

1982 ALASKA CLOSE ENCOUNTER

TYPE: CE-I
DATE: Oct. 27, 1982
TIME: Early evening after dark
DURATION: Approximately one hour
WITNESSES: 2
PLACE: Near Summit Lake, Alaska

The Ken Hamblin Show on radio station KOA in Denver is a popular, late night talk program. On the night of July 18, 1983, the topic of discussion was the UFO phenomenon, and Larry Sessions, director of the Gates Planetarium in the Denver Museum of Natural History, and I were the guests.

KOA has a powerful 50,000-watt nighttime signal which reaches over 30 states. This wide broadcast coverage made it possible for us to learn of the remarkable CE-I case presented here. Although our three-hour program elicited calls from listeners over more than half the United States, it was a call I received at my office the following afternoon that proved the most interesting and forms the basis of this report.

The call was from one Tom McCrorey, owner of a trucking business based in Meridian, Idaho. McCrorey said he had been

by Richard Sigismond

pulling his 18-wheel refrigerated tractor-trailer down from the province of Saskatchewan, Canada, through the northern panhandle region of Idaho, when he heard our show. He proceeded to relate details of a close encounter his wife, Bonnie, and her father, Maurice Smith, had had in October, 1982, while they were driving to Anchorage, Alaska, to visit relatives. They had seen a huge metallic sphere, estimated to be 100 feet in diameter, with striking surface features which made the object look like a cross between a golf ball and a geodesic dome.

The object was at tree-top level and no more than 100 yards away from the witnesses. Moreover, it was, for all but a few minutes at the end of the sighting, stationary, dominating the night landscape for about one hour before it dramatically changed color from silver to yellow to orange, then to a bloody red orange. Finally, silently and slowly, the huge object drifted off into the night sky.

My caller said the pickup truck in which his wife and her father were traveling had

stalled just after dusk with a frozen gas line, on a road near Summit Lake in Alaska. Failing after numerous attempts to get the vehicle started, they were forced to remain with the truck for several hours on a very cold night. (I subsequently learned that the father, Mr. Smith, suffered a severe case of frostbite as a result.) In effect, they were captive witnesses.

At first, they assumed the object was some sort of giant construction, possibly related to the nearby Alaska oil pipeline. They thought that the giant sphere, perched at the tree-top level, had some sort of underpinning, perhaps a pylon obscured by the trees and the darkness. They got this idea because at some point earlier in the day they had observed a roughly similar, albeit smaller, construction sitting on a pedestal.

I asked my caller if I could talk directly with his wife about the incident. McCrorey said he would encourage her to call back but he warned that she might be reluctant to do so because the experience had terrified her.

McCrorey's prediction proved correct. Bonnie did not call back that day or for several weeks. Finally I contacted Tom and asked him to try again to get his wife either to call me or to agree to take a call from me. He said he would try but that she still was hesitant to speak about her experience.

In late June, 1984, I had yet to hear from the McCroreys. Then I happened to read Larry Fawcett and Barry Greenwood's *Clear Intent* and on page 50 came across a reprint of a NORAD document, a portion of which immediately commanded my attention. The document, a message sent by the Commander-in-Chief of NORAD to NORAD units in North America on November 11, 1975, concerns the by-now well-publicized "visits" by UFOs to certain Strategic Air Command bases. The document mentions that when personnel at Falconbridge AFB in Ontario viewed the object through binoculars, they found it was a sphere about 100 feet in diameter and had craterlike indentations on the surface. In other words, they saw something strikingly similar to what Bonnie McCrorey and Maurice Smith had observed.

Soon afterwards I called Meridian, Idaho, to see if Bonnie and her father had yet agreed to communicate the details of their experience. Tom, who took the call,



This drawing depicts the object seen by Bonnie McCrorey and her father, Maurice Smith, while driving to Anchorage, Alaska, in October, 1982.

Mattoon Gasser: A Modern Myth

by Willy Smith

It is truly remarkable how the episode of the "Phantom Anesthetist"—who in 1944 allegedly attacked citizens of Mattoon, Illinois, with a mysterious gas—has become a staple of contemporary ufological (and other) literature, invariably cited as a classic example of mass hysteria. Furthermore, it has been used to support opposite contentions. For example, one writer emphasizes the differences between the onset of UFO waves and the start of mass hysteria flaps.¹ Another quotes it to stress the thesis that cattle mutilations have a naturalistic explanation,² namely, the hysteria of the farmers, rather than a bizarre explanation due to UFOs or other preposterous circumstances (Ed. Note: see the book review in this issue of *IUR* regarding *Mute Evidence* for an explanation of these mutilations). Recently, in a series of papers appearing in the *MUFON UFO Journal*, the Mattoon incident is cited and used to maintain that "mass hysteria probably has nothing to do with UFO reports."³

I wonder how many of those who so freely speak of the "anesthetist of Mattoon" to prove one point or another have really gone to the original literature to inform themselves of the particulars of this event. Not to be like them, I secured with some effort, a copy of Donald M. Johnson's initial paper,⁴ and my investment paid off.

Before going into the nitty gritty, I wish to point out that from the very beginning, Johnson, whom I suspect of being just a student at the time, apparently intended to "prove" a case of mass hysteria, regardless of the evidence that he himself had found in Mattoon. This is the impression that assaults the reader from the very first line when, for instance, it is indicated that "the story begins on the first night of September, 1944, when a woman reported to the police that someone...had sprayed her..." These remarks are not correct; the story did not start on Sept. 1, and she did not report it to the police but to a friend and to her husband, who called the police.

Now to the details, all provided by Johnson. According to him, and after a careful reading of his paper, the true chronology of both the reports and newspaper coverage is as follows:

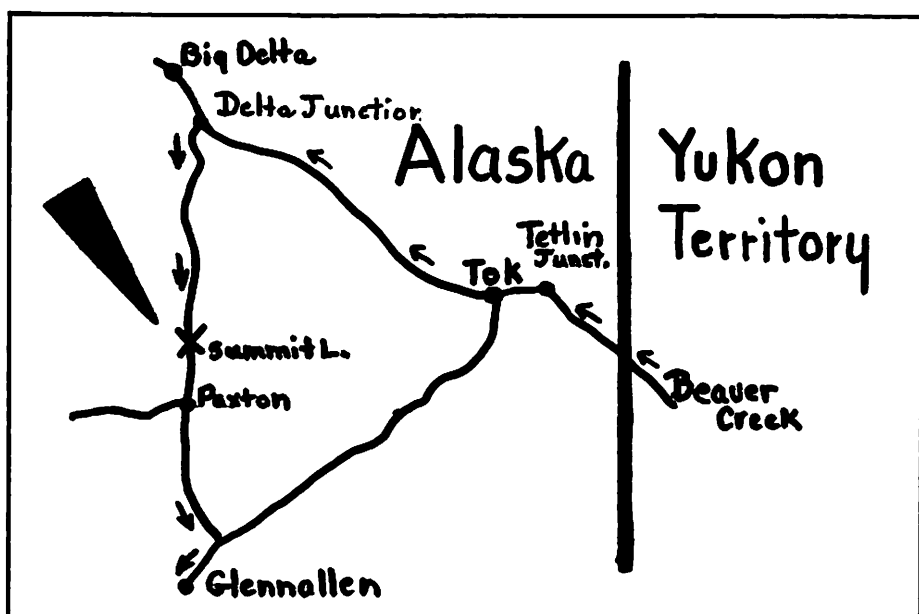
Date	Name of Witnesses	Report or Coverage
Aug. 31	Mr. & Mrs. B	Not reported to the police until Sept. 3. Not published in newspaper until Sept. 5.
Aug. 31	Mrs. C	Not reported until later; not made public until Sept. 5.
Sept. 1	Mrs. A. & her daughter	About midnight asked a friend to call the police. Husband, two hours later, saw a man run from window and called the police again.
Sept. 2	-----	Incident of Mrs. A and daughter appeared in newspaper.
Sept. 3	-----	No paper. (Sunday)
Sept. 4	-----	No paper. (Labor Day)
Sept. 5	-----	The cases of Mr. & Mrs. B and Mrs. C appeared in newspaper.
	Mr. & Mrs. B	New case reported to police.
	Mrs. E	New case reported to police by her husband.
Sept. 6	-----	Three more cases.
Sept. 7	-----	No cases.
Sept. 8	-----	Four cases.
Sept. 9	-----	Five cases.
Sept. 10	-----	Seven cases.
Sept. 11	-----	No cases.
Sept. 12	-----	Final case.

A grand total, then, of 25 cases in 13 days. However, the weight of all these cases is not the same. The case of Mr. and Mrs. B, for instance, occurring before the key case which supposedly triggered the total sequence, cannot be attributed to hysteria, since Mr. B was the one to feel sick and smelled the gas. This was *not* hysteria but a real event. As for Mrs. C, she was with her daughter, so it would seem a case of *folie a deux* but without a stimulus, because again this was prior to any publicity. It seems more rational to accept that this was also a real incident. Johnson's key case, Mrs. A and her daughter, is an episode with two witnesses, and moreover, Mr. A, coming home much later and ignorant of previous events, sees a man run from the window. Hysteria, or plain fact? I think there is no doubt, unless we postulate that Mr. A had obscure motives to gain public attention: a prowler was prowling and scared Mrs. A and her daughter. Thus the sequence, if imaginary, was triggered by a real incident.

In the absence of more details, we can make no judgments on the other cases. But we have made progress, as we have easily explained the initial incidents. Perhaps the others were prompted by the sensationalist handling by the media, particularly the local paper, the *Mattoon Daily Journal Gazette*. In fact, there is a curious detail here, glossed over by Johnson; the story appeared on the front page, in a column headed "Mrs. A and Daughter First Victims." How come? Only one incident was known when this was published, apparently considered by the paper and police as a serious attack, and yet we find this "first" as if the reporter knew there were more to come. Johnson dismisses this as an error, but such a contention does not resist analysis. Too many people see the headlines of a paper before it goes to the presses. Was the whole thing "organized" to bring national attention to Mattoon, otherwise a faceless community in Illinois?

Fortunately, Johnson provides us with detailed statistics of the coverage, in square inches of newspaper space, occupied by the series of events. Although the judging of the value or truthfulness of an issue by the press coverage in inches is a sometimes practice in the "soft" sciences, it only indicates the editorial bias of the media, of which we have a daily example in the morning news. And in this case, if there was foul play behind the scenes, the statistics of the

(continued on page 9)



said his wife had recently expressed a willingness to talk with me about her UFO experience. Unfortunately, she was out when I called. I phoned again later in the week and at last established contact. I learned new details of the event and, in addition, Bonnie promised to write me a letter giving her recollections. She did this on Aug. 27. Some of what she wrote follows:

“On October 20, 1982, my father, Maurice Smith, and I left Meridian, Idaho, headed north for Anchorage, Alaska. On the 7th day we went into Alaska and when we came to the Tok Junction, instead of turning southwest we went northwest and ended up getting lost. My dad referred to this later as the Alaskan Triangle.

“It was getting late afternoon when we stopped for gas at a lodge near Summit Lake. We had coffee and visited with the people that ran the lodge.

“Just before dark it started getting extremely cold and the pickup stopped right in the road with a frozen gas line. We thought for sure someone would stop to help us, but nobody did. After we had been there about 20 minutes, we noticed a huge ball up on a ridge to our left. We figured it was about 100 feet in diameter. It was silver colored and appeared to be a geodesic dome. We joked about it being Paul Bunyan’s golf ball. We had seen a similar dome in a valley earlier in the day.

“Within the next hour it changed color from silver to yellow to orange to bright orange to a fiery red-orange, then slowly lifted off the ground and moved up the ridge northerly until it went out of sight. *It never made any sound whatsoever!* When it first took off we were only 100 yards from it.

“An hour or so later a policeman came along and got our pickup started.

“We flew back home and stopped off at Sitka to visit my older brother. While there we talked to the Pastor of a church. I believe his name is Bob Benton. When we described what we had seen, he said he and many others had seen these things while stationed there in the Air Force. Their superiors told them they didn’t see anything and when one man took pictures they were taken away.

“When we returned home, my dad called my uncle, who is a retired Air Force Lt. Col. and he said he had seen these things while flying a jet fighter.”

It is not every day that we ufologists come upon close-range sightings of giant 10-story-high spherical UFOs. But as a psychologist, I am instinctively drawn to Bonnie McCrorey’s closing reflection: “When this, whatever it was, changed all colors and took off, it was the fact that there was no noise at all, *that was the scary thing about it!*” □

Rendlesham

by Jenny Randles

At that point, none of us knew that two East Anglian UFO investigators, Brenda Butler and Dot Street, had collected a highly interesting and relevant story from an independent source.

I should explain here that East Anglia is a large dome-shaped region of England which juts out into the North Sea. The land is flat, with much reclaimed from the sea. Most of the towns are rural agricultural villages. Because of its strategic location, East Anglia is covered by one of the tightest radar nets in the Western world, and several of the air bases (such as Woodbridge/Bentwaters) have both British and American base commanders.

Because of its relative isolation and low population density, East Anglia has rarely been well covered by UFO investigators. Brenda Butler, from Leiston, Suffolk, just a few miles from Bentwaters, has followed the subject as an independent researcher for many years. Dot Street got interested shortly before 1980, after a personal sighting and quickly became the regional investigator for the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA). Neither woman was well known in ufology or experienced in handling significant cases.

Yet a number of significant UFO incidents have occurred in the region over the years, most prominently the Aug. 13, 1956, Lakenheath radar-visual case. One of the key factors involved in the radar and visual observations was Bentwaters—which figures in this new story.

Base Officers' Story

Early in January, 1981, Brenda was told the following story in confidence by a high-ranking USAF officer, now serving at a base in the United States. Early on the morning of Dec. 30, a farmer called the base to report what he thought was an aircraft crash. A team went out into the Rendlesham forest to investigate and found a landed UFO. (The team consisted of high-ranking officers from the base, including Brenda's friend, security officers and the base commander.) The disk-like object stood on three legs, and a shaft of light shone from its underside. Three entities, about three feet tall and in silver suits, were seen in the light beam. For some hours the base commander and the aliens conversed. Then the allegedly damaged UFO was repaired and took off.

The next day an A-10 aircraft overflew the forest and found radiation traces. The area was sealed off and inquirers (such as the farmer) were told an airplane had crashed, although no statement to this effect was made public.

Brenda continued to hear second-hand accounts which affirmed previous testimony, although other elements were added. These included severe animal disturbance in the vicinity, an alleged order "from the top" to the team confronting the UFO to leave their weapons behind, and the supposed existence of film of the events. Surprisingly, in none of these reports and in no other report was there reference to the interference to the jeep light and engine.

At last, Brenda informed Dot and suggested that the two of them commence a proper investigation. Dot notified her BUFORA coordinator for the county, Bob Easton, of what they were doing. Bob was intrigued because he had already heard, via Norman Oliver (then editor of the BUFORA journal), that American ufologist Lucius Farish had just picked up a story from a serviceman sent stateside after a tour of

**The disk-like craft
stood on three legs,
and a shaft of
light shown from
its underside.**

Sail along, silvery disc: a response

I read with appreciation and some dismay Hobart Gregory Baker's commentary, in the last issue of *IUR*, on the Alaska close encounter case I discussed in November/December 1984 *IUR*. Baker claims that the "close encounter" was not with a UFO but with the moon.

Of course Baker is quite correct in pointing out the continuing need for good research in the field of UFO investigation (or, for that matter, any other endeavor worthy of our attention). But then, having lectured us roundly on the fundamentals of good investigatory practice, he goes on to commit the scientifically unacceptable action of rewriting the case to fit his own theory.

He alters the color-change sequence reported by the two witnesses to the exact opposite of what they said it was. He demands the existence of trees and mountains where necessary to fit his thesis when no such impediments to vision existed. He claims that the witnesses were unable to tell in which direction the object moved. He alleges that it moved *west*, hence necessitating that it move up and more or less overhead when in fact the witnesses report that it moved up a ridge and to the *north* until out of sight (following the country, i.e., the terrain). He ignores the witnesses' testimony that the object remained both stationary and silver-colored for a considerable period of time before it began its dramatic color-change sequence. It did not begin to change from silver to yellow to orange until well into the next hour from the time it appeared.

Baker further demands that the witnesses were capable of mistaking the apparent size of the rising moon by a 25-fold factor. He ignores the witnesses' assertion that the object not only was silver-colored but resembled a huge geodesic dome. There is nothing in this that even vaguely suggests the rising full moon.

I believe that I can rule out the moon according to the data given in the article (whatever other information there may be being irrelevant). I do not believe Baker can rule the moon in according to those same data -- which is

why, I assume, he changed the data to suit his thesis.

Now, as to the quality of my investigation:

I interviewed the woman witness by long-distance telephone on two occasions prior to her writing her letter, taking notes in each instance. Upon receiving her letter I prepared a set of questions and spoke with her again.

I had also separately queried her husband on two occasions long before I talked with her. This gave me the ability to judge the clarity of her recall of the event -- she having detailed to him the full sequence of events that occurred during the experience soon after her return to Idaho from Alaska.

I have also interviewed the woman's father who was the other witness to the event. His remarks, fully corroborating her testimony, form part of the log of this case.

Finally, a few observations about the witnesses:

Bonnie McCrorey and her father Maurice Smith are Western ranch people. Smith, in his 60s, still runs 500 head of cattle and several thousand sheep. The high plains, hills and mountains are the home environment of these people. The moon in any of its aspects or phases is no stranger to Smith or his 35-year-old daughter. Dusk and the rising moon (however resplendent) and dawn and the rising sun are facts of everyday life. We are not, in other words, dealing with city-bred tourists on their yearly outing, in a rare confrontation with nature.

Simply put, the facts of the case do not permit the moon to be a reasonable explanation for what the observers saw. -- *Richard Sigismund*

(b) The lighting inside the craft was dim and Bossa could not determine the color of the eyes of the crew (version i). Yet Bossa kept his green-tinted glasses on! In version ii the glasses are not mentioned.

(c) In version i Bossa found the object at a distance of 75 kilometers from "his hotel," while in version ii he was either 280 kilometers from Bahia Blanca (province of Buenos Aires) or 200 kilometers from the city of General Acha (province of La Pampa). He also established his geographical coordinates as 68 degrees west and 37 degrees south. All of this information is inconsistent.

(d) No time is given for the encounter, although Bossa is careful to provide the time of his departure (apparently from General Acha) with two friends the next day. In version ii they started at dawn; in version i rain prevented them from departing until afternoon.

(e) The names of the friends are not provided. In fact, when one thinks about it, we know of Bossa and his personality only through the letters he wrote and the information provided by Horacio Gonzalez, a Venezuelan ufologist now deceased. Coral Lorenzen indicates that she talked with Bossa by phone in 1957 and Len Stringfield may have a third letter from him, obtained through the good services of Horacio Gonzalez (1, page 84) and "written in wretched English." Bossa is variously described as an architect, an aeronautical engineer or an architectural engineer (whatever that may be).

(f) A minor inconsistency between the two versions is the reported difficulty Bossa experienced when trying to start his car on the run. No such problem is mentioned in version i. A second minor discrepancy concerns the dates. According to version ii, the incident took place on May 15, 1955, while in other versions, including a letter written to Stringfield (1, page 82) on October 25, 1955, the date is reported to be May 10, 1955.

(g) Last but not least are the behavioral inconsistencies: If we believe what we are told, Bossa, an educated man, kept his cool while inside the craft, where he remained about five minutes. Yet, presented with the opportunity to remove some item from what he had recognized as a

spaceship, he did nothing of the kind! Also, while first approaching the landed craft (notice, it was not demolished), he tells us that when he was at a distance of 50 meters he thought it was a plane that had crashed. He then proceeds to describe the saucer in terms entirely incompatible with the way a crashed plane would look. In version i Bossa had no problems entering the craft; in version ii he had to do some acrobatics to accomplish it.

It is rather hard to believe that, knowing what was waiting in the fields, he opted not to return immediately. This site was adjacent to the road and even if the area is thinly populated, it is unlikely that no one would pass the place for many hours. If we take Bossa's account seriously, we have to conclude that the bodies, described as stone cold, may have lain there undisturbed for as long as a day.

In the end there are only two possibilities:

(i) The story is true, in which case it becomes necessary to find a satisfactory explanation for the anomalies listed above.

(ii) The whole thing is a clever hoax, perhaps developed by an educated man for his own entertainment or by a not-so-well-educated man for financial gain, in which case Bossa perhaps never existed.

If he was as well known as Gonzalez wants us to believe, it should be a simple matter to find material proof of his visit to General Acha or to Bahia Blanca in May 1950.

References

1. Stringfield, Leonard H. *Situation Red: The UFO Siege*, Doubleday: New York, 1977.
2. Lorenzen, Coral E. "The Reality of the Little Men," *Flying Saucers*, December 1958, page 26.
3. Flachaire, M. "Un atterrissage d'astronef en Argentine," *Le Courrier Interplanetaire*, No. 15 (Paques 1956), Lausanne, Switzerland, Alfred Nahon, Director. ❖