

# THE RENDLESHAM FOREST MYSTERY

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The case reported herein was first alluded to by the author in a "late item" which found its way into Volume 26, No. 6 of *Flying Saucer Review* (page iii of cover) and fuller details were promised in due course. Here then are those details.

WHEN reading the works of Leonard Stringfield, for example "Retrievals of the Third Kind" in FSR Volume 25, Numbers, 4, 5 and 6, and of Charles Berlitz, *The Roswell Incident* (Granada paperback 1982), one wonders why the alleged UFO crashes always occur in America, and always in deserts. Why, indeed, have they never occurred in more recent years. One is forced to conclude that we would never get such a tale in dear old conservative Britain. Or would we?

**Where there's smoke there's fire — or more smoke!**

In February 1981 I received a phone-call from East Anglian author Paul Begg. Paul, best known for his *Thin Air* book (a praiseworthy sceptical examination of mysterious vanishings), looks for answers, not speculations. So what he had to tell me sounded worth checking out.

It seems that Paul and his wife had met a man in their local village pub who was slightly known to them, and presumably knew of Paul's interests. He decided to relate an episode which, he said, had occurred a few weeks previously (we *think* on Tuesday, December 30, 1980). According to him, the civil radar establishment where he worked had on that day tracked a UFO. It was night, and their base (one of many such systems that litter the strategic East Anglian region) had recorded this unusual target heading towards Suffolk and the general region to the east of Ipswich. This man had not been on duty when the incident had happened, but his friend had, and he had got the story from him. Allegedly the target was reported to other radar systems on the south east coast (both civil and military) and was checked against all known air movements. It was uncorrelated. This was the only part their station played in the affair (although they knew other places had recorded it too). But they were left in doubt about the status of the incident when the US Air Force came along a couple of days later and took away the tapes of the radar trackings of this UFO.

Being in a sensitive area viz-a-viz the Official Secrets Act readers will appreciate we cannot name this "witness." But he did agree to talk to us, and, thanks to Paul, UFOIN members Kevin McClure (a specialist in sorting out rumours) and Peter Warrington (our most experienced radar case investigator) checked with

him. The story, as verifiable as it can be, was as I have given. One rider added was that they were led to believe, by the USAF people who collected the tapes, that the "anomaly" had landed not far from Woodbridge Air Force Base (indeed it was suggested even *on* the base), and that a metallic craft, plus entities, was encountered. Electromagnetic effects on a military jeep which approached the site were also claimed.

So, we had ourselves a rumour of an extraordinary story, but little more than that. Merely anecdotal, "a friend of a friend told me" type stuff, from which one can hardly build mountains. Was there smoke behind the smoke, or a glimmering of a real fire? All we knew was that the radar man *seemed* to be telling the truth, and had no obvious reason to lie about this. Then came news which changed everything.

## The wonder of Woodbridge

Norman Oliver was at that time (February 1981) still editor of *BUFORA Journal*. As such he picked up stories from all over the world. One day, about this time, he received a half-garbled account from the USA that "something big" had happened at Woodbridge around the turn of the year. The gist of the rumour was the same. The difference was that this came from a US serviceman now back in the States who, possibly, thus felt more free to talk.

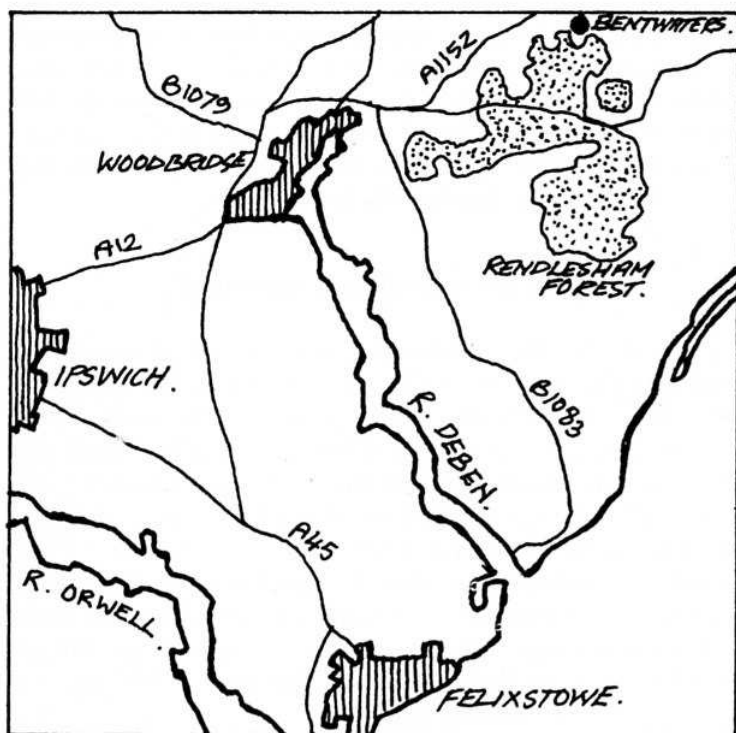
This was all rather interesting, but not half as interesting as what was going on, unbeknownst to the rest of us, in rural Suffolk itself. When I called Bob Easton (the nearest UFOIN member to the Woodbridge base . . . though still many miles away in Essex) I intended to tell him of the story, but he told me of the Norman Oliver aspect, and that local BUFORA investigators were on to it as well, *and* finding things out!

These local investigators were Brenda Butler — who was closest, in Leiston, about 10 miles north of the area in question — and her friend Dot Street, based twenty miles further north in Lowestoft. The two young women covered a vast, mostly rural area, more or less on their own. Suffolk is such a low-density population region that it has never generated many investigators, although it certainly has generated some intriguing UFO sightings (underlining the well-attested rule that interesting close encounters are in inverse proportion to the population density). One recalls the classic radar/visual case of August

1956 (usually known as the Lakenheath case, since most of the multiple ground and air sightings and radar trackings involved that base, although Bentwaters USAF base was initially involved too, and Bent-

present it is impossible to say how much of this is fact and how much fiction generated by the inevitable stories that are sweeping the community.”

#### Scene-set for an Encounter:



Location in East Anglia of Rendlesham Forest.

waters, whilst a USAF-leased base, is alongside Woodbridge, the subject of our 1980 case). This Lakenheath R/V is still regarded as one of the two or three best cases in UFO history. It has defied attempts to solve it and really *must* have set our Ministry of Defence thinking very seriously about UFOs — if they were not already so doing. Indeed many internal sources have told me that is so.

Dot and Brenda had picked up the story on their own initiative, and were chasing it with some haste, as indeed they are *still* doing in 1982). This sudden independent coming-together of *three* closely linked rumours, made us think very carefully that something might really be behind them all. Yet, despite the incredible nature of the information emerging, the media were *not* latching on to it. This seemed, and still seems, baffling. It is the kind of story any local newspaper would surely fight for. But aside from a local BBC interview which Brenda did in Autumn 1981 — which was not picked up nationally — and a London *Standard* reference to the case in May, there has not been any effort by the media to crack open this affair.

The London *Standard* piece emerged, in fact, from an interview with me, whilst I was promoting my then just-published book *UFO Study*. It was well done and factual, not exaggerating the story. It merely quoted from a half-page “progress report” I wrote at this point for FSR, *Military Contact Alleged at Air Base*: “At

Rendlesham Forest is a large area of wooded land about eight miles north east of Ipswich and close to the coast. It is surrounded by little more than a few farms. The only habitation of any note is the village of Woodbridge at the western edge. The USAF bases lie some three or four miles to the north of the forest. Earth mystery lovers will no doubt be interested to know that there are tumulii, and a number of “ley” place names in the region. Should anybody want to land, the woods could be ideal. There are spots open enough for this to occur, while the woods themselves would afford cover. And the very desolate surroundings would certainly reduce the number of potential witnesses to a minimum.

#### The discovery of substance behind the shadow

Clearly crucial to an understanding of what, if anything, really happened, is the local follow up by Brenda Butler and Dot Street. Brenda prepared a multi-page report on their work in March 1981. She circulated a few copies, and I received one. It is somewhat confusing in that it suffers from being a personal description with no real chronology. None of the half-dozen witnesses cited in it are named, or even given any status other than Witness 1, 2 or 3 etc. I have talked with both Brenda and Dot in an effort to clarify what the report implies and I think I have this clear. What follows is a summary, with additional data that Brenda ventured to me during a January 1982 discussion.

It now transpires that Brenda discovered the incident within days of its having taken place, a month before the other rumours surfaced. Her informant was a personal friend at the USAF base, an officer who has confided UFO information to her before. On this occasion she was told not to discuss the matter publicly. Afraid, both for his sake, and because she wanted to get more inside information from him in future, she complied with his request. She only began to follow up when *other* sources informed her of the incident, and later when the existence of the Begg and Oliver rumours became known

The primary witness (the officer) claims that this is not the first incident of this magnitude which has happened in the vicinity of the base, although this was the most impressive as it involved *contact*. His story, told initially and confirmed on follow-up in February 1981, is as follows:

On December 30, 1980, a farmer in the vicinity of the forest called the base to advise them that he had just seen an aircraft crash into the Forest. The base



police went out to check on the claim and came back saying: "there's a UFO in the woods!" (This would be at an unspecified time, but at night. Someone from the base newspaper heard of this, and went to the scene armed with still and movie cameras, and in fact is said to have *filmed* the object on the ground! The base commander, meanwhile, ordered a high-level team to visit the site, involving himself, the chief of security police, and several other high-ranking officers. The base commander expressly forbade any of the group to take weapons with them. At the site the object was on the ground apparently damaged on the outside. Entities (three of them, about 3 feet tall, and in silvery suits) were suspended in mid air beside the craft within shafts of light. They were repairing their damaged craft. The base commander confiscated all the cameras from the Base press sources, and demanded a total news blackout. He himself (alone) spoke with the aliens whilst they worked. The object was on the ground for *four hours* before climbing to hover briefly over treetops and then shoot away at great speed. Next day an A10 aircraft was sent over the forest looking for radiation traces. They found some. Meanwhile all personnel on the base were issued with strict instructions not to discuss the affair publicly. This informant spoke to Brenda only on strictly confidential terms and even then refused to answer two specific questions viz: the precise shape of the landed craft, and the subjects discussed in conversation with the aliens.

### Related anomalies?

At about this time, while Brenda was the only ufologist to know of this affair, a number of possibly related anomalies came to her notice which might well be of some interest. The first stemmed from a discussion she had with a man (not military) who is sometimes called into the base to do major electrical repairs. He, not knowing about the crash rumours, told the following tale, from supposedly the same time span, and *possibly* the same date:

The man was called to the base because the lights on the runway had all gone out . . . mysteriously. He was not told what had caused this . . . indeed the base refused to tell him! The weather was very cold and it was night. He was led to the runway to fix them, which he did, under an *armed guard* of six men. It was this he found most odd, because he has never been so treated on other visits to the base.

Brenda also discovered through her local information net — which does seem impressive — that forestry workers in Rendlesham had discovered a section of forest with the tops of trees scorched. They had reported this to the Air Base, and were told to keep it quiet although, presumably, they were not informed why.

On February 12, 1981, mystery bangs were alle-

gedly heard in the area of the forest. One forestry worker tried to find out what these were, and was advised they were due to unexploded bombs being exploded on Orford Island — off the coast a few miles away. Brenda checked with the police but they did *not* confirm this explanation. Indeed they had none to offer. Three bangs were apparently heard at intervals of 20 minutes. This informant was asked if he knew anything about an object crashing into the woods. He agreed he did, but had been informed it was an aircraft. Since there had been no mention of this in the press he found it hard to believe.

### An investigation is mounted

In view of the coalescing rumours that *something* had happened (a few other sources had advised her of an "aircrash") Brenda decided to act. She called Dot Street and gave her some information. They took the bull by the horns, called the base commander, and made an appointment to see him! This was at 4.00pm on February 18, seven weeks after the "crash". They asked the commander specific questions but he would not answer them. In return he queried them on their UFO knowledge. Ultimately they were told to contact the Ministry of Defence as all the Base UFO reports — certainly implying they had some — went to the Ministry. (It does seem to me that some unit in the USA must have been informed too.) Incidentally the MOD were contacted. They told Brenda that they ". . . did not know anything of such an incident" and advised her to contact the base commander!

According to the primary witness (the officer) this visit seems to have had some repercussions. The commander is said to have called a meeting of his officers in an effort to discover who had leaked the story. The "culprit" was not discovered, but one respected officer was allegedly shipped straight back to the USA. It is claimed that this was because suspicion fell on him that he was an "informant to ufologists." In view of these after-effects Brenda's decision not to disclose the names, or in some cases the nature of her information sources, was greatly strengthened.

From their meeting with the base commander, when they formed the distinct impression that he knew very well what they had been talking about, the two women went to the Forest. It was now growing dark, and they only knew the alleged landing area in a vague sense, but drove to where they thought it was. The forest is about three miles from the base, and they drove into it and along towards a clearing, close to the site. At this point Brenda goes on to describe a curious incident which may suffer from personalised interpretations and over imagination. Dot Street, however, confirms it did occur.

It seems the car suddenly began to vibrate. It accelerated, reaching 60/70 mph, and was quite out of control so far as Brenda, the driver, was concerned. Dot

was scared, and believing Brenda was doing it on purpose to frighten her, told her to stop. In the back seat was Brenda's eight-year-old Alsatian. It was whimpering and leaping about madly. After about half a mile the car suddenly stopped and the dog calmed down. The women were scared. (I was to discover by a curious synchronous coincidence — which is quite another story — that Brenda's dog has had a heart condition since birth and does suffer heart attacks periodically . . . these cause the dog to jump around until given medication. This may or may not be relevant, but should be mentioned as it is not in their report.)

While Brenda checked the car engine — finding nothing wrong with it — Dot saw a house on the edge of the woods, and went off to see if it was occupied. Brenda was none too keen on being left alone in the gathering gloom, and so tried to restart the car. It worked perfectly. She drove off after her colleague. At the house Dot was talking with two elderly gentlemen, and Brenda joined in the questioning.

These two men said there had been a great deal of military activity in the woods during the previous month or so. Their house lights had also flashed on and off at times and TV reception was poorer than normal. They knew nothing of a UFO or "crash".

They drove out of the forest the way they had come. They had had quite a debate as to whether they should risk this. They found an empty house, and met a man in a white car who thought ". . . we were doing a check of animals dying in the woods" which, apparently, is not as peculiar as it might sound, as most major woodlands have such periodic checks. On the way out the car began to vibrate, and the oil and ignition lights flashed on and off. It also skidded. Whilst the women clearly think this might be important, I am forced to wonder if an old car, on a rough track in winter, might not have a loose connection shaken about by the terrain? Not that I know much about cars!

### A flood of witnesses

By now, thoroughly intrigued, the investigators did all they could to seek out the truth. In doing so they found several other "nameless" persons who ventured what they knew. In the main this complied with previous stories, and the Begg and Oliver rumours. Some features differed from the allegedly first-hand story, given to Brenda soon after the event, and it must be realised that these witnesses are passing on what they heard rather than what they saw. Some of the "detail" may thus be seen as icing sprinkled on to the cake by constant retelling and imagination. Also bear in mind that some of these people did not request anonymity. Brenda is merely giving it to them in view of the MOD and security associations of the affair.

Aspects of these three separate tales, coming primarily from airmen at the base, and which agree with

the story so far, are these: Farmer made report; commander and high rank officers went out there; UFO had crashed, but was repaired; entities were seen; radiation and heat counts next day revealed traces, marks left on trees at site. Some aspects which differ, i.e. new elements in these three tales, are: As the UFO took off the ground beneath it glowed temporarily with intense heat; the UFO was on three legs separated by 30 feet each; the area was cordoned off for several days, and those enquiring were told that an aircraft had crashed, although no general news story to this effect was ever released; about two weeks after the incident the farmer who had first made the report told the base his cattle were playing up, and his lights and TV flashing. He was told merely that there had been an aircraft. But one of Brenda's contacts on the base insists ". . . there were no aircraft up that night."

It would seem from this that we must treat this latter batch of details, save the air-crash story which appears consistent, as rather more unsubstantiated, and possibly fantasy. There does, however, seem to be a core aspect to the story. Note that the "EM effects on the jeep" feature, which came via the officers who took the radar tape, is *not* confirmed in any of the stories from the base.

### A return to the woods

Brenda and Dot went back to Rendlesham Forest to check out the exact landing site, which had now been confirmed by one of the other base contacts. It was very close to where they had gone, by "accident", and where, allegedly, the car effects took place. The site was in a "restricted area" and it seems that it might be land owned by the base. They actually passed a sign which read: ENTRY ONLY BY PERMISSION OF THE BASE COMMANDER, BENTWATERS. However, they passed this to approach the Forestry Commission Office, and they discussed the case with two forestry officers who were there. They knew some details, but did not seem acquainted with *all* the features of the primary rumour. They added, from the subsidiary rumours, the bit about the farmer's cattle acting up, plus comment that the UFO was very brightly lit, and had been erratic on take-off. They were given permission to go to the site, but the area was under snow and they decided to put this off for a while. What they did do was to go in search of the farmer.

At the first smallholding, about half a mile from the forest, the farmer and his wife denied seeing anything, but said they had heard a UFO had come down on Woodbridge land. They also told them that two men had visited them, soon after the incident, looking for the farmer who had reported the event. The farmer's wife, incidentally, said there was only one man. The two forestry officials had previously told Brenda and Dot that one man had been asking them questions while searching for the farmer just two days after the



“crash” on New Year’s Day 1981. They had no idea who he was. The farmer and his wife said they told the man — it could have been men — they presumed it was an aircraft that had come down. The man never returned . . . and guess what? He was dressed in a black suit!

The investigators found the farmer. He refused to talk to them. As they drove off he “eyed the car closely.”

Through other sources, the ufologists followed up several reports of LITS seen in the Leiston area between December 27 and 30. One man in a pub told them he had seen a bright light one night during this period *over* Rendlesham Forest. He presumed it was an aircraft, but was slightly puzzled why it stayed in one spot for 20 minutes.

Ipswich and Woodbridge police were both contacted. Brenda says: “they definitely knew something,” but shunted her back and forth with “you’ll have to talk to the Base Commander . . . we can’t tell you anything.” They even tried to get the local newspaper interested. The Leiston office called the HQ in Ipswich with Brenda listening. They did not react as they normally do in such circumstances, telling the local reporter to check it out . . . they said: “Leave it!” Brenda and Dot believe that the press may have been prevented from following the case by application of pressure from official sources.

Brenda and Dot’s second visit to the Forest was on February 24, 1981. On March 9 they called the Forestry Commission again and spoke to one of the two officers they had met earlier. He was abrupt and denied all knowledge of the incident! Through a contact in the Forestry service the women tried to get to the site, but they were told that “for some strange reason” this was not possible. The area in question had suddenly been burnt to the ground for no obvious reason. This was on February 26 . . . two days after their visit to the Forestry Commission Offices.

Paul Begg told me in London in October 1981 that he had run up against a brick wall of denials when he tried to check things out. Nobody admitted to knowing anything. Similarly, Bob Easton, the BUFORA Co-ordinator for Brenda and Dot’s region, has met a barrage of denials and continual shuntings from person to person and office to office. He told me: “I think something genuinely *did* happen . . . but beyond that I can’t go.” At my request he and Andy Collins are hopefully going to visit the area to have another try.

### What is the explanation?

I now know just how Berlitz and Len Stringfield (compiler of the original USA crash stories for his FSR series) must have felt. I am sure that Brenda and Dot are telling the truth. And I respect their reasons for maintaining anonymity of witnesses. This is a sensitive issue and the move is a wise one. I hope, however, these people will be willing to talk with strictly vetted persons . . . and I think some of them will.

Did a UFO crash? An honest assessment of this case suggests, as incredible as it might seem, that there is at least a good possibility that the essence of the story is true. The whole thing does gell together rather well. So far as I can see there is little doubt that *something* very curious happened that night, which, for some reason, officialdom is hushing up. For it all to be rumour seems most improbable, as too many people claim to have seen things, and there is a considerable consistency. And if rumour, why not denounce it . . . and why obtain the civilian radar tapes? Not that rumours are well-known for turning up on radar screens!

A cover-story clearly emerged that the crashed object was a plane — perhaps thanks to the farmer’s thinking that was what it must have been? But why cover up a plane-crash in woodland? And how do you get this plane out of there afterwards? And why again take away the radar tapes? The “plane crash” story *would* be an effective way of deflecting interest. And there is a story from one source that the plane which crashed had some kind of nasty weapon inside — hence the radiation? But *could* such a crash be hidden — presumably to prevent panic or public outcries against “necessary” military deployments? I have grave doubts about the ethics of all this, if that really is the answer. Maybe the UFO story was seeded to hide the crash. But it seems to be the other way round. For it was the plane-crash rumour that was spread to farmers and foresters. The UFO rumour came only to restricted sources. Realistically a UFO crash does seem a better explanation.

Brenda Butler is fair in her assessment, with which I concur: “We must have an open mind. It may have been a UFO . . . or a secret experiment of some sort.” We are *not* giving up. Lord Clancarty is looking at the government angle for us. Lawyer Harry Harris is probing the legality of this apparent cover-up of *something*. Brenda and Dot are plugging away . . . “We intend to find out what *really* happened. If we do, we’ll let you know.