

"Encounter of the Decade"

I first heard about Val Johnson's UFO experience on the WDAZ late news one night, several days after it had occurred. I called the station and was told that as far as they knew, it had already been investigated by CUFOS. Since it was within investigation range, I would have left to check out the site, were it not that I figured it would by then have been adequately looked into by Allan Hendry of CUFOS. However, by chance, a close associate, Guy Westcott, was vacationing in Minnesota around that time, and he took time out to visit the area on his own. Not only did he come back with a rather detailed investigation report, apparently, Hendry had not been there by the time he left. Westcott went back later to verify a few things on 16 Sept. 1979, and obtained a taped report from Deputy Johnson, in his own words:

"This is Deputy Sheriff Val Johnson...I report in connection with an incident which happened August 27th, 1979, at approximately 1:40 a.m., western section of Marshall County, approximately ten miles west of Stephen, Minnesota. This officer was on routine patrol, westbound down Marshall County Road #5. He got to the intersection of #5 and Minnesota State #220. When I looked down south #220 to check for traffic, I noticed a very bright, brilliant light, 8 - 12 inches in diameter, 3 - 4 feet off the ground. The edges were very defined. I thought perhaps at first that it could be an aircraft in trouble, as it appeared to be a landing light from an aircraft. I proceeded south on #220. I proceeded about a mile and three tenths or a mile and four tenths when the light intercepted my vehicle causing damage to headlight, putting a dent in the hood, breaking the windshield and bending antennas on top of the vehicle. At this point. at the interception of the light, I was rendered either unconscious, neutralized or unknowing, for a period of approximately 39 minutes. From the point of intersection, my Police vehicle proceeded south in a straight line 854 feet, at which point the brakes were engaged by forces unknown to myself, as I do not remember doing this, and I left about approximately 99 feet of black marks on the highway before coming to rest sideways in the road with the grille of my hood facing in an Easterly direction. At 2:19 a.m., I radioed a 10-88 (Officer Needs Assistance) to my dispatcher in Warren. He dispatched an officer from Stephen who came out, ascertained the situation as best he could, called for the Stephen Ambulance to transport me to Warren Hospital for further tests, x-rays and observation. At the time the offeicer arrived, I complained about having very sore eyes. At Warren Hospital, it was diagnosed that I had a mild case of welder's burns to my eyes. My eyes were treated with some salve and adhesive bandages put over and instructed to keep them on for the remainder of the day, or approximately 24 hours. At 11:00 a.m.,

(continued)



Sheriff Dennis Breckie, my employer, picked me up at my residence in Oslo, and transported me to an ophthalmologist in Grand Forks, North Dakota. He examined my eyes and said I had some irritation to the inner portions of the eye which could have been caused by seeing a bright light after dark. That is all I have to add except to say that my timepiece in the Police vehicle and my mechanical wrist watch were both lacking 14 minutes of time to the minute."

Very well. Westcott's suggestion was that the ball of light was ball lightning. He makes an interesting case in that the previous evening had been hot and humid, and could possibly have created a charge in the atmosphere. Another supporting point is that Johnson estimated the object to have been 5 km. away near some trees, which just happen to be along a power line. If we can assume that the plasma carried a large charge of some sort, upon contact with the leading edge of the car (the grille and headlights), it discharged some or all of its energy through the electrical system. This is quite amenable to effects noted for some theories of the creation of ball lightning. It has been proposed that the power output from a ball lightning plasma may be between  $10^3$  and  $10^7$  joules, nothing to sneeze at in any case. However, to explain all the EV effects, must we let the plasma ball have mass to create a tangible and definite dent in the hood, or would it need a force, let us say, in newtons?

The bending of the antennas, in Westcott's opinion, is not due to an object travelling at high speed and striking the two aerials. Allan Hendry, for example, is widely quoted as saying that the bends occurred from an impact with an object. Westcott suggests that the aerials bent after whipping forward when the brakes were applied, and striking the red outside dome light on the roof. In support of this, Westcott notes two melted indentations in the rear of the dome light that could have been caused in that manner, and the bends are at what could be called appropriate heights in the antennas, each with "discoloration" of the metal. The aerials were taken to the Honeywell Labs on Minneapolis, which concluded that they were bent "by force" and "not heat". The magnetic pattern scan done on the car showed it was not subjected to a strong magnetic field. This all comes from various sources, and is at present about as much as I can ascertain. A UFOFORUM consultant in physics questioned the mechanism of the cause, but not the actual cause itself. Was it, therefore, a true case of ball lightning? Or was it something non-terrestrial? Westcott's suggestion is very interesting. UFOFORUM investigation is continuing.

#### Follow the Bouncing Plasma

On a highly similar note, two excellent discourses on ball lightning have come to my attention recently, both of which hesitantly include a brief mention of UFO's for completeness. The first is "Ball Lightning", by S. Singer, published as Chapter 12 in Volume 1 of a several-volume series titled "Lightning". The series is edited by R.H. Golde, and published through Academic Press in 1977. Singer presents a good survey of reported characteristics of ball lightning, and examines various theories which have been presented in scientific papers over the years. Despite the large amount of literature published on the subject, the phenomenon is still not understood by scientists, who are in disagreement over the most basic points. Singer mentions UFO's in a short paragraph where he points out the similarity between the pro/con existence debates of UFO's and ball lightning, but says that "both sides are unacquainted with the existence of this precedent". (I was quite aware of the ball lightning comparison, as was the Condon Committee, when it included a section on ball lightning in its final report.) Singer later cites R.V. Jones' rather un-



objective article (Physics Bulletin, V.19, 1968, pp. 225-230) as a "definitive discussion" on UFO's, concluding that UFO's "do not exist".

The more recent of the two is "Ball Lightning", by W.N. Charman, published as an entire number of Physics Reports (V.54, no. 4, 1979, pp. 261-306.). UFO's crop up a few times in Charman's paper, which contains about the same information as Singer's, but dwells on each fact somewhat longer, and finds more meaningful observational characteristics to explore. Charman also makes use of the eyewitness observation tests as recorded by Menzel and Drake, transferring the concepts from UFO's to ball lightning. In addition, he mentions the "ionized swarms" of insects suggested by Callahan and Mankin, but generally rejects the proposal as an explanation for ball lightning reports, though it is, he says, "undoubtedly interesting in the general context of unidentified flying objects."

I strongly recommend either or both of these papers as a source of information on ball lightning, to get better acquainted with one explanation for UFO's, as suggested by some skeptics.

### "Centre gets 'UFO' photos"

That's what the headline said about MUFOS in the Winnipeg Tribune on 12 Nov., 1979. Being the co-chairman of MUFOS, I was somewhat shocked to find that I was supposed to have been given these photos. I was also surprised to read: "Ed Barker, centre chairman (sic), described the pictures as 'spectacular, fabulous-looking things' - as photographs - but said he couldn't see the UFO in them."

When I finally did get a chance to see the photos a few days later, I was somewhat disappointed. (Ed had since gone on a local TV show with the photos and their donor.) The four photos were reportedly of a 1.6 kilometre-long spaceship, taking off from the Canary Islands in April of this year. The first was merely a shot of some illuminated clouds in the distance, looking like nothing more exotic than a sunset. But the other three were more or less similar to each other, showing the bright "exhaust" of something apparently rising into the sky, but no actual object. Also in the photos were presumably the same clouds as in the first shot, but with a bright, orange trail, winding to the horizon. A big problem in the interpretation of the photos is the almost total lack of information about them. All I'm told is that they were taken with a NIKON camera with daylight film. But no further data; no settings, shutter speed, location, time sequence, etc. However, the photos do come with a good story about how the photographer obtained the shots after talking to some sincere contactees in the Canary Islands. The contactees passed on word from the space brothers that a war will break out soon, which will devastate the Earth. So, the space brothers are taking select humans off Earth, to return them when all is settled. The donor of the photos said that they were so convincing, he intends to build a fallout shelter, and buy a lead suit.

My candle is in the window, brothers.

### Book Reviews

The UFO Handbook by Allan Hendry. Doubleday, New York, 1979. 297p.

Hendry's experience in UFO investigation may be meagre compared to others, but he sure learns fast. In the short while he has been looking into UFO reports, he has shown an admirable tendency to deal objectively and tactfully with UFO witnesses. His guidelines and personal findings show again what I call the "human" side of UFO research. While effectively weeding out IFO's from the bulk reports, he makes a good case for proving that the UFO phenomenon does definitely exist. Well worth reading,



and a good reference book.

The UFO Guidebook by Norman Briazack and Simon Mennick. Citadel Press, Secaucus, N.J., 1978.

This incredibly silly compilation of fortean terms arranged as a glossary ranks as one of the most senseless wastes of paper yet. The problems arise from a wide variety of sources: from the authors' inaccurate definitions themselves, to their creation of unneeded acronyms and words. My favorite is their definition of "blisk", namely, "a unit of velocity equal to the velocity of light." "Manadim", "befap", and "aconin" are all acronyms for various types of extraterrestrials. Befap, for example, is short for "beings from another planet". Truly, this book is blisks beyond anything I've ever seen.

The Complete Book of Extraterrestrial Encounters, by Randall Fitzgerald. Collier Books, New York, 1979.

Fitzgerald has done a good job of arranging book reviews of major UFO and fortean works, dwelling at good length on each. While showing a minimum of bias, he also dwells at length on the "ancient astronaut" type of literature to be all-inclusive. He does indeed include a great number of excellent books in his collection, and he is to be commended on his effort. Unlike many of its kind, his title for the book is worthy of the word "complete". There are, however, a few notable omissions, if one wanted to quibble, one being "The Walton Experience", by Travis Walton. Interestingly, he does include "The Ultimate Experience", by Bill Barry, much less valuable than Walton's own version. As a reference book, Fitzgerald's work may rank at the level of Catoe's bibliography and Hendry's UFO Handbook (see review).

#### Velikovsky Re-reconsidered

Another original thinker is no longer among us. Immanuel Velikovsky is now dead, having lived to a ripe old age. While his skeptical peers are breathing a sigh of relief, they should be cautious. Velikovsky's ideas and attitudes will live on, carried along by his supporters and proponents. I am fortunate to have talked with at least one strong catastrophic evolutionist, Dr. E.R. Milton of Alberta, so I am more aware of the theories and critiques involved. Evolution and cosmology are both still poorly understood, and Velikovskism contributes a criticism of science, a necessary element of science's own progress.

#### Manitoba Conference on Ufology

On 16 March, 1980, I am hosting the first Manitoba Conference on Ufology, at the University of Manitoba. Attendance is by invitation only, and the list of guests and speakers include all active and passive ufologists in Manitoba, that I am aware of. My aim is to review and discuss the current research being done on UFO's in the province. Scientist, layman, pro and con are invited, and I hope that the event turns out to be a worthwhile symposium. Since each guest must give at least one short paper and/or a panel seat, I would think that a great deal of information should surface. We shall see.

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