

AN EARLY BRITISH NAVAL SIGHTING?

AT the time when FSR was being launched, in the spring of 1955, I was working — after a diplomatic career on four continents — in an Intelligence post somewhere in the governmental and administrative heart of London known as Whitehall. The name of the organisation where I was employed and the nature of my duties there are not matters that need to be chronicled here, and it will perhaps suffice if I say that, being in central London, I was well placed to make social contacts with people of various services, including officers of the CIA and of the American Air Force Intelligence.

Having once seen something extraordinary in the sky (in the far west of China, no less than fourteen years before FSR began) my mind was already much taken up with the problems of the “flying saucers.” And, among these officers and officials whom I was meeting outside of office hours I found that there were some who were evidently pretty knowledgeable and who took more than just a superficial or passing interest in the “saucers” and were even very willing to discuss them seriously, although I noticed that, naturally enough, they seemed far more keen on ‘pumping’ other folk than on releasing much information on the subject themselves. In other words, they were already “cagey”. (I emphasise again that these officials were invariably encountered on purely social occasions, for my own work was in no way connected with them, secret though it was, and none of them were ever met in the course of my duties.)

It must of course be borne in mind that those were still very early days in the UFO business. The meetings of the famous “Robertson Panel” of scientists in the USA only took place in 1953. Things were fluid still, “*the lid was by no means fully screwed down yet*”, and lots of stories and reports were getting into the newspapers which would assuredly never get into them now, and people in uniform were correspondingly more relaxed still and not yet quite as much on their guard as they would be in later years.

In the summer of 1958, on a social occasion, while taking my vacation in a country not far from Britain, I met another American officer — a captain in the U.S. Air Force Intelligence, with whom I had a very interesting chat for an hour or so on UFOs. He told me that he had had a personal encounter with a “*foo fighter*” when about to land his plane on an airfield near Tokyo in 1946, very shortly after the defeat of Japan. He told me that, at a certain moment, the “*foo fighter*” exploded right in front of his aircraft. He said the whole area beneath and round about was combed exhaustively by American troops and Japanese police, but not a scrap of the enigmatic intruder was ever found. (In the famous Brazilian case at Ubatuba,¹ in September 1957, on the other hand, it will be recalled

that the “*foo fighter*” fell right on the shore-line, between sea and land, and a good proportion of it was recovered and, as we were subsequently informed by APRO, was being analysed in a Brazilian laboratory. (Further reports were promised, but I never saw any, and this did not surprise me!) We gathered however that the main constituent of the object was the easily combustible element magnesium.

I then told the American Air Force Intelligence Officer about the strange sight that I (along with two other Europeans) had seen in the sky over a city in the remote interior of China at about noon one day in the summer of 1941,² and he listened with evident interest and asked many questions, but refused to speculate. I was left with the impression that he already “knew a lot.”

Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten

One of the earliest “big names” that we heard mentioned in connection with the “flying saucers” was that of Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. He too — so it was said — “knew a lot about flying saucers”, because the British Navy possessed photographs of them in flight over the sea, and also sometimes at rest on the surface of the water.

My own (unpublicised) association with FSR had started with the very establishment of the journal in 1955. I had filled in a subscription form and sent off my cheque, and in due course, as a subscriber, I began to receive my FSRs, from No. 1 onwards. My first contributed item appeared in issue No. 2 (Vol. 1, No. 2) but it was to be a good many years before my name was given in the journal — not, in fact, until I had ceased to be a civil servant.

As for Lord Mountbatten’s great personal interest in our subject — we knew with certainty that this was true, for he had asked to receive FSR, and a copy of every issue was accordingly sent to him right from the beginning. (Nor was he the only person in those very highest levels among our national leaders who had expressed such an interest, and who consequently also received every issue of FSR right from the commencement.)

A Strange Story

A distant relative of mine (now dead) had served in the Royal Navy in World War II. Not long ago, just before his death, he told me a strange story which I think should now be placed on record, as it agrees so closely with some of those tales and rumours that were heard in Whitehall during the 1950s. He said, simply, that he knew a colleague, another British naval officer, who had worked in the early post-war years in the main building of the Admiralty — which, as I should perhaps explain for the benefit of foreign

and overseas readers — was in those days the administrative headquarters for the Royal Navy and is in Whitehall. This officer told my relative that, on a certain occasion, in the Admiralty, he happened to visit the room of a very senior officer in the Royal Navy and there, right on the great man's desk, he saw what he ought not to have seen — files on the subject of UFOs, and photographs of strange disc-shaped objects on the surface of the sea.

The Alleged Landing on the Mountbatten Estate

After the murder of Lord Mountbatten by the I.R.A. terrorists in 1979, FSR published an article by Desmond Leslie,³ giving the details of an extraordinary affair regarding which we had already heard vague rumours over a good many years past. A UFO, or UFOs, it seems, had landed briefly in the grounds of the Mountbatten estate, at Broadlands, in Hampshire, Southern England, one snowy day during the 1950s, and an occupant of the craft had spoken to an ex-Army NCO, Sergeant Briggs, a member of the Admiral's outdoor staff. According to Desmond Leslie, when Lord Mountbatten heard of the encounter, he at once sent for Sergeant Briggs and got him to make a full statement, of which six copies were prepared. Briggs signed all six copies, and was permitted to keep one, while Lord Mountbatten placed the other five copies in a drawer of his desk.

Confirmation by Charles Gibbs-Smith

When the Directors of FSR held their next board meeting, they were able to hear direct confirmation of this affair. For our colleague Charles Gibbs-Smith reported that he had traced Sergeant Briggs and discussed the matter with him, and had seen his signed copy of the Report which Lord Mountbatten had drawn up. Several of us urged Charles Gibbs-Smith to put this important piece of corroborative evidence down in writing at once, so that it might go on record in our journal, and it is a matter for very great regret that our much-loved colleague, already a sick man, was apparently unable to attend to this before he died. This brief note must serve therefore for the record.

Evidence of the Royal Navy's Interest in UFOs

Traditionally the Royal Navy has been known as the 'Silent Service.' Although we have all heard so much evidence to indicate the great interest taken by all Air Forces, and for many years past, in anything of a 'ufological' nature, only rarely have we heard of *Navies* taking an interest in such matters. Although a cursory glance through the history of our subject will show that at various times there have been reports of investigations by the naval authorities in the USA, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, to name just a few, never, it seems, has there been mention of the British Navy.

The article in *Uranus*

Recently, when leafing through the pages of *Uranus* (the early mimeographed UFO magazine, long since defunct, which was edited in the mid-1950s first by Eric Biddle and later by David Wightman) I came across the interesting little story which I reproduce below. As will be noted, it is said to have come from a German press source but most unfortunately, though the name of the German newspaper is given, there is no reference to the date of either the paper or the alleged report. However, many readers may feel inclined to think, as I do, that the story *sounds genuine*. We must bear in mind that those were still the very early years of the UFO Phenomenon. The official clamps of secrecy only began to be effective around 1956-57, and in the seven years that had elapsed since Kenneth Arnold's famous sighting in July 1947 many extraordinary reports had got out that certainly would not stand the slightest chance of doing so today.

I have no idea what the circulation of *Uranus* was, but it was certainly very small. It was a simple little mimeographed magazine on very poor paper, and it is likely that few copies will have survived. If we do not give this report wider circulation by reprinting it now, it will probably be lost and forgotten altogether. If we print it now, there is always the possibility that one of our German readers may be able to trace the original item in the *Speyerer Tagespost*, and if we take it from there we may be able to find out more about the story and learn from where they got it.

Who knows? The possibility is not excluded that this story in a German newspaper concerns the very same UFO sighting and the same photographs about which the British naval officer from the Admiralty spoke to a member of my family a quarter of a century ago.

A British Naval Sighting Comes to Light (This report first appeared in the *Speyerer Tagespost*)

Three British submarines returned to Plymouth after manoeuvres held off the Bristol Channel. The Commander, Captain Chelwan,⁵ reported to his Admiral that he had seen "Flying Saucers" floating on the sea approximately eleven nautical miles south of Lundy Island. He was able to take two photographs showing the objects.

The research organisation on UFOs, formed about a year ago in London and attached to the Admiralty, confiscated the film at the Admiral's request, and decided that the photos will be studied, evaluated, and released for publication⁷ at a later date. In the meantime Captain Chelwan was ordered to treat his encounter with the UFOs as a military secret and to instruct his officers and men accordingly.

Before the order was imposed, however, a newspaper man obtained a five-minute interview with Captain Chelwan, and here is the Captain's story:—

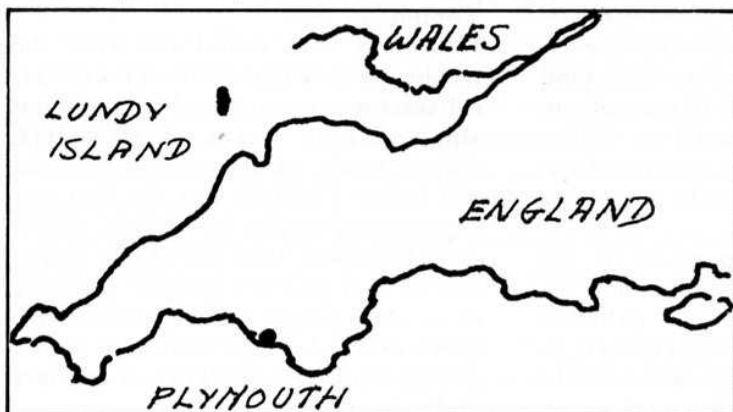
"We surfaced near Lundy Island, and, on opening the hatch, my Engineer and I noticed, about a mile to the S.W., two silvery discs floating on the sea. As the sun was shining on the ripples, I thought at first that it was a light reflection, but presently we both heard a buzzing sound. We quickly grabbed our binoculars and examined the objects. They were shaped like a disc slightly elevated in the middle, and had no windows, portholes, or other apertures. The elevated middle portion was stationary, but the flat outside portion, surrounding the middle part like a collar, rotated slowly on the water.

"We thought the objects measured approximately 100 ft. across, the middle portion appearing to be not bigger than one tenth of the whole disc. The outer portion surrounding the centre piece appeared not to be attached to it, as there was a gap between them measuring about two feet.

"I must say we were very much surprised at the sight of those objects, and officers and men crowded⁸ the deck staring as if they were hypnotised. As the whole "show" took only 80 seconds, it was impossible to form a sober judgement. Their origin seems to be a puzzle; technically they seemed far above anything we knew. We all thought immediately that they were Flying Saucers. I intended to give an order to go at them full ahead and, if possible, get alongside them, but the buzzing sound became higher and more urgent, until the pitch was so high that it could not be heard any longer. The two discs mounted horizontally, turned sideways at about 300 ft., and disappeared in twenty seconds at a speed which I estimate to be at about 2,000 m.p.h. At the same time a reddish glow surrounded the objects.⁹ The Admiralty declared that the sighting was to be treated seriously and the evaluation of it would take some time."

Notes and References

1. See FSR, Vol. 6, No. 4 (July/August 1960), page 21.
2. A brief account of this sighting has been given by Robert Chapman, Science Correspondent of the London *Sunday Express*, in his book *Unidentified Flying Objects* (pub. Arthur Barker, London, 1969) and later as a Mayflower paperback under the title *UFO: Flying Saucers over Britain?* (also 1969).



3. See Desmond Leslie: *Did Flying Saucers Land at Broadlands?: Alleged Encounters on the Estate of Earl Mountbatten of Burma*. In FSR Vol. 26, No. 5
4. See *URANUS*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (December 1956). Editor David Wightman. A mimeographed twenty-page bulletin issued six times yearly by Markham House Press Ltd., 31 King's Road, London SE3.
5. This name *Chelwan* should be an important clue. I asked the department of the Ministry of Defence who deal with these matters whether they could assist me by tracing an officer of this name, and I received an extraordinarily prompt reply that they had no record of any officer of such a name having served in the Royal Navy. It is very much to be hoped that one of our readers who has more leisure than we at FSR do (our number is very small), and who has access to old issues of the *Navy List*, might be able to effect a more convincing search for us, and tell us whether they have any success.
7. ... "released for publication..." OH YEAH? We seem to have heard of such assurances on plenty of other occasions!
8. Remember that this UFO report dates from the early or mid-1950s, that is to say, from a time when very little had yet been published about the details of UFO appearance or UFO behaviour. Read this alleged naval officer's account carefully, and note how numerous are the features that today strike us as familiar, because we have seen them in so many other reports. If it be claimed that someone in Britain or Germany faked this story, then one can only say that he must have already been remarkably well informed on various aspects that can have been known only to very few folk indeed at so early a date. G.C.

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THE BRITISH UFO RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (Founded 1962) publishes two periodicals, research projects; sponsors monthly lectures in London, the UK International UFO Congresses; and has a well-established network of investigators. SAE for details to BUFORA Ltd, 30 Vermont Road, London SE19 3SR.

World round-up

of news and comment
about recent sightings

More Reports of UFOs over Greece

From the *Athens Daily Post* (English-language paper) of Friday, November 13, 1981:—

FLYING UFOs were observed on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, over the cities of Larissa and Edessa at 7.40 p.m. The UFOs were about 7-10 metres round (*sic*) and were moving slowly from East to West.

From the *Athens News* (English-language paper), Saturday, November 14, 1981:—

UFOs in Greece: Reality or Baloney?

The UFOs of Larissa and Edessa have now been sighted by citizens and by Air Force pilots ordered to search the skies in the Salonika regions of Mihaniona, Langada, and Kalohori.

Pilots carrying out regular flights at 10,000 ft. reported that they saw the objects at a great height. Statements of citizens who had seen the UFOs said they were immobile, and this was confirmed by Gendarmerie patrols who also "saw something".

Three Salonika Police officers followed the two UFOs closely for nearly two hours from the Triandria District of Kalohori.

Late on Thursday night the Police announced that the descriptions of the three officers coincided. Other eyewitnesses' reports said that the UFOs were polygonic and changing rapidly in colour from green, via blue, yellow and red to carrot orange.

Meanwhile, in Salonika itself rumours were spreading like wildfire, some saying that one UFO had landed at Kalohori, others that the UFOs were red, or blue, etc. Police services, professional photographers and the merely curious were all in an uproar on Thursday, dashing here and there to places where the UFOs were either alleged to have landed or been sighted.

A very large UFO has also been reported at Vermio, and is said to have been visible from Edessa, Naoussa, Yanitsa, and other parts of Western Macedonia.

An Astronomer's View

Astronomer D. Ilias says all this is a load of baloney, however. "Although we are constantly skimming the skies, we have not yet seen a real bona fide UFO," he comments. "It's usually a case of meteorological phenomena, or artificial satellites, or one of the bright planets like Venus and Jupiter, or even an early morning aeroplane flight which often results in a bright illuminated exhaust trail that causes interesting shapes."

The UFOs disappeared from the Salonika skies around 8.00 p.m. on Thursday evening.

Further Reports

From the Piraeus (Athens) Greek-language paper *He Eleuthera Ora* of Saturday, November 14, 1981:

Under the scare-headlines, PUBLIC IN UPROAR AT SIGHTINGS: UFOs INVADE GREECE, this paper says: "The UFOs, with the help of the local Observatory, are trying to drive us all crazy". It goes on to say that, on the previous day, the UFOs had been seen in the skies over many cities and towns of Central and Northern Greece, throwing both public and officialdom into uproar. The Salonika Observatory says it is merely the planet *Aphrodite** which at present is very bright in the sky of Greece.

Karditsa and Trikala

According to reports received early on Friday evening, the paper goes on, bright, strangely-shaped objects were seen over and around Karditsa, Trikala, Kavalla, Volos and other places. Astonished residents were besieging the police stations with phone calls to report the presence of UFOs. Police patrols at these places confirmed the sightings, but were unable to give an explanation.

But the explanation given by the Salonika Observatory does not account for the fact that (whether stationary or not) the objects seen by so many thousands of people over the last few days were low in the skies, es-

timated at altitudes of no more than "3,000 kms." and no less than "1,000 metres".

Volos and Kavalla

At Volos thousands of people saw, between 7.00 and 8.00 p.m., an object that was ten times the size of an ordinary star. The glare from it was tremendous and from time to time it changed in shape. Its shape seemed to be of an uneven "X", with the top-left arm missing. It resembled a semicircle at times, while at other times it was described as "similar to Concorde". The object remained low and stationary at 30° to the horizon, south-west of Volos. By about 7.50 p.m. there was no more light and it was out of sight.

At Kavalla the UFO was sighted at 6.30 p.m., moving very slowly. Many folk watched it for about 40 minutes before it vanished. It looked like a bright star. Many thought it was a man-made satellite.

At Karditsa a bright object resembling a star was seen to travel very slowly from East to West through the sky at 6.30 p.m.

At Trikala the UFO was seen moving towards the South-West. Local residents and people in the villages round about watched it for 30 minutes. It was shaped "like a bright tray" and changed shape from time to time. Finally it vanished behind the Pindos Mountains.

(Translation from Greek: Gordon Creighton)

(Credit and thanks to reader J.M. Hammond of Boston, Lincolnshire.)

Translator's Note

*Normally one would not take the trouble to translate what seems a typical scare-story generated by the amazingly bright planet *APHRODITE* (Greek name, of course, for our old girl-friend *VENUS*). But the first two reports (in English) are curious, as it is clear that more than one object is spoken of. Is it possible that the presence of a very bright *APHRODITE* low down on the horizon coincided with a genuine outburst of UFO activity over Hellas? — G.C.