
Special Report: Stephen, Minnesota; Not Proof, But...

A main issue under examination at the Manitoba Conference on Ufology, on March 16, 1980, was the Val Johnson UFO incident which occurred on August 27, 1979. The case has received wide publicity, and has been noted in most ufozines (it was discussed in SGJ #6), so it will not be repeated again here. But, briefly, it involved the apparent impact of a U.S. police vehicle with an unidentified flying object, near the town of Stephen, Minnesota. The incident was supported by various physical evidence in the form of dents, impact marks and broken glass.

Frankly, it is one of the most puzzling incidents in the history of ufology. This strong statement is partly because of the fact that the case involves a man who has been described as "the perfect witness". Val Johnson is a Deputy Sheriff in Marshall County, Minnesota, and is a trained observer as well as an experienced police officer. The physical evidence suggests that something very strange happened to him in the early morning on a lonely stretch of road near the Red River. The time sequence of events is very firmly established by both tape recorded and written logs of his actions that morning. The physical traces were examined and measurements were made immediately after the encounter by trained police investigators, and Mr. Johnson was taken to a hospital by ambulance directly from the site.

At MCU, the case was discussed and reviewed in detail by all participants, as presented by guests Val Johnson, Everett Doolittle and Greg Winkowski. Doolittle was the first individual to reach the site after Johnson radioed for help, and Winkowski conducted the initial police investigation. Many fascinating points were noted, as given in the following paragraphs.

The Physiological Effects

When Val Johnson was found by Everett Doolittle, he was slumped forward over the steering wheel, and in mild shock. A bruise later appeared on Johnson's forehead, presumably caused by impact with the steering wheel. He was dazed, and said that "everything was in slow motion". He had an intense pain ("excruciating") in his eyes, and having done some welding in his career, knew what welders' burn was like and compared his pain to this. "It was as if someone had hit me in the face with a 400 pound pillow", he said of the sensation of his head. However, he stated repeatedly that the only pain he experienced was from his eyes. This is extremely interesting in the light of dental examinations he had one week previous and one week after his experience. At the first, he had an extensive series of x-rays taken, in preparation for major dental work. His bridgework, including the caps on his front teeth, was intact. At the second examination, the examining dentist found that Johnson's bridgework was broken at the gums. Yet, no swelling or pain was felt.

The Physical Evidence

When Everett Doolittle arrived on the scene, Val Johnson's police car was front-end-first in the left-hand ditch, with its rear end sticking into the left-hand lane of the road. The "impact point" was determined by the location of the broken glass of the headlight, on the road, 953 feet from where the car was found. From that point, "yaw marks" (described by Doolittle as faint skid marks caused by putting a car out of gear without applying the brakes) travelled in a straight line for 854 feet down the road. These became dark skid marks from there to where the car stopped moving, going in a straight line for most of the remaining length, turning abruptly at the end toward the ditch.

The right member of the left pair of headlights was broken. There was a round dent, approximately one inch in diameter, directly over the master brake cylinder, on the hood. This dent appeared as if a hammer had struck the hood at an angle that could be anywhere from 45 to 75 degrees from the horizontal. A photograph taken with a UV filter showed that there was a deposit left on the flat bottom surface of the dent.

The windshield of the car had an interesting pattern of breakage, in the shape of a teardrop (point up). This was located on the driver's side. There were three main impact points visible, though the lowest of the three was largest and most complex. Testing of the glass by the Ford Motor Company suggested that there were signs of both inward and outward motion of the windshield. They were apparently unfamiliar with the breakage pattern. It is fairly obvious, though, that even a small stone would have been driven through the windshield, even at relatively low speed, so it is hard to interpret the shattering as an actual impact. However, it was noted at the Conference that the analytical findings bear some resemblance to those of a shock-wave-induced breakage.

The roof light which was affected had its glass knocked out. The police radio antenna on the center of the roof was bent about 5 inches up from the roof, at about a 45 degree angle. The CB antenna on the trunk was bent near its tip, at an angle near 90 degrees, 3 inches from the top.

An interesting observation made by the police investigators was that all the damage on the vehicle occurred in a stright path no wider than twelve inches in diameter. Because of this "linear" formation, it was suggested that an object had struck a glancing blow to the car, initially impacting the headlight, rolling over the hood, up the window and over the roof. However, at the Conference, it was realized that this scenario could not account for all the damage in the form it was observed. An object hitting the car at the front would not have the capability to re-diect its force downward further up the hood, graze the window and still have enough force to bend the antennas.

The antennas are spring loaded, so anything bending them would have to have been travelling extremely fast to create the shape they are now in. It was also proposed that the antennas were bent by a strong deceleration, causing them to whip forward. But the design of the antennas is such that they can withstand a strong deceleration without acute bending. Any deceleration of

sufficient strength to bend them backwards as they moved forward, would certainly have killed the occupant. Most curiously, the insects adhered to the antennas were not wiped off from the impact, as might be expected.

The battery of the car can no longer hold a charge. It has been proposed that the headlight and roof light were imploded by a high-energy electrical source. Ball lightning was suggested as a cause, but it could not have created the dent in the hood, nor the impacts on the window, let alone the bending of the antennas. The electric clock in the car was found to be missing 14 minutes. Strangely, Val Johnson's mechanical wristwatch was also lacking 14 minutes. This is indeed odd, because both were synchronized with the clocks in the police station earlier in the night, and all time checks after that agreed, as late as 01:00, only a short while before the incident.

The CB radio in the car, although it was said not to have been in the best working order before the incident, was described as being "even worse" after it.

Allan Hendry, of the Center for UFO Studies, sent a gauss-meter to the police investigator, in order for them to test for changes in the car's magnetic pattern. These results were, apparently, negative.

There was evidence of dust particles in the shattered glass, and it was suggested that this dust was the residue found in the round dent in the hood.

The Psychological Effects

When Val Johnson called for help, his voice was described as being "weak", and like "someone coming out of a daze". He had been, apparently, unconscious for 39 minutes, from the time he heard glass breaking and felt a light "hit" him, to the time he woke up, opening one eye to see the red "ENGINE" light on his dash. During that period, the car had travelled in a straight line for 953 feet, before veering to the left over the left lane into the ditch. He does not remember applying the brakes, yet the skid marks belie the fact that they were, indeed, applied.

At MCU, Mr. Johnson was asked what he thought had happened to him that morning. He said that he believed he "had seen something (he) wasn't supposed to see". Questioned on this, he could only speculate that he had stumbled upon somebody doing something that wasn't meant to be observed, and that his powers of observation were effectively neutralized. He was also asked if the method of regressive hypnosis had ever been suggested to him. He replied that the National Enquirer (a sensational gossipzine) had asked him to submit to a regression, and pay him for the exclusive rights of the results. He had rejected their offer. He was then asked if he would agree to a hypnotic regression with a clinical hypnotist for research purposes, not for publication. He said no, and added that he was not curious about what had happened to him that morning. Everett Doolittle said after this that their file on the case is now closed, and that their investigation is now terminated after reaching no conclusions. They stated that their investigation was over, and that the matter is now in the hands of the

ufologists. They will not subject Johnson to either a polygraph or a regressive hypnosis, as they feel it is not necessary for their investigation. All three were asked if the Air Force, CIA or FBI had approached them, and they all answered to the negative,

Val Johnson was asked if he had since experienced any other unusual incidents: dreams, MIB, psi phenomena, etc. He revealed a highly interesting thing; from time to time, he will find himself thinking three words, which somehow are sticking in his mind. The words stay with him "like a McDonald's commercial", and he can find no reason for thinking them. The three words are: "I AM COMMITTED". (He said that if he ever saw that light again, he'd stop the car and "yell for help!")

Discussion

This case was reviewed in detail, and photographs of the car were examined closely. Additional evidence was brought forth, and theories were presented to try and account for all the evidence. Guy Westcott, a NOAP investigator, stated that he had found a "burn mark" in the field beside the road, while he was examining the site. This mark, about 6-7 feet in diameter, had no vegetation on its surface, and bore some resemblance to a fertilizer burn. Val Johnson said that a representative from the USDA (Agriculture Rep) expressed a personal interest in the case, and had taken infrared aerial photographs of the site. These showed that the ditches on either side of the site had a "different" chlorophyll absorption than the surrounding fields.

After much debate, it eventually was concluded by the MCU participants that the incident was inconsistent with the theory of the car having been struck by an object of some sort, including ball lightning. The idea of hits by multiple objects was considered and found marginally tenable. However, there are 39 minutes to account for, a complex sequence of impacts by several objects, or even some effects caused at a short distance by unknown individuals, can be included in the list of possibilities. It is easily demonstrable that something very unusual happened that morning, and that at the present time, there is no adequate explanation for the effects noted in the case, based on the proposed theories. Many questions still remain unanswered, and they may remain unanswered for some time to come. The Stephen, Minnesota, incident is listed in UFOROM files as "unknown".

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