

The Levelland, Texas, Sightings

November 2, 1957

Dr. J. Allen Hynek:

For the moment, let us look at the probability that motors are killed and lights and radio stop by coincidence when the driver has a UFO close sighting.

We have all seen cars stopped by the side of the road, hood up, waiting for tow trucks. It would be highly improbable that a car would become completely immobilized and then a few moments later "heal itself," yet it can happen. Perhaps, for example, a wire that had become loose was jarred back into place in some way. But to combine this low probability event with the simultaneous appearance of a strange light coming down from the sky and hovering over the car, the car remaining disabled only so long as the light was present, is dubious at best.

It is, of course, much the easier way out to dismiss the whole matter as "psychological" (whatever that means in this context) and return to commonplace, understandable matters. However, that would not be acting true to the high ideals of science, which involve being curious about all things that occur in man's environment, investigating and weighing them, and calmly considering the evidence.

If the probability of a happening in any *one* case is extremely low, consider the probability of coincidence in the following train of events - if they happened as reported.

On the evening of November 2, 1957, at about 11:00 P. M., just one hour after the Russians had launched their second, dog-carrying artificial satellite (that certainly *was* coincidence) but before we Americans knew about it, Patrolman A. J. Fowler, officer on duty at Levelland, Texas (population 10,000), received the first of several strangely similar phone calls.

The first was from Pedro Saucedo, who, with companion Joe Salaz, had been driving four miles west of Levelland when a torpedo-shaped, brilliantly illuminated object (as Saucedo described it) rapidly approached the car. Fowler listened to a terrified Saucedo relate the incredible story of how, as the object passed close over the car, the truck headlights went out, and the engine died. A certified copy of a statement made by Saucedo reads:

To whom it may concern: on the date of November 2, 1957, I was traveling north and west on route 116, driving my truck. At about four miles out of Levelland, I saw a big flame, to my right front. . . . I thought it was lightning. But when this object had reach to my position it was different, because it put my truck motor out and lights. Then I stop, got out, and took a look, but it was so rapid and quite some heat that I had to hit the ground. It also had colors - yellow, white - and it looked like a torpedo, about 200 feet long, moving at about 600 to 800 miles an hour.

As the UFO moved into the distance, the truck lights reportedly came on by themselves, and Saucedo found that his truck started easily. The two men drove on to Whiteface, ten miles west of Levelland, and it was from a phone booth there that the call was made to Officer

Fowler. Fowler apparently figured the man must have had one too many drinks, and he dismissed the report from his mind.

Considered by itself, the testimony of an uneducated, frightened truck driver, as sincere in his reporting as he might have been, has little credibility. But one hour later Fowler got another call, this time from Mr. W. of Whitharral. Fowler was told that he (Mr. W.) was driving four miles *east* of Levelland (the direction in which the Saucedo object had disappeared) when he came upon a brilliantly lit egg-shaped object, about 200 feet long, sitting in the middle of the road. As Mr. W. approached it, his car engine failed, and the headlights went out.

According to the observer, the object was lit up like a large neon light and cast a bright glare over the entire area. The observer decided to get out of his car, but when he did so, the UFO rose and, at an altitude of about 200 feet, the object's light or glare blinked out entirely. Mr. W. then had no trouble starting his car.

A short time later Officer Fowler got another call, from another Whitharral man, who was, at the time of the incident, some 11 miles north of Levelland. He reported to the police station that he had come across a glowing object sitting on the road and that as he approached it - the reader can finish the sentence - his car engine stopped, and his headlights went out. But when the object left shortly thereafter, all was again well.

But that was not the end. According to a signed statement in Project Blue Book files, at 12:05 A.M. that Saturday night in November, a 19-year-old freshman from Texas Tech, driving roughly 9 miles east of Levelland, found that his car engine began to sputter, the ammeter on the dash jumped to discharge then back to normal, and the motor "started cutting out like it was out of gas." The car rolled to a stop; then the headlights dimmed and several seconds later went out.

Baffled at the turn of events, he got out of his car and looked under the hood but found nothing wrong. Closing the hood, he turned away and then noticed for the first time, he reported, an oval-shaped object, flat on the bottom, sitting on the road ahead. He estimated it to be about 125 feet long, glowing with a bluish-green light. He stated that the object seemed to be made of an aluminum-like material, but no markings or other details were apparent. Frightened, he got back into the car and tried frantically but in vain to restart the car.

Resigned, he sat and watched the object sitting in front of him on the road (he did not state how close he thought he was to the object) for several minutes, hoping that another car would drive by. None did. The UFO finally rose into the air, "almost straight up," and disappeared "in a split instant." Afterward, the car was again fully operable.

"I then proceeded home very slowly," his statement continues, "and told no one of my sighting until my parents returned home from a weekend trip . . . for fear of public ridicule. They did convince me that I should report this, and I did so to the sheriff around 1:30 P.M. Sunday, November 3."

At 12:15 A.M. Officer Fowler got still another call, this from a man phoning from a booth near Whitharral. This observer reported his encounter with the strange object at a point some nine miles north of Levelland. Once again the glowing object was sitting on a dirt

road, and as his car approached it, its lights went out and its motor stopped. Soon the object rose vertically, very swiftly, and when it reached an altitude of about 300 feet, its lights went off and it disappeared from sight. As the reader expects by now, at this point the car lights came back on and the car was started with no difficulty.

By this time Officer Fowler had finally realized that something odd was going on, and he notified the sheriff and his colleagues on duty, some of whom took to the roads to investigate. Two of them reported bright lights, seen for just a few seconds, but they did not have any car-stopping encounters.

At 12:45 A.M. another single witness - I have broken my rule to use only multiple-witness cases because of the independent witnessing of essentially the same event or object, with the same physical effects, from independent nearby points - driving just west of Levelland and thus close to the spot where two hours earlier Saucedo had had his sighting, spotted what looked like a big orange ball of fire at a distance of more than a mile. The ball then came closer and landed softly on the highway about a quarter of a mile ahead of the observer. It covered the paved portion of the highway.

The witness reported that the motor of the truck he was driving "conked out" and his headlights died. Meanwhile, the object sat there on the road ahead of him, glowing bright enough to light up the cab of his truck. In about a minute, the observer reported, it made a vertical ascent - and, of course, things returned to normal. This encounter was not phoned in at the time to Officer Fowler but was reported the following day. One possibly significant clue to some as yet unknown process may lie in the fact that the reporter stated that when the UFO landed it changed from its original red-orange color to a bluish green but that when it rose it changed back to red-orange. And it is perhaps of interest to note that the object or objects always landed on the pavement, except once, when it settled on a dirt road.

But that is not all. At 1:15 A. M. Officer Fowler got another call, this time from a terrified truck driver from Waco, Texas, who was at the time just northeast of Levelland, on the "Oklahoma flat road." The man told Fowler that his engine and headlights suddenly failed as he approached within 200 feet of a brilliant, glowing egg-shaped object. He said that it glowed intermittently "like a neon sign" and that he estimated it to be about 200 feet long. He reported that as he got out of the truck, the UFO quickly shot straight up with a roar and streaked away.

Officer Fowler stated that the truck driver was extremely excited when he called and that the witness was most upset by his close encounter. The truck engine and lights worked perfectly when the object left.

By this time patrol cars were out looking for the reported object. Sheriff Clem and Deputy Pat McCulloch were being kept up to date by Fowler as they drove around the area. At 1:30 A.M, while driving along the Oklahoma Flat Road, between four and five miles from Levelland, the two men spotted an oval-shaped light, "looking like a brilliant red sunset across the highway," a good 300 or 400 yards south of their patrol car. "It lit up the whole pavement in front of us for about two seconds," said Clem.

Patrolmen Lee Hargrove and Floyd Gavin were following in their patrol car several miles behind. In his signed statement Hargrove stated:

Was driving south on the unmarked roadway known as the Oklahoma Flat Highway and was attempting to search for an unidentified object reported to the Levelland Police Department.

. . . I saw a strange-looking flash, which looked to be down the roadway approximately a mile to a mile and a half. . . . The flash went from east to west and appeared to be close to the ground.

Constable Lloyd Ballen of Anton, Texas, also reported seeing the object, although his statement was: "It was traveling so fast that it appeared only as a flash of light moving from east to west."

None of these patrolmen's cars was affected, but Levelland Fire Marshal Ray Jones, who also was looking for the UFO, stated that his car's headlights dimmed and his engine sputtered but did not die, just as he spotted a "streak of light" north of the Oklahoma Flat.

Officer Fowler reported that a total of 15 phone calls were made to the police station in direct reference to the UFO, and he added, "Everybody who called was very excited."

In terms of probabilities, that all seven cases of separate car disablement and subsequent rapid, automatic recovery after the passage of the strange illuminated craft, occurring within about two hours, could be attributed to coincidence is out of the statistical universe - if the reports are truly independent (and they are, according to the tests we've used throughout).

Suppose we try to attribute the happening to mass hysteria, although that does not disclose a mechanism for killing engines and extinguishing lights and stopping radios. The observers were independent unless all of them, for example, were listening to a local radio station that carried the news. (No investigator ever checked into the important question of whether the radio stations were notified and if they broadcast the reports.) We know that at first Officer Fowler discounted the reports, and it is unlikely that he would have almost immediately notified the local station. But let us suppose that he or someone else did and that all car radios were tuned in to that particular station. We still would need an explanation for the physical effects reported unless we attribute them to downright prevarication rather than to hysteria.

What was needed at the time was swift reaction by Blue Book and a serious, thorough investigation. Captain Gregory, then head of Blue Book, did call me by phone, but at that time, as the person directly responsible for the tracking of the new Russian satellite, I was on a virtual around-the-clock duty and was unable to give it any attention whatever. I am not proud today that I hastily concurred in Captain Gregory's evaluation as "ball lightning" on the basis of information that an electrical storm had been in progress in the Levelland area at the time. That was shown not to be the case. Observers reported overcast and mist but no lightning. Besides, had I given it any thought whatever, I would soon have recognized the absence of any evidence that ball lightning can stop cars and put out headlights.

I was told that the Blue Book investigation consisted of the appearance of one man in civilian clothes at the sheriff's office at about 11:45 A.M. On November 5; he made two auto excursions during the day and then told Sheriff Clem that he was finished.

A newspaper reporter subsequently said that he had recognized the investigator and

identified him as an Air Force sergeant.

In any event, Blue Book came under severe pressure. In a memo dated December 4, 1957, Captain Gregory complained that.... . as a result of pressure from both the press and public

. . . Assistant Secretary of Defense requested that ATIC immediately submit a preliminary analysis to the press . . . a most difficult requirement in view of the limited data."

Interfering with cars on the highways is but one of the physical effects reported in this category of Close Encounters. There are also the reported - and photographable - effects on living things, notably plants and trees. Many witnesses have reported temporary paralysis in their limbs when their encounters have been quite close.

More than 300 cases of "scorched, denuded circles" and related "landing marks" frequently associated with the sighting of UFOs at close range have been cataloged. These, like UFOs in general, have been reported from many parts of the world, and a definite pattern is evident. The prototype is clear from an examination of even a few cases.

Source: The UFO Experience, J.Allen Hynek (1972) pages 123-128

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