for them to be statistically distinct. Additionally, because the data are weighted to match various demographic characteristics, the effective number of respondents is 1,000.

2. Percentages are calculated including those who answered "don't know" to provide a complete accounting of opinion.

3. For results from previous polls, I rely greatly on the summary article by Robert J. Durant, "Evolution of Public Opinion on UFOs," *IUR*, Nov./Dec. 1993, pp. 9–13, 20–23.

4. Moreover, the question was preceded by the questions asking about ETI, thus providing an alien context for interpreting the reality of UFOs question.

5. The Sci-Fi Channel did exactly this by hiring a lobbying firm, run by Tony Podesta (brother of John Podesta, President Clinton's former chief-of-staff) and Dan Mattoon, to lobby Congress about the UFO subject and push for full disclosure of whatever the government may know but not be telling us. See the Coalition for Freedom of Information website at [www.freedomofinfo.org](http://www.freedomofinfo.org).

6. Determining the meaning of survey results post hoc is not a straightforward exercise. Consequently, before agreeing with me, I recommend thinking carefully about

these issues and the others I discuss, and trying to come up with plausible alternative explanations for the findings.

7. In a parallel manner, having a UFO sighting greatly increases one's interest in UFOs. In a survey CUFOS did of its Associates in the early 1990s, we discovered that 40% of those responding had a UFO sighting, compared to the overall figure among adults of 10% or so.

8. In this post-September 11 era, the interpretation of this question is complex. Which and how much information on the war on terrorism should be shared with the public is a matter of daily public debate.

9. This finding is not anomalous. A 1996 poll in Utah, done by the Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, asked a representative sample of Utah residents, "Do you believe some humans have been abducted by extraterrestrials?" 16% said yes, and this in a state that is very religious, socially and politically conservative.

10. Further details on the indicator questions and the background to their development is contained in my article "Counting Abductees: What Can Surveys Tell Us?" *IUR*, Fall 2000, pp. 19–23.

11. For information on this subject in an accessible introduction to survey research, see Floyd Fowler Jr., *Survey Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1993). ♦

## IUR BEHIND THE TIMES

This issue of *IUR*, though dated Winter 2002–2003, is being printed in early May 2003. Like many UFO periodicals, *IUR*'s publication date doesn't match the calendar date printed on its cover. This has been true now for several years, but even though longtime CUFOS Associates may recognize the situation, it can still cause confusion when sending in renewals.

Becoming an Associate of CUFOS entitles you to four issues of *IUR*. You will receive those issues before we ask you to renew, even when our schedule slips.

Some of you prefer to send in renewals at the same time every year, and we appreciate that; but it is probably best to wait for the renewal notice included in your fourth issue of *IUR*. If you renew your Associate status several months before it expires, there is a chance that your renewal date will become unclear to you. Renewing early doesn't really cause us much record-keeping trouble, but it can cause you more worry if you wonder, *next year*, why you haven't received a renewal notice.

We'd like to predict that we will get *IUR* back to a printing schedule that matches the calendar, but that is unlikely, due to staffing, funding issues, and the difficulty of locating high-quality content.

For those who like to renew at the same time every year, please keep doing so if you wish. We won't send your money back. Perhaps this note, though, will reduce the confusion caused by *IUR*'s schedule.

# COLLISION COURSE

BY JENNY RANDLES

In the early 1950s the British government was still struggling to come to terms with UFO encounters. Sources at the Air Ministry (now the Ministry of Defense, or MoD) were reluctant to introduce a full-scale investigation project along the lines of Project Blue Book in the United States, and did so only in the wake of major activity during the NATO exercise Operation Mainbrace.

This several-day wave of sightings had occurred in September 1952 at a time when Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill had become personally intrigued by UFOs—especially as these events followed the Washington, D.C., wave so swiftly. Churchill had followed this series of events and was not easily fooled by casual explanations.

In a celebrated memo of July 28, 1952, Churchill wrote to his air minister demanding to know what the UFO mystery was all about. I was told by Ralph Noyes, a man then working as secretary to the air ministry, that this was because Churchill had been assured previously that UFOs were merely an "American craziness" sorted out by the CIA and there was nothing for the British military to worry about. Indeed, Noyes heard the air minister say somewhat testily, "I thought [U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt S.] Vandenburg had sorted this out in '49," apparently a reference to the decision to reject the Estimate of Situation report from Project Sign declaring UFOs to be of extraterrestrial origin. If so, it is interesting that the U.K. government knew of such things by 1952. Most American citizens did not.

The Washington events now suggested to the astute Churchill that the verdict on UFOs was not exactly true, and the rapid follow-on during which RAF planes and a U.S. aircraft carrier off the British coast were buzzed by daylight objects established the need for action in his mind. Recall that this was the same man who had actually been the first major statesman in the world to take sightings of mysterious objects seriously. For in the build-up to World War I, as head of his country's Navy, a young Churchill had warned the British parliament that a major wave of airship sightings occurring around strategic locations (such as dockyards) could involve "enemy surveillance operations." At least, he

insisted, the threat from these incidents ought to be taken more seriously. So his unwillingness to be fobbed off 40 years later should not be a surprise.

Some information has recently surfaced about this period, thanks to the excellent research into Public Record Office files and interviews with surviving MoD figures conducted by researchers David Clarke and Andy Roberts. They report their findings in *Out of the Shadows* (London: Piatkus, 2002). Clarke and Roberts also located the Air Ministry briefing document evidently shown to Churchill in an attempt to persuade him that UFOs were no big deal—information the ministry seems to have had fed to them via the CIA.

While we have no documentation to back it up, Churchill must have soon realized (thanks to Operation Mainbrace) that complacency over the latest UFOs was unwise. It seems more than likely that the former war leader was aware that action was needed, hence the fairly rapid move toward setting up a British UFO project.

This project became active early in 1953. Edward J. Ruppelt mentions in his fine memoirs, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956, p. 130), that there was a visit made around this time by two British intelligence officers. He notes that they were in the United States on a classified mission and were asking Blue Book staff a list of single-spaced questions about UFOs. These questions spread over six pages. It is now possible to place that intriguing anecdote into some historical perspective. My guess is these men were there because Churchill wanted a more proactive stance on UFOs within the Air Ministry.

Against this background, I was fortunate enough to be given an insight from someone who became involved in these events and who was brave enough to speak out about them. This was several years before the recent declassification of MoD files. My source, then retired and terminally ill, heard me speak on a national BBC radio program and told me that he was impressed with my objectivity. He decided to take what might be his last chance to get the story of his UFO encounter on the record "before it is too late," as he put it, and "because there is little anyone can do to stop me now." But even then, concerned about what he was doing, he asked me to be discreet.

After we agreed to meet, there were unexpected prob-

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*The English Electric Canberra B2 aircraft, which first flew May 13, 1949, was the UK's first successful jet bomber and was used extensively on photo-reconnaissance and electronic intelligence missions.*

lens before I could travel out with colleague Peter Hough to the man's home in the Pennines. After speaking to me by phone in the BBC studios, the witness had checked with former colleagues in the RAF and at the MoD science and technology unit where he had worked until a few years earlier. It was made apparent that some people there were not happy with his decision to talk about these matters, even though they had occurred almost four decades earlier.

Thankfully, his desire to put the story on record in what proved his final months of life outweighed this pressure (which never amounted to a formal instruction not to speak to me but I suspect would have caused lesser men to think again). And I was able to make a record of this fascinating close encounter, told below in his words.

I should add that, despite searching the Public Record Office files, no trace of this incident survives in available government sources. There are two possible reasons.

Perhaps it was so secret that the file is maintained off the usual path of UFO data, which tend to involve more low-grade material, such as letters sent to the ministry by members of the public. If so, then this file might exist but still be classified. The U.K. still lacks a Freedom of Information Act to establish that for sure.

But the other option to bear in mind is that few data exist regarding other 1950s RAF encounters. There is almost nothing about the complex Lakenheath/Bentwaters radar-visual sightings of August 13, 1956, as a typical example. The reason cited by the MoD for this glaring omission is that many early files were routinely destroyed before the decision to retain them was taken in the 1960s. Yet some records do exist on lower-level, often solved, cases from that earlier

decade. It will be seen as either a pity (or as a suspicion) that the more impressive events appear to be the ones that have unfortunately disappeared.

Whatever the case, this incident is a fascinating close encounter, well described by what was still a very lucid witness. His story has made me wonder just how many similar encounters have taken place but never reached the UFO community in the fortuitous manner with which this one came to light.

## THE WITNESS AND HIS STORY

Cyril George Townsend-Withers began his flying career in 1939, had a distinguished war record, and by 1953 was an RAF flight lieutenant. On retirement from the MoD in the 1980s, he had reached the rank of wing commander. Having a science and engineering background, Townsend-Withers was made a radar and technology troubleshooter. At the age of 47 he retired from active flying duty to take on a post as a principal science officer for the Air Ministry. In this role he developed experimental and usually secret radar and aircraft in-flight technology systems as part of the unit based at RAF Boscombe Down in Wiltshire.

Townsend-Withers was stationed at this base in 1953 and working both in that scientific capacity and as active aircrew on experimental missions. This, if you recall, was around the time when the Air Ministry first set up their covert UFO project.

Here, from my interview, is Townsend-Withers's account of what happened.

**JR:** Why have you decided to tell this story after many years of secrecy?

**TW:** I am now retired and none too well. The 30-year rule has expired on this matter. So far as I am concerned, this means that I can now talk about it. [In the British MoD a "30 year rule" prevents information that is deemed secret from being released to the public record for that period, though some data are withheld for 50 or even 100 years.]

**JR:** So what did happen?

**TW:** It was the spring of 1953, I believe. I was asked to test some new ECM [electronic counter measure] equipment. This technology attempts to disrupt enemy radar but we had experienced problems with ground interference during earlier tests. Because it was important work, a pilot [also a flight lieutenant] and I were given a prototype Canberra aircraft. It did not even yet have internal fittings. Pared down like this we could fly much higher than in a normal Canberra and put the equipment through the motions well clear of any interference from below.

**JR:** Where were you flying at the time?

**TW:** We were above Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, out of Boscombe Down, and we got up to over 60,000 feet. It was just after noon on a cloudless day as we set off on a northwesterly heading when my radar picked up a target at five miles behind pacing us like an echo. Fearing the return of the interference problems, we switched off the system, reset it, and did a number of internal checks. This did not clear the target. Now we knew that something really was following us. But that was virtually impossible at this height.

**JR:** Could it have been a secret flight or a spy plane?

**TW:** We were a secret flight and because of the importance of our job that day we were given cleared air space. I knew this was something important—and, of course, that it could have been an enemy aircraft. So I clambered into the rear gun turret to investigate. Sure enough, there was an object trailing behind. It was round and silvery, reflecting sunlight like a giant mirror. I told the pilot to increase speed. Although we got to 225 knots the object stuck with us so I recommended "a big radius turn" in order to shake it. The object vanished from the radar now because the system was only operating in a rearward-facing mode. However, the object was not visually absent for long. Within moments it was dead ahead. As we came out of the turn, we flew towards the glinting object and closed the gap very fast. For about 30 seconds we were on a collision course. During this period we had a close-up view.

**JR:** What did it look like?

**TW:** It was silvery and very thin in body shape. Overall it appeared to be a remarkably flat oval without any sign of wings or windows and just the faintest hint of a tail fin at the rear.

**JR:** Could it have been a balloon?

**TW:** No. I had seen many of them before, being used to flying at great height. This was something very strange.

**JR:** Did your pilot make an emergency turn to avoid collision?

**TW:** At first we were just stunned, but we were preparing to pull out and fly around the object. It never gave us the chance. Suddenly the thing just shot vertically upwards without acceleration—going from zero to an incredible speed in moments. It climbed up like a rocket—60 or 70 thousand feet, as quick as you could say it. We soon lost sight of it far beyond any height that we could hope to emulate.

**JR:** What happened when you landed?

**TW:** Back on the ground we reported it, of course. But I was really surprised by the reaction. Nobody seemed that interested. They pressed us really hard to be sure it was not a Soviet aircraft, but this idea was absurd, and I said so. Nobody was much interested beyond that point.

**JR:** Do you mean that there was no official investigation?

**TW:** Oh yes, there was one. I was instructed to work with the radar manufacturers. We stripped the equipment and reassembled it. There was nothing wrong. Eventually the Ministry accepted that there was no fault with the equipment and I expected a full debriefing about what we saw, now that they knew it was real. It never happened. They were only concerned that we get the equipment working and reminded us that the real threat came from the Russians, not UFOs. But I got the definite impression that our sighting was of interest to sources other than the channels that I dealt with.

**JR:** Do you mean that there was a covert investigation unit?

**TW:** I was not satisfied by this apathetic response and started to ask questions. It was then that I trod on some toes. I discovered that there was a newly formed research team at Farnborough who were handpicked to study the evidence and were assessing incoming reports. I even heard whispers that they had developed a working assumption that alien craft might be coming to earth. But it was made very clear that none of this was for public discussion and I was not to dig further into that situation.

**JR:** So, after all these years, what do you think that you saw that day?

**TW:** I think that I was privileged to get a close-up view of a reconnaissance device from someplace else. To the best of my knowledge this was a constructed object—a controlled device.

## ASSESSMENT

Over the years I have interviewed a number of RAF aircrew who have had close encounters with UFOs. None have impressed me in the way that this man did. He was highly educated, with a scientific knowledge far beyond my own and a no-nonsense way of describing what he saw. He left me in little doubt that he believed that he had seen something extraordinary and had become persuaded that a (still) covert government study was looking into such evidence.

Yet, as with other witnesses (such as the two navigators involved in the 1956 Lakenheath/Bentwaters chase), there

was a puzzling lack of debriefing by the powers that be. Why ignore what ought to have been a primary witness? Why was Townsend-Withers, like the crew in the two Venoms that were scrambled to pursue a radar target over East Anglia three years later, not given a major interrogation by the authorities?

Even if the truth about UFOs was suspected by government to be fairly inconsequential (as skeptics usually assert), this attitude makes little sense. It beggars belief that the crew members of two RAF planes sent up during a vectored mid-air intercept as at Lakenheath/Bentwaters were never even interviewed. It defies all common sense that a witness of the caliber of a science officer and RAF navigator who was part of a top-secret mission should not be subject to even greater scrutiny, given that he was describing a phenomenon seen visually and on radar at close quarters and that behaved in a way beyond the capabilities of known technology of the day—especially since this incident happened so soon after Churchill's initiative.

Indeed, it makes more sense to believe that a secret investigation project was underway and that its findings still have not been made public, for whatever reason. Skeptics prefer to argue that cases such as this one were not subject to investigation because, beyond logging the story, there was little to investigate. UFOs were considered to be largely a collection of misperceptions and so posed no "defense interest." If, as Townsend-Withers was told, the UFO was not regarded as a Russian spy plane, then it was of no interest to the Air Ministry. But, surely, unless they had a very good idea what the UFO was, such disinterest seems foolhardy.

The other factor to consider must be the potential explanation of this sighting as a weather balloon. I have to say I believe some military encounters that took place during the 1940s and 1950s are probably properly explained as sightings of balloons. The presence of fast-moving jets at great altitude where weather balloons were operating came together in this period for the first time in history. This brought about a set of unique circumstances during which the strange appearance and apparent odd behavior of balloons were perceived from mid-air by aircrews unfamiliar with the operating characteristics of balloons at high altitudes.

It is more than likely that in some instances startled aircrews would come upon a balloon (visible as a mere dot, if visible at all, from lower levels) that would look like a huge disc at the altitude modern jet aircraft were then starting to fly. Given the novelty and public interest in UFOs, is it really a surprise that these might be mistaken for such a weird craft?

In addition, a fast-moving jet closing in on a stationary weather balloon would enhance the impression of a collision with, perhaps, both objects moving toward one another rather than just the jet's being in motion. But if the balloon was stationary (and perhaps much higher than the jet was flying), then, as the aircraft closed, the angle subtended between jet and balloon would increase rapidly, creating an

apparent illusion of the balloon rocketing upwards.

The similarities between this description and various 1940s and 1950s mid-air encounters are plain. But do they solve the Boscombe Down case? Certainly, the aircrews in the two Venoms during the 1956 Lakenheath/Bentwaters case offer useful comparisons. These two navigators tell the same story. The object they were vectored onto was essentially stationary. They closed in on it and flew right past it, observing it by radar; it did not move. In the dark night they saw nothing, and so they concluded that they had encountered a weather balloon.

So, I am hesitant to completely reject the weather-balloon theory for the Boscombe Down encounter. Yet we need to recall some important facts. Townsend-Withers stated he had a close familiarity with weather balloons. He had seen them often during the dozens of high-altitude flights that he had made, and he was familiar with their teardrop shape. He alleged that this object had no resemblance to any balloon he had seen before or in the many flights he made subsequently. His report apparently made that clear. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that the Air Ministry merely ignored such a well-qualified assessment.

Moreover, the Boscombe Down object was apparently both seen visually and tracked on radar, which, if true, negates the balloon hypothesis—since on first sighting it was moving behind the Canberra for several miles without losing ground on a jet traveling at over 200 mph.

Nor was this radar target an anomalous-propagation effect. Withers used all his know-how to get rid of such an anomaly, using tactics that in previous flights had purged the interference effects that they had experienced before taking a flight to this great altitude. The radar target was of a real object and was in the same location as the silver disc confronted visually when the science officer stepped into the observation turret. Only as the aircraft turned to try to close in on the object did it appear (both by vision and on radar) to become stationary. Balloons do not suddenly stop like this.

Overall, this case remains intriguing, because it describes such a strangely shaped craft recorded both visually and instrumentally and recounted by a well-trained witness. In short, if Townsend-Withers's account is reasonably accurate, we are left with a highly impressive close encounter. And its proximity to such a covert mission (during which the Canberra had set a new altitude record for the aircraft, by the way) is even more intriguing.

Unfortunately, we were not able to talk with the pilot on the flight (he was already dead) and the case will, therefore, likely remain contentious as a single-witness incident. One case proves nothing about the true nature of UFOs; however, it certainly does prove that impressive encounters involving skilled scientific observers have taken place. Nothing ought to be concluded from one incident, but it is the sum of such evidence upon which the case for UFOs as genuinely anomalous rests. And this suggests that the skeptics have not answered all the questions. ♦

## BOOK REVIEWS

Ann Druffel, *Firestorm: Dr. James E. McDonald's Fight for UFO Science*. Columbus, N.C.: Wild Flower Press, 2003. 640p. \$34.00.

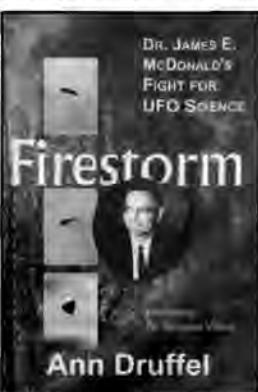
After many years of relative quiet, a Renaissance in UFO sightings took place in the mid-1960s. Until then, the Air Force UFO investigation repeatedly denied that anything extraordinary was being observed. Their scientific consultant was Dr. J. Allen Hynek, who later founded CUFOS and became a leading scientist in advocating serious investigation.

Only groups like the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) and the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), in opposition to the Air Force, were carrying the banner and advocating serious attention to UFOs in any public way. The leading proponents were Donald E. Keyhoe of NICAP and Jim and Coral Lorenzen of APRO; the skeptics were Air Force spokesperson Maj. Lawrence Tacker, and Harvard astronomer Donald H. Menzel.

A build-up of UFO sightings began in 1964 and intensified for several years, reaching a crescendo in 1967. From a historical standpoint, it was the largest and longest UFO wave of all time, and it included hundreds of close encounters and physical evidence cases, as well as repeated observations of craft-like objects and their apparent occupants. The credibility of Air Force conclusions on UFOs increasingly came under fire, including highly critical editorials in major newspapers. A revolution was in the making.

This book offers a treasure trove of information about one of the most fascinating periods in UFO history and one of its leading figures, Dr. James E. McDonald. Thoroughly researched and heavily documented, *Firestorm* contains a biography of McDonald and a history of his UFO activities, especially his relationship to NICAP and his interactions with fellow scientists, the news media, and Congress. Ultimately, it is a sad and tragic story. However, for those of us who lived it, the time was exciting and McDonald was a knight in shining armor. Ann Druffel has recreated this pivotal point in UFO history through extensive interviews with the participants. She and I were colleagues in NICAP.

Revolutionary changes in the way UFO sightings were perceived and evaluated occurred in the mid-1960s. The Air Force's Project Blue Book investigation was subjected to internal and external review, and a contract was given to the University of Colorado to conduct an independent study of the UFO phenomenon. The confluence of events that led to the ultimate closing of Blue Book, only to be followed by more controversy, included the following elements:



- Publication in 1964 of NICAP's *The UFO Evidence* summarizing the serious evidence that had accumulated.

- The major wave of UFO sightings that was especially intense in 1966 and 1967.

- The appearance on the scene of Dr. James E. McDonald, professor of meteorology and atmospheric physics at the University of Arizona.

- Establishment in 1966 of the University of Colorado UFO study, sponsored by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

It was also at this time that Philip Klass of *Aviation Week* magazine appeared on the scene and quickly became the leading UFO skeptic in the public debate. Since McDonald was a prominent and highly regarded atmospheric scientist, his views on the subject were especially important. After all, UFOs were objects observed flying in the earth's atmosphere, not in distant space where astronomers focused their attention. McDonald was well-versed in atmospheric phenomena (which Menzel often claimed were the source of many UFO reports) and in radar meteorology.

Most scientists of the time presumed (with little or no actual investigation) that UFO reports resulted from some combination of a will to believe in visitors from space and careless misinterpretations of natural phenomena or human technology. McDonald, on the other hand, conducted hundreds of direct investigations gathering empirical data, checking weather conditions and any conceivable stimulus that might have caused a false report, carefully sifting and sorting through all aspects of each case.

Once he began speaking out publicly about his conviction that UFOs were something very important scientifically, he was hit with a backlash from many scientists (other than his colleagues at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics who knew what an outstanding scientist he was), politicians, and others. He had not anticipated the level of the personal attacks and calumny that came his way.

Gradually his involvement with UFOs took its toll on his professional life and on his family. Unknown to most of his friends and colleagues, McDonald suffered from a bipolar disorder that made him subject to occasional bouts of depression; most of us had seen only what later could be interpreted as the manic pole of the disorder—his tremendous energy in pursuing investigations and analyses.

The "firestorm" metaphor is appropriate on several levels: McDonald swept through ufology like a forest fire whenever UFO sightings flared up and controversy raged. Druffel succeeds not only in capturing the spirit of the times, but also in illuminating those events through well-informed, thoughtful, and balanced reporting, including sensitive treatment of personal and family matters.

This book strongly deserves a far wider audience than it probably will ever receive, due to the fact that it is "ancient history." However, it is important to learn from history, and this is an important and well-written history containing many lessons for posterity about science, politics, and controversy. Among the persons who would profit by read-

ing it are those who were either not yet born or too young to be aware in the mid-1960s, professional scientists and government officials who think UFOs have received a fair hearing, historians of science, and some of our poorly informed skeptical British colleagues who insist that they see no ridicule factor affecting treatment of UFO sightings.

My hat is off to Ann Druffel for this impressive contribution.—Richard H. Hall, former assistant director, NICAP.

Colin Bennett, *Politics of the Imagination: The Life, Work and Ideas of Charles Fort*. Manchester, England: Critical Vision, 2002. 206p. \$17.95.

*Politics of the Imagination* is not a biography of Charles Fort. It does not—nor does it seek to—replace the late Damon Knight's reasonably definitive *Charles Fort: Prophet of the Unexplained* (1970). In other ways it doesn't much resemble that book, either. Colin Bennett, a Londoner of vast reading and freewheeling imagination, has written a generally engaging, often playful, and sometimes profound meditation on Fort's thought in the context of modern culture.

He imagines at the outset that the "Charles Fort" of *The Books* is the literary creation of a frustrated fiction writer, not to be confused with the flesh-and-blood Charles Fort. That character allowed him to "combine externally observed reports of all kinds of anomalies, culled from years of study of generations of printed matter ranging across a wide field of human interest, with a vast interior monologue in which Fort reinvents both his fiction and himself." Bennett calls this character "Sonnabend," after a Fort-like character in Lawrence Weschler's novel *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* (1995).

More likely, however, Bennett is creating his own kind of fiction. What writer is not creating the character of "author" as he or she writes? On occasion, when I have read my own writing, I have found myself reflecting that the "Jerome Clark" who wrote the words is a stranger, someone who doesn't exist as does the quotidian Jerome Clark (actually, "Jerry Clark") and who is not entirely recognizable to him. As a literary device, the transformation of Fort-as-narrator into Sonnabend strikes me as unnecessary, even cumbersome.

Fortunately, the device, while modestly distracting, does not get in the way of Bennett's ruminations, often wittily expressed in a way that Fort himself would have approved. He writes, for instance, of why some of us resist anomalous phenomena and others don't. "It is not a question of truth versus falsehood," he says, "but what kind of level of universal mess we are prepared to accept." For the reality of the extraordinary experiences, which are so frequent that they could as easily be called ordinary, he goes on, "there is



almost *too much* evidence already to indicate that something most peculiar is (perhaps always) going on. The matchbox in the kitchen may be in front of the eyes when searched for, but if we are not thinking about it, it will be invisible."

This is not a UFO book, of course, though inevitably UFOs get mentioned from time to time, usually in a fairly hyperbolic manner. Bennett's previous book was *Looking for Orthon* (2001), on George Adamski as culture figure, and so his ufological focus here, too, is oddly Adamski-centric. "Something within us has been profoundly disturbed by his claims," Bennett claims.

It is not clear whom he means by "us." Surely not just about everybody in the world, to whom Adamski has never even achieved the status of being forgotten. (I do recall, though, a conversation with a now-deceased, very famous rock star who shocked me with a mention of Adamski.) If by "us" Bennett means ufologists, he's simply wrong. Adamski did not "profoundly disturb" the 1950s ufologists who loudly rejected his claims; he simply annoyed them, because he was someone whose manifestly bogus, comic-book yarns provided those who were so inclined an easy way of dismissing even sober UFO proponents. More to the point, the cases championed by conservative ufologists, the genuinely puzzling, noncontactee close encounters of the third kind—"occupant reports" in the parlance of the period—were infinitely weirder. Adamski's story rose out of a limited human imagination (and surely a limited intelligence as well) and thus was more boringly recognizable than profoundly disturbing. And as fringe personalities go, Adamski's occasional associate George Hunt Williamson is—at least from this distance—the more fascinating (novelistic, one might say) character.

Still, *Politics of the Imagination* is, its occasional missteps aside, an original book unlike any other, an intellectually grounded attempt to come to grips with Fort's philosophy as opposed simply to Fortean phenomena. If it isn't always easy reading, it is usually provocative and stimulating, and a whole lot smarter than the bulk of writing on weird stuff—or, as Bennett calls it, "the almost event... within a kind of octave of appearances... unstable states.... If we subtract from one person's doubt about the existence of [for example] fairies, another person's positive belief in such things, the outline of what remains forms... an ideo-material space. The dimensions of this locus... have been largely lost to the modern mind"—though not, of course, to the experience of many modern humans.—Jerome Clark

*The Skeptic Encyclopedia of Pseudoscience*, ed. Michael Shermer. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2002. 2 vols., 903p. \$185.00.

I think this will be an important book, as far as that's possible in the Internet era. Mainstream reviewers will praise its very real virtues, and public and academic libraries will buy it. And it will see wide use by students at all levels. This is unfortunate for ufology, for this could easily have been a much better *skeptical* book, if only the UFO and

cognate material had been vetted by competent ufologists.

This may seem the cliché attitude of applauding the matadors until one's own brand of bull enters the arena, but in this case, it can be backed up; it's even useful to do so.

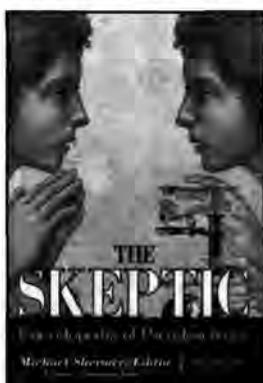
The work is divided into five sections. The first three—"Important Pseudoscientific Concepts," "Investigations from *Skeptic Magazine*," "Case Studies in Pseudoscience from *Skeptic Magazine*." Despite the constant use of the invidious term "pseudoscience," its dedication to magician James Randi, and the usually skeptical viewpoints of the entries, the book is far from the sort of rigid party line so familiar in analogous works from Prometheus Press. Section 4 consists entirely of debates, pro/con pairs on specific topics, mostly far afield from ufology.

Getting to our own subject, I focus upon the gateway entry, Barry Markovsky's "UFOs." It is, frankly, incompetent. He begins with a cumbersome definition of a UFO as "any object that, from a given observer's perspective, is presumed to have floated or flown through Earth's atmosphere or outer space and is of uncertain nature and origin." That is, he defines a UFO as an IFO, plus something trivial (literal perspective, or some misperception, gullibility, personal or social delusion, hallucination, or hoaxing). This is a frontloaded conclusion, received from the more-or-less great debunkers.

Declining to discuss cases much, Markovsky undertakes explaining how it comes about that the uncritical populace believes that such things must be ET craft. Can he do this? Well, seeing that Markovsky doesn't know what he's talking about, has occasional difficulty with logic, and hasn't a whiff of the evidence that could keep an intelligent person (short of a rationality flameout) interested in the subject, I'd say no.

The single case he does treat at any length is Roswell (Project Mogul explanation, all the way). He says, "The events created only a short-lived public stir at the time, but they achieved wide notoriety when resurrected by Charles Berlitz and William Moore's 1980 book *The Roswell Incident*. (True. It was in 1947 a four-hours-wonder, followed by the horselaugh of the balloon-radar target Air Force explanation.) Then on the very same page Markovsky says, "Media coverage of Roswell and other cases in the late 1940s paved the way for an upsurge in UFO claims with extraterrestrial overtones."

Then this acuity continues as Markovsky considers UFO classification schemes. "The best known is the simple set of 'close encounter' categories devised by astronomer J. Allen Hynek . . . A close encounter of the first kind (CE-I) is a basic UFO sighting with no physical evidence left behind. Most UFO sightings fall into this category."



This is not a misquote. Markovsky, the *Encyclopedia's* UFO expert, is chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of South Carolina and has published at least one paper in his field on "paranormal beliefs," but he doesn't know Hynek's classification has six categories, not three. He knows not of Nocturnal Lights, Daylight Discs, or Radar/Visuals. He seems to take "close" as a brand name like Chanel—he has little sense it has to do with distance! He does not know that Hynek defined "close" in *The UFO Experience* (1972) as "in general, less than 500 feet away."

But why would Markovsky read Hynek? He's read Robert E. Bartholomew and George S. Howard, and Klass, and Sheaffer. And he's read a 1988 debunking potboiler by psychologist Terence Hines, *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal*, who writes, "The most common type of UFO report is the so-called close encounter of the first kind (CE-I). It consists of a sighting of a UFO, but with no physical evidence of the object left behind." Hines claims to have read Hynek! Markovsky also read Vallee's *Confrontations*, which has a classifications appendix, but unfortunately, Vallee does not write for the lower school grades.

Because of his scholarly sloth, Markovsky has absolutely no idea what a truly puzzling CE-I is like—for example, the Beverly, Mass., case of April 22, 1966, a Condon Report unexplained case. Dr. Roy Craig was extremely puzzled: Twice in the Condon Report he says that if the witnesses' testimony is "taken at full face value," it can be explained only by "the presence of strange vehicles" or "that an alien vehicle was physically present."

The most impressive part of the case: Three women, who'd gone out to reassure a scared little girl that the domed disc going by her window had been only imagined around airplane lights, saw three such discs "playing tag." One woman made beckoning motions, and one disc came and flew overhead. The other two women ran, and turned to see the 20-foot diameter disc above the head of the first woman, who stood shocked, hands on her head as if warding off a blow. "Run, Brenda, run!"—she did, and the disc swung back to its fellows. One of the women who ran from under it said, "It was just like looking at the bottom of a plate."

In his book on the Condon project, Craig said the Beverly case "alone would not justify an alternate report claiming that Extraterrestrial Intelligence is a reality." But Beverly and the many cases like it do prove that there is really something to be explained, something which gives people the impression of craft in conditions where the impression of, say, a Mack truck would be unquestioned.

Markovsky, however, would have the reader think CE-I cases are explained by perceptual illusions, by "advertising airplanes and helicopters seen at night from oblique angles," and all the usual suspects that can mimic a distant object, but can't be blamed for a thing several hundred feet away that comes and flies 20 feet over your head.

Markovsky is again shaky in defining a CE-II as involving "physical evidence or some form of interaction with the

(continued on page 26)

## JET CHASE—continued from page 7

amazed by its brilliance and silence. Mike was also certain there was no dark body behind the light. His size estimate was that the light was as large as the fighter following it.

The difference between Rogers's and Mike's description is in the size estimate. From the beginning, Rogers referred to a starlike source of light. On the other hand, Mike's estimate of the light being "fighter size" is similar to Dillman's. I could not resolve this discrepancy. Rogers is adamant, and I know his spatial estimates to be impressively accurate. His description of the small blue light disappearing momentarily behind scattered clouds and the fighter not disappearing because of its larger size is a compelling piece of data. Mike is equally certain of his estimate, and I felt I could not push the issue further without my influencing the outcome, so this will have to remain a discrepancy.

Velocity estimates on the blue light were done by Brad Sparks. The estimates are very rough, only as good as the time and spatial memory of the witnesses, and are based on heights as bracketed by the clouds at 3,500 and 6,000 feet. In the first 3–4 seconds of Rogers's sighting of the blue light, after its initial decrease in altitude and as it began horizontal flight, it traveled about 50 degrees, indicating a speed of about 600–1,000 mph. After being lost in the tree tops, it took Rogers 7–8 seconds to find it again and the light had traveled another 45 degrees, suggesting a slower speed, fitting with Mike's description of the light seeming to slow. At the end of Mike's sighting, the light hesitated and then cut to the east traveling about 60 degrees of arc in one-half second. If the light were three miles away, the speed to the east would have been in the thousands of miles per hour or at least three miles in that one-half second. The acceleration would have been about 2,000 g or more.

Because both Rogers and Dillman saw an object or light being chased by a fighter at about 1:40 a.m., the obvious question is whether they saw the same UFO at the same time from nearly opposite directions. The answer is no. First, the times are not that precise. Second, as discussed above, at 1:40 a.m., the orange object/fighter pursuit must have been within a couple of miles of Dillman, whereas Rogers was more than eight miles away when the blue light flew nearly overhead.

## THE OFFICIAL WORD

Initially, in the effort to sort out what happened on the morning of July 26, there were as many questions about NORAD's scrambled F-16s as there were about the unknown objects sighted. Where did the suspicious radar track occur—over D.C., southern Maryland, or somewhere else? As outlined below, NORAD spokesmen's information evolved with time on this point. How many fighters departed Andrews around 1:00 a.m. and who sent them where? The news media assumed that the radar track and Rogers's blue light and F-16s were all one and the same event, but there

was no hard information to support this hypothesis. Two interrelated questions needed answers. Where did the scrambled fighters go and how many fighters were scrambled? (In the quotes below, *italics* are mine.)

On July 26, Maj. Venable, NORAD, in a phone conversation with me stated that two F-16s were scrambled from Andrews about 1:00 a.m. to investigate "suspicious air activity over DC." The pilots found nothing and returned to Andrews.

The same day, Fox News reported that "folks at NORAD saw something they couldn't identify in *Maryland airspace*."<sup>13</sup> Also, CNN reported that two F-16s investigated a low-flying unknown aircraft *close to the restricted zone* over Washington, D.C. They further reported that a Pentagon official said an aircraft appeared on radar *in the 15-mile restricted flight zone*. Maj. Venable said, "the pair of jets were scrambled . . . to investigate reports of an aircraft *in the Washington, D.C., temporary flight restriction area*."<sup>14</sup>

On July 27, Maj. Mike Synder of NORAD said the radar track met the criteria of a "small private aircraft." He further said, "*It never entered restricted D.C. airspace*."<sup>15</sup>

Southern Maryland was not mentioned. Wanting to know, even in the most general way, where the scrambled F-16s went, I spoke with Maj. Venable again on July 29 but obtained no additional information. He suggested I e-mail him and I asked the following questions, basically trying to get the parameters of the scramble.

1. What time did the F-16s take off and land?
2. Did the aircraft use their afterburners during this flight?
3. Did the two F-16s fly tandem or in close formation in the area south of Andrews (Waldorf area)?
4. When returning to base, what compass direction where the F-16s coming from?

Maj. Venable's reply was not helpful. "The facts: Two F-16 jets from Andrews Air Force Base were scrambled approximately 0100 hours 26 Jul 02 after radar detected an unknown aircraft. The unidentified aircraft's track subsequently faded from the radar. The F-16s investigated, found nothing out of the ordinary, and returned to base. For operational security reasons, NORAD will not discuss specific details."

A July 27 *Washington Post* article quoted Maj. Douglas Martin, NORAD, who almost word for word repeated the quote from Maj. Venable in the above paragraph.<sup>16</sup> The *Maryland Independent* and *Washington Times* had similar quotes with even less information.<sup>14,16</sup>

To add to the confusion, NUFORC had an anonymous report from Arlington, Virginia (within the restricted flight zone and located just west of Reagan National Airport). A man and his son reported two silent circular lights, flying in tandem, that went over their house west to east-northeast (toward D.C.) around 1:15 a.m. on July 26. A couple of minutes later, they saw the same or similar lights again moving west to east-northeast. This time the lights appeared to hesitate, and one flew back to the northwest and the other

flew northeast. The witnesses reported this to NUFORC after hearing about the southern Maryland sightings.<sup>22</sup> This raises the obvious question of whether these lights could have been the scrambled jets or the unknowns. There is no answer, as the witnesses would not give contact information to NUFORC.

More puzzlement followed after I interviewed Dillman and found out that four fighters took off, not two. I again contacted Maj. Venable and told him what I had learned. His e-mail reply was as follows: "NORAD only scrambled two fighters in response to the event in question. There may have very well been other airplanes departing Andrews AFB, but they were not NORAD aircraft responding to this event."

When I spoke with Capt. Smith of the 113th ANG, he suggested that Dillman's observation of the departure of four fighters was a typical training exercise, and that these missions frequently took place at night. He shrugged off my questions about training at low altitude, using afterburners over residential areas at 1:00–2:00 in the morning and about the fact that these events were unique to long-time residents in the area. I asked if he could find out if there had been a training mission scheduled for 1 a.m. on July 26, and he said that he would. However, he has not called back and I have not been able to reach him. My messages were not answered.

In terms of the July 26 scramble, I wondered if this information could be interpreted to mean that two additional fighters took off as part of the NORAD scramble as well as four aircraft on a training mission. Dillman felt that if fighters had taken off to the west or north, he would probably be unaware of them. Certainly a surprising coincidence that two groups of fighters departed at 1:00 a.m., but not impossible. Further, Maj. Venable was quoted as saying, "At no point in the mission did the fighters chase or intercept another aircraft."<sup>14</sup> At the time, the picture was confusing.

In November, I received strong evidence to support the hypothesis that the four F-16s over southern Maryland were, in fact, the scrambled aircraft. A response arrived to my July 31 FOIA requesting the Daily Record of Facility Operation (FAA 7230-4) for Washington-Dulles and Reagan National Airports and Andrews AFB Approach Control Facility.

Only the Reagan National tower log had information about the scramble. The log noted that at 1:00 a.m. EDT the tower was alerted to a scramble of jets from Andrews, and the air traffic control operators blocked altitudes of 4,000 to 6,000 feet for the jets to use. At 1:51 a.m., the interceptors returned to Andrews. This information strongly supports the hypothesis that the fighters over southern Maryland were the scrambled F-16s. Not only did the four fighters observed by Dillman take off at the correct time for the scrambled aircraft, but they returned to base at the reported time. Further, the altitudes blocked for the scrambled jets match the altitudes at which jets were observed over southern Maryland, that is, between the broken clouds at 3,500 feet and the overcast at 5,500–6,000 feet. A note in the tower log at the time of scramble reads, "No aircraft seen in the CAP or TFR area. ROC (DB) advised." This indicates that

Reagan National tower operators are not aware of aircraft in the Combat Air Patrol area or the Temporary Flight Restriction area, and that the FAA Regional Operations Center is advised. "DB" is probably the initials of a person.

The Andrews AFB Form 7230-4 has virtually no information on it. No scrambles or other flights are noted. The Dulles International Airport log had no information of interest. At the time I wrote the FOIA, I did not know what areas were of interest so I included Dulles just in case. I also asked if the Air Traffic Control Center in Leesburg, Virginia, tracked any air traffic other than routine commercial traffic between midnight and 3:00 a.m. The letter accompanying the tower logs stated, "There are no records concerning an unusual air traffic flight on July 26, 2002, in the vicinity of Washington D.C." Reagan National was apparently not tracking any aircraft either, so one might reasonably ask what radar was tracking the unknown on July 26?

Peter Davenport of NUFORC suggested the unknown may have been tracked by an AWACS surveillance aircraft. AWACS have flown intermittently over D.C. since September 11, 2001. Sparks also suggested that the unknown may have been tracked by an AWACS aircraft based upon the fact that the 4,000–6,000 foot altitude range was blocked for the intercept and the fact that FAA has no air traffic control radar with height-finding capability for the short range.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously radar data is of great interest, as it could confirm the presence of the unknowns and show their flight paths. On August 8, 2002, Robert Durant requested the radar and voice recordings from Reagan National and Andrews for the midnight to 3:00 a.m. time period. Durant has had nothing but frustration with this FOIA, receiving a variety of excuses, including the excuse of a flood in the relevant FAA office. The end result, as of April 2003, is that he has received neither the requested data nor any reason why it has not been forthcoming.

## CONVENTIONAL EXPLANATIONS

I have carefully considered conventional explanations for the events of July 26.

**Small private aircraft.** What happened to the radar track that met the criteria of a small private aircraft described by Maj. Snyder? Where did it go? F-16s reportedly "can locate targets in all weather conditions and detect low flying aircraft in radar ground clutter."<sup>19</sup> For the small private aircraft to land at night, there must be some facility with lights. The Lower Marlboro Landing Strip is in the area where the fighters circled and flew between 1:00 and 1:30 a.m. to the east and southeast of Dillman's location. It is a small grass airstrip and is privately owned. Speaking with the owners, I learned it has no lights and is never used at night. If there were a small private aircraft flying in the area, surely four F-16s would have been able to find and identify it, and there would have been no need for fighters to go blasting through residential areas at low altitude using afterburners. Canadian UFO investigator Don Ledger, a

private pilot himself, points out that if the aircraft flew off above the ceiling, the pilot would have had an IFR (Instrument Flight Rules) rating and would have been on a flight plan (hence known to air traffic control).

**Military training exercise.** This possibility is made unlikely by the circumstances: training at 1:00–2:00 a.m., flying low over extensive residential areas, using afterburners? Ledger, ex-Skyhawk pilot Bob Shearer, and James Canan, ex-editor of *Air Force Magazine*, think a training exercise is not a reasonable possibility; further, the fact these jets were up at night in that time and place indicates that something was going on, and it was not a training exercise or pilots letting off steam. They point out that pilots go to air combat ranges or to military operational areas (MOAs) for training exercises. There are at least three MOAs in the general area, the nearest located 31 miles from Andrews. The activity at 1:00–2:00 a.m. took place much closer to the base, and based on what the witnesses reported, probably within 15 miles of the base.

With reference only to aircraft activity and not to unknown objects or lights, Dillman, Rogers, and Mike have all stated that in the years they have lived in southern Maryland, the aircraft activity between 1:00 to 2:00 a.m. on July 26 was a unique experience. They had experienced nothing like it before, and as of February 2003, nothing like it has happened since. Dillman sees fighters take off at night regularly, but they leave the area. Rogers sometimes hears aircraft at night, but they fly by and leave the area.

In summary, a training exercise explanation for these events conflicts with the verified fact that there was a NORAD scramble caused by an unidentified radar track. The small private aircraft explanation conflicts with the fact that four F-16s reportedly could find nothing in a 50-minute search.

## SPECULATION

Some intriguing aspects of these events can only be pointed out and speculated upon.

**Why and how four fighters?** Why and how were four fighters scrambled at 1:00 a.m.? As described above, in past and present scrambles, two F-16s are reported scrambled. In cases of clear potential danger, still only two F-16s were scrambled from Andrews. In one case when a small plane was in the restricted zone and four miles from the White House, one pair of F-16s was scrambled.<sup>24</sup> In another case involving a possible airliner hijacking approaching Baltimore-Washington International Airport, one pair of F-16s was scrambled from Andrews to escort the airliner, and another pair was scrambled from Langley Air Force Base in Hampton Roads, Virginia, to fly combat air patrol of the nation's capital.<sup>25</sup> The overwhelming evidence is that Andrews has two F-16s on strip alert. There is no record in the press or media of more than two F-16s being scrambled from Andrews.

Although Maj. Venable of NORAD stated categori-

cally that only two F-16s were scrambled at 1:00 a.m., we know that four were scrambled. In my conversation with Capt. Smith, 113th ANG, on October 10, I asked if a scramble routinely involved two F-16s, and his response was, "unless there is an imminent large-scale threat, only two aircraft are scrambled on NORAD request." Part of the explanation may be that although NORAD requested a scramble of a pair of F-16s, the duty officer in charge at Andrews may have decided to scramble two pairs. Then the question becomes why? Could it be because there were two unknowns?

The strip alert situation means aircraft and pilots are ready to get into the air in 15 minutes.<sup>26</sup> Assuming someone made the decision to launch two pairs of F-16s, how much advance notice did they have in order to have an additional pair ready to launch? This is a really interesting question, and radar data might give us an answer.

## SUMMARY

A couple of intriguing questions have not been addressed. Is there any significance to the fact that the initial sighting in both Waldorf and Brandywine was of a clearly descending light or object that moved in a horizontal path at the end of its descent? Is there significance to the fact that the unknowns flew a similar flight path moving to the south and then to the east? Is there significance to the fact that each unidentified with its pursuing fighter returned to the area southeast of Dillman where the all fighter activity took place between 1:00–1:30 a.m.?

The strength of this event lies in the fact that we have totally independent observations by knowledgeable witnesses of an unidentifiable object or light clearly being pursued by military fighters three times within a 10-minute period. An added advantage is that this activity took place between two cloud layers, allowing height estimates to be verified.

In conclusion, an unknown radar track caused a NORAD scramble whose timing and altitudes tie it to these pursuits described by independent witnesses. The scramble appears to be unusual, composed of two pairs of fighters rather than the normal one pair. We have military fighters flying at less than 6,000 feet altitude in the middle of the night over residential areas, using afterburners, without apparent concern for the dense civilian population underneath. We have unknown objects flying near our most sensitive areas, and our modern fighters are no more able to intercept and identify them than were the fighters of 1952.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank James Canan, Robert Durant, Donald Ledger, Robert Shearer, and Brad Sparks. They all answered endless questions, particularly but not solely about flying and military aircraft, and have been very generous with their time and knowledge.

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## CANADIAN SIGHTINGS ON UPSWING

"In 2002 we had the largest number of separate events for a single year in the history of collecting UFO data for Canada," Chris Rutkowski of Ufology Research of Manitoba told the Canadian Press February 12.

"We have some extraordinary cases in Canada last year reported literally from one end of the country to the other." Since 1989 his group has been compiling reports from across Canada.

There were 483 UFO sightings reported in 2002—30% more than in 2001 and a 250% increase since 1998.

That's a record, if 1993 is excluded when one celestial fireball contributed to a high of 489 reports that year, explained Rutkowski, who added that 154 of them were easily explained because of the fireball.

## TIMMERMANIA—continued from page 9

### THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Near Ashland, Oregon. Two nights in 1967.

In the 1960s there was a little fad called "dream-sharing." Inspired by the cultural practices of the Senoi people of Malaysia, who shared dream memories in the mornings as a family and community-building element of their culture, some Americans tried to do the same. One such family was the subject of this story.

One morning the family's mother reported an unusual dream. A flying saucer landed in the backyard and the extraterrestrials wanted to take the family with them. She was upset, not because of abduction but because she had on a terrible nightgown with a hole in it, and insisted on changing.

The father thought this dream interesting because he apparently had the same one. He said that a flying saucer landed in the backyard; he was all for going, but his wife wanted to stop and change clothes.

The daughter then said: "Wait a minute—you guys in my dream were going somewhere and I couldn't go with you because I didn't have the right equipment. It was these flying saucer people, and they wouldn't take me, but they did take my cat."

None of the three family members could remember anything else from their shared dream, but it was an interesting experience and stuck in their heads. But then the kicker came that put the whole thing over the rainbow. The husband was ill and did not last for more than a year. He finally went into the hospital and passed away in 1968. On the night he died, a small girl living next door awoke and stared out the window. In the morning she told her mother that their neighbor had died. But how do you know that, her mother inquired. "Because I saw a flying saucer land in their yard," was her reply.

Try to wrap your head around *that* one. Because this story seemed to intersect UFOs, dreams, and death, I wrote Kenneth Ring, probably the world's leading authority on near-death experiences, and author of an interesting book (*The Omega Project*) on these peculiar matters. Ring, who has retired from NDEs and is thoroughly enjoying life in San Francisco, was as flummoxed as I am as to the possible meaning of such an event. So he preferred to believe that it didn't happen, and maybe most of us might as well.

### OUIJA MADNESS

Columbus, Ohio, to West Virginia. Date unknown.

For most of you, this story will most likely seem like trivia, but I rather like it. Part of it is because I grew up in West Virginia, and like fellow West Virginians Budd Hopkins and Tom Dealey, we all secretly know (as did Gray Barker) that our home state is the center of the weird universe.

This event involves four men who decided that the best

way to get inside information was to get it from a ouija board. They were playing around with the thing, and asked it how they could get into contact with a flying saucer. The board told them, of course, to go to West Virginia.

The directions were more elaborate and the social pressure probably high, so the adventurers decided to go for it. Across the mighty state of Ohio they fearlessly trekked, into the Mountain State of Mothman, Indrid Cold, and the Braxton County Monster. Into the hills on a certain road, through a farmer's gate at a certain time, over the hill to a certain white barn, and then . . .

There was the barn, just as the board had led them. And there, behind the barn, was an eerie glow. And they ran and jumped into their car and raced back to Ohio as fast as they could go.

I can't blame them too much, though. We hillbillies don't cotton to uppity strangers from the big city.

And so we close the Timmerman Files for now. I hope that you enjoyed the "wild side" of them. I know I have. ♦

### REVIEWS—continued from page 21

UFO." Many ufologists get fuzzy about this, so we must not blame him. With CE-IIIs, Markovsky wishes to use Jacques Vallee ("known for his detailed and meticulous investigations") as a sad example. Vallee's "evidence failed to offer proof of extraterrestrial origins either for UFOs or for the ostensive artifacts some claim they have left behind. However, his lack of proof did not stop Vallee from making wild speculations that apparently he had come to believe." Markovsky is particularly indignant that Vallee could warn against the extraterrestrial hypothesis yet say that UFOs may clue us in on "unknown dimensions" beyond the four we know. "In other words," Markovsky cries, "even though the physical evidence failed to demonstrate extraterrestrial origins, Vallee preserved the ETH via a conclusion that requires an even greater leap of faith."

First, does this ad hominem argument prove something, or is it poor logic? Second, any ufologist could tell Markovsky that he can't really understand Vallee from reading just one of his books. Vallee's theories are as complex and layered as a continental weather map. To get any idea of them, Markovsky would have to at least read not only *Confrontations* (1990) but also *Dimensions* (1988), in which Vallee enumerates the difficulties of the ETH. For the past 35 years or so, Vallee has held that:

- 1) The UFO case material shows that UFOs exist, they affect their surroundings, and they do surprising things; and
- 2) The behavior and bizarre abilities of UFOs, and the behaviors and appearances of their putative occupants, don't fit the ETH scenario.

Vallee hasn't failed to prove the ETH, he thinks he has positively disproved the ETH. Enthusiastically lumping together everything paranormal that he can find an analogy in, Vallee opts neither for the ETH nor for the idea that UFOs are an irrationalism. Actually, the concept Vallee

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wants has come to public consciousness only recently.

By way of explanation, let me relate this anecdote. A friend of mine half-owns a horse (she claims the intelligent end). Discussing its training, she said: "Horses and dogs are different. If a dog has been properly socialized and treated decently, it wants to do what you want it to do; the problem is how to get this across. After that, it's just repetition and reinforcement. But a horse doesn't want to do what you want it to do. The horse wants to do what it wants to do. And so you have to bamboozle the horse." And the highest form of horse-bamboozling is called "horse whispering."

A horse is a herd animal. It communicates by, and has innate responses triggered by, subtleties of relative position as the herd moves and interactive posturing and gesturing. A whispered horse is confronted not by violence, hog-tying, and exhaustion, but by a human in a corral or smaller space who *acts* something like a horse, but with a freedom from horse responses and with intentions that the horse cannot match. A good horse whisperer can be riding a wild horse in about half an hour. Vallee really thinks UFOs are a whispering phenomenon—in their absurd elusiveness, for example:

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## LAURA IS NOT ALWAYS JUST A GIRL'S NAME

and in this case LAURA stands for Local Area UFO Research Associates, people willing to (1) meet with others seeking intelligent talk about the UFO phenomenon, (2) locate nearby witnesses, (3) inform the public with some of the best information available. For suggestions about forming such a group near where you live, write to LAURA, P.O. Box 1621, Lima, OH 45802.

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If you wanted to bypass the intelligentsia and the church, remain undetectable to the military system, leave undisturbed the political and administrative levels of a society, and at the same time implant deep within that society far-reaching doubts concerning its basic philosophical tenets, this is exactly how you would have to act. At the same time, of course, such a process would have to provide its own explanation to make ultimate detection impossible. In other words, it would have to project an image just beyond the belief structure of the target society. It would have to disturb and reassure at the same time, exploiting both the gullibility of the zealots and the narrow-mindedness of the debunkers. This is exactly what the UFO phenomenon does. [Dimensions, p. 253]

Isn't Vallee's theorizing too wild and complicated, and too full of elusive hypotheses? I'd say yes—and thus partly agree with Markovsky. But to say Vallee is trying to reinstate the ETH via a leap of faith simply shows that Markovsky hasn't done his homework.

The horse-whispering idea at least meets the great objection (which Markovsky brings up) by Robert Sheaffer that UFOs would be a "shy phenomenon"—one obsessed with being elusive to human detection. Sheaffer may say that, like astronomy before Copernicus, such a theory about UFOs is too full of epicycles upon epicycles. But we do have actual examples of "whispering."

Where Markovsky deals with CE-IIIs directly, he objects to correlating physical injuries, vehicle stallings, and power failures with UFOs: "with no prior constraint on what would constitute a mysterious correlate, there almost always will be *something* that one could dig up." But it was this sort of thinking that held back the making of ethology, the science of animal behavior. As Mark Rodeghier says, "It doesn't mean you can't do it, it just means you have to be *careful*." Of course, Markovsky doesn't know of CE-IIIs like Delphos, Trans-en-Provence, Langenburg, or Valensole.

In CE-IIIs, Markovsky knows only of contactees and abductions, focusing on the latter. "Typically, the abductee recalls having been taken aboard an alien spacecraft and subjected to a sinister and highly invasive examination. Mysteriously, the aliens always manage to eliminate all evidence of incisions or other intrusions. The best known of these cases also assert that the aliens wiped out the abductee's conscious memories of the event . . . suppressed until much later, when it emerges under hypnosis." I wasn't surprised that Markovsky doesn't know that something like 40% of abductees remember their experiences without hypnosis. But I was a little startled to see he knows nothing about the scars and scoop marks on abductees, and the claims made about them—perhaps he doesn't watch much television.

His other material on abductions is just the standard stuff, needing no comment here. With this loose a grip on the UFO evidence, no surprise: The continuance of ufology and the ETH (Markovsky can't distinguish them) must be due to ignorant or purposeful bad logic, and various sociological bandwagon effects. People will believe the ETH because of the emotional charge on a story, or because of propaganda techniques, or simply because they see others believe.

Markovsky especially notes two techniques of persuasion: "Sharpening means emphasizing the gist of the message; leveling means leaving out information that seems inessential. The effect often is to radically alter the impression of the event that others receive. Facts that could serve as the key to unlocking the mystery are leveled because the person retelling the story found them uninteresting, whereas sharpening may enhance the mysteriousness of the claim."

I quoted this so the reader may exclaim, "So that's what you call it!" We're familiar with these ploys in UFO books and broadcasts, but also in the writings of debunkers and skeptics. Perhaps Markovsky's ghastly mess shows what you get from reading almost only the skeptics on UFOs.

Of course, it's no news that the clergy sometimes find themselves a little less bound by the rules they thunder to the pews. Markovsky, for example, says "proponents of the ETH have been known to cite particular cases as supporting

evidence long after they have been soundly debunked, which is an obvious misuse of evidence." The RB-47 radar/visual case of July 17, 1957, was a Condon report unexplained case. It was subsequently made much of by Dr. James McDonald. Philip Klass "soundly debunked" it in his *UFOs Explained* (1974)—his explanation was accepted by crewmen of the reconnaissance B-47, and was hailed as a masterpiece by skeptics and some ufologists (other ufologists wrote feeble replies that whistled past the grave).

But ufologist Brad Sparks realized that Klass's timeline required the RB-47 to go supersonic, which was simply impossible. Sparks's complete refutation of Klass's debunking takes up 28 pages in the second edition of Jerome Clark's *The UFO Encyclopedia* (1998). No one has yet answered it. Markovsky, I'm sure, hasn't read Sparks's analysis. And for those skeptics who have heard of his essay, such a case simply drops out of their discourse, with no hint that there's any problem for skepticism in it.

Behind Markovsky's overcausalness lies an odd axiom: You can *always* dismiss a residue. "People sometimes forget that just because you call something a UFO does not mean you possess any information about the object beyond the mere fact of its nonidentification. You still do not know what the object actually *is*, tempting though it may be to take that logical leap and infer extraterrestrial intelligence." You might attempt to put the ETH aside and still say that at least there was an event strange enough to produce, say, the Beverly report or the RB-47 radar returns. No. "History shows" it's more likely something was left out, or misinterpreted. And "it matters little how many eyewitness testimonies are gathered . . . there are simply too many ways that eyewitnesses are known to err."

This is an overtrimmed version of an argument put forth by a Condon Committee member, Michael Wertheimer. He said that for any case, you could always imagine an unknown, but unintelligent, natural phenomenon that *just happened* to have whatever characteristics you took as indicating it was an artifact made by intelligence. (For example, a flattened plasma with alternating dark and bright segments around the edge.) For this reason, he claimed that science could not grasp or handle anything short of absolutely perfect proof that ET intelligence is here. So you shouldn't even try. Because everyone in the Condon Committee was fixated on the ETH, they were stymied for a time. But Wertheimer apparently did *not* deny there could be well-observed bizarre things—real strangeness in the world.

There are actually two fallacies about residues: One is to think that a mere residue proves a hypothesis you would like to be true. The other is to think that a residue must be a *mere* residue because it's small, or because not dumping it would imply there's something big yet to be learned.

When it's a residue of claimed historical events (like UFO incidents), there is no a priori way of knowing when you can dismiss it, or when you have to go through with it. You have to learn, by doing the work, unlike Markovsky.  
—Frank John Reid ♦