

SIGHTINGS AND STRANGE DOINGS IN OXFORDSHIRE

The Reverend Donald Thomas (Long Hanborough, Oxford)

A FORMER sergeant in a famous British regiment, "John" (not his real name) had served his time with the Forces in Northern Ireland, and the year 1978 found him living, with his wife and child, in a village in West-Oxfordshire. The village lies on the Witney-Faringdon road, and is consequently not far from the great British and American Air Force Base at Brize Norton.

Events in 1978

John first came to see me at the Long Hanborough Rectory in September 1978 to tell me about a recent experience.

Between 0015 and 0130 hrs. on the morning of August 16, 1978, he had been driving through Witney, when his eye caught an unusually bright light with a flash of red. He quickly pulled up at the side of the road and, as he fortunately had his camera with him, he aimed it skywards. Having a colour film loaded, he caught the large glowing area, blood-red at the centre and surrounded with orange turning to yellow, and took two photographs. But when in due course transparencies had been made and were thrown on to a screen, what raised the eyebrows was the little cluster of very small but intensely bright pin-points of light, and the pictures began to look even more interesting when they had been enlarged and the jerky streak of light joining up the pin-points came into clear view.

About a month later, in September 1978, John had a second sighting, this time on the narrow country road linking Freeland with Barnard Gate, an area some four miles to the east of Witney. (See *Ordnance Survey Map, One Inch, No. 145.*)

The third — and most unexpected — sighting occurred at about 11.30 p.m. on Saturday, September 23, 1978. John was driving along the A338 road towards Wantage. When he was on the Lambourne Downs, some 2½ miles south of this town, at about 700-720 ft. above sea-level, in the vicinity of Angel-down Farm, he declares that he clearly saw an enormous craft not very far from the ground. "It took up three-quarters of the width of my four-foot wide windscreen," he said.

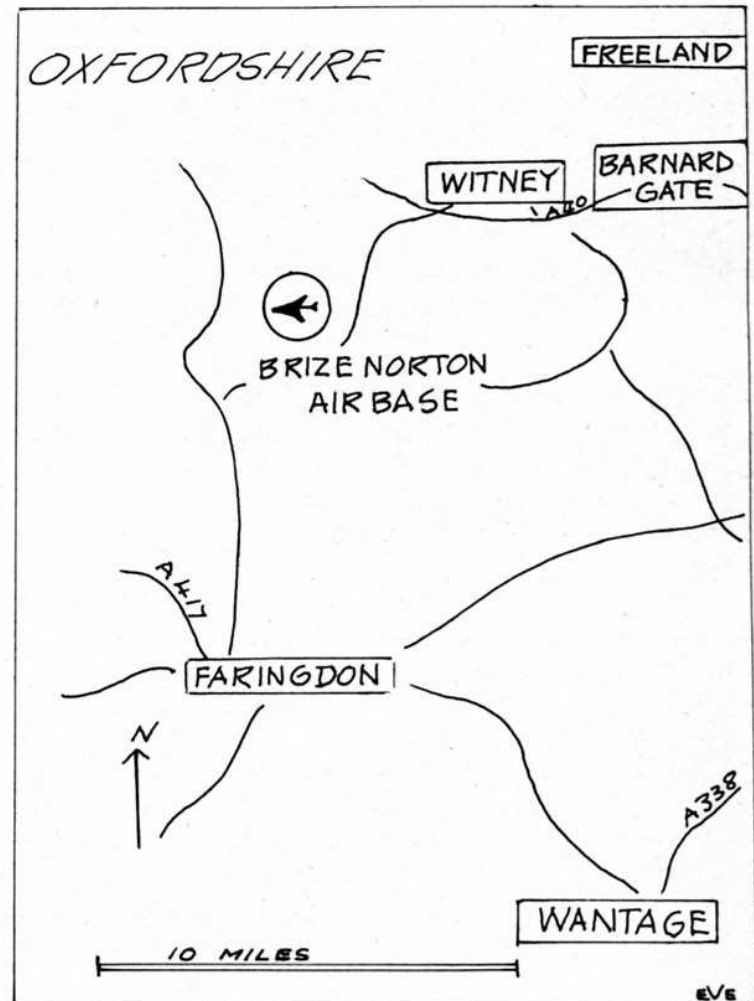
He said the craft crossed the A338 road on a course that appeared to be from S.E. to N.W. It produced a noise louder than that of the average car engine, and he described the sound as "like a mixture of an oscillating radio and the shsh of a car-washer". Moving much

more slowly than an aircraft, the machine was illuminated not only by the Moon but also by its own lights. These were very bright "laser-type" lights, all white, coming from three or four separate rows of portholes. Some of these portholes were larger than the others. John unfortunately had no camera with him on this occasion, and, equally unfortunately, no companion to corroborate his amazing story.

He described the colour of the craft as brownish-bronze.

I asked John what effect this experience had had upon him, and he commented that he had not been at all tired at the end of that day — "not as I should normally have been". He said that he also discovered next day that he was adding up figures (Pounds and Pence) a great deal more quickly and more easily than before.

He said his vehicle appeared to have been largely unaffected as regards either engine or headlights, but he found that the interior car-light seemed to have ceased to work properly. The clutch also appeared to



have been affected, as it now juddered, as it had never done before, as the car climbed at 700 ft. a second.

The sequel to these events of September 1978 only came to light three years or so later. In the meantime John had been in and out of hospital, and proved extremely difficult to track down. Although one dialled the correct digits, his telephone number had now become "unobtainable".

As he has now explained to me, what happened after the September 1978 sighting was as follows:

The mystery black car

In the latter part of that month, September, or possibly in early October, he had returned home one night to find an extremely odd and altogether quite unidentifiable car parked some 200 yards from his house. It was black. The number-plates looked as if they bore some enigmatic, "Arabic-looking" script. The driver, dressed in black, stared at him blankly as he passed by.

Some six months later, this strange experience was repeated. John had been somewhat frightened on the first occasion, but on this second occasion he was a good deal more disturbed.

During 1979 John spent a long time in the Oxford Orthopaedic Hospital.

Then, in January 1980, having taken the A40 road and finally driven along the Witney by-pass, he had only just turned off the main road when he perceived through his driving-mirror that he was being followed. The vehicle behind him was the same unidentifiable black car. It followed, at a steady distance behind him, for some 2½-3 miles, and then quite suddenly vanished.

On this third occasion, John was a thoroughly frightened man — so much so that his alarm communicated itself to his wife, who became unnerved too.

John's wife had recently given birth to a child — their second, and after a while it looked as though the unnerving events were all over and the memory of them was beginning to fade into the past.

Widespread disturbance of equipment

What precisely triggered off the next stage in the story I do not know, and I have been quite unable to ascertain. Something, of some importance, must have started it all off again. *This time John's car, television, telephone, all seem to have been affected.*

The telephone was important in connection with John's work. It would now often ring late at night, and when John answered it, there was always nothing but

silence. He would replace the receiver and turn over and go back to sleep, and again it would ring. And so on, all through the night, night after night.

John got the telephone company to give him a new ex-directory number. In the meantime, the strain had obliged him to give up his business.

Between September 1980 and March 1981 a series of totally inexplicable occurrences centred on John's car, a Ford *Cortina*. One day it would start perfectly. Two or three days later it was necessary to tow the car for half a mile to get it going. Then, again, it would seem quite normal, and would respond instantly to the self-starter. New plugs, new points, a new coil, and, finally, a new battery, were successively fitted by John in his efforts to correct the fault. Yet all in vain, for still the vehicle refused to respond on three days or so in a week, behaving perfectly on the other days.

This sort of narrative seems so utterly impossible. One would prefer to assume that it had all been made up. But do frightened people concoct impossible stories of this sort? (Particularly as, in this case, at least one member of John's family would prefer to withhold it all from the investigator, so "unreal" and so "impossible" and so "out-of-this-world" does it all seem!)

However, as C. S. Lewis reminded us, the Devil is only too happy when folk believe that he does not exist!

A note on the Witney case by Editor, FSR

Early in 1981 I secured the negatives of the Witney photographs, through the good offices of the Rev. Donald Thomas, and passed them for evaluation to FSR's photographic expert, Mr Percy Hennell. Mr Hennell's report of his findings is given below.

It will be noted that Mr Hennell invites comparison of these pictures with those taken by Mr Robert Burke at St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex, at about 6.00 a.m. on November 24, 1967.

The full illustrated account of that case, by FSR's Aeronautical Consultant the late Charles H. Gibbs-Smith and Mr Percy Hennell, was featured in FSR Vol. 14, No. 2 (March/April 1968). G.C.

Mr Percy Hennell's report on the Witney photographs

"To begin with, I have enlarged the two significant frames (i.e. the portion of the pictures with which we are concerned) about 175 times. As, according to the numbering on the film, they *are* successive in the order I had anticipated, I have marked them "A" and "B". The wavy line indicates the passage of the object. The brighter parts of the line would seem to show a slackening of speed, and the large white blobs would seem to show where the object actually stopped. (*The*

foregoing is based on the assumption that there was only one object.)

On the other hand, if there were four of them, my interpretation of the movement tracks is still valid because they must have been moving at an incredible speed and emitting an intense light, to record all that activity in an exposure of 1/100th of a second.

Frame "B" indicates camera shake, which at this enlargement would be liable to occur at 1/100th second exposure. The object or objects are reforming and moving away. It is my opinion that, having regard to the minute size of the originals, there is no question of any manipulation of the originals.

The photos show great similarity to the celebrated St. Leonards sighting of a few years ago."

Signed: PERCY HENNELL, F.I.B.P.

April 4, 1981

Technical details of the photographs

Exposure: 1/100th second.

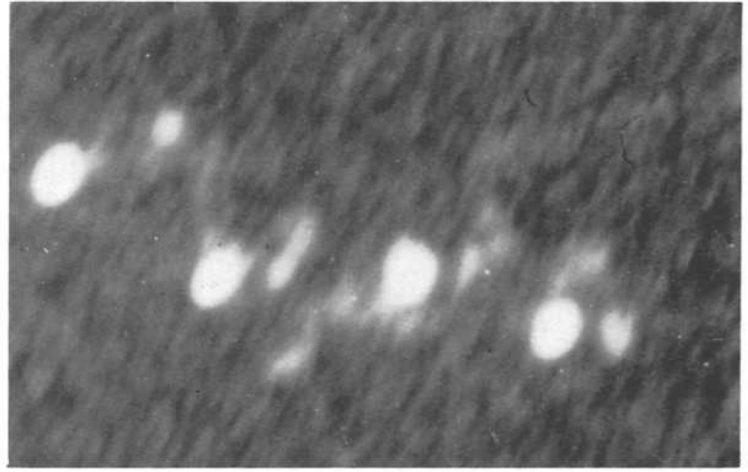
Aperture: F4

Conditions: Moonlight and light cloud.

Time: 0015 hrs. or later, August 16, 1978.

Postscript to the Witney Story

It is important that attention be drawn to the fact

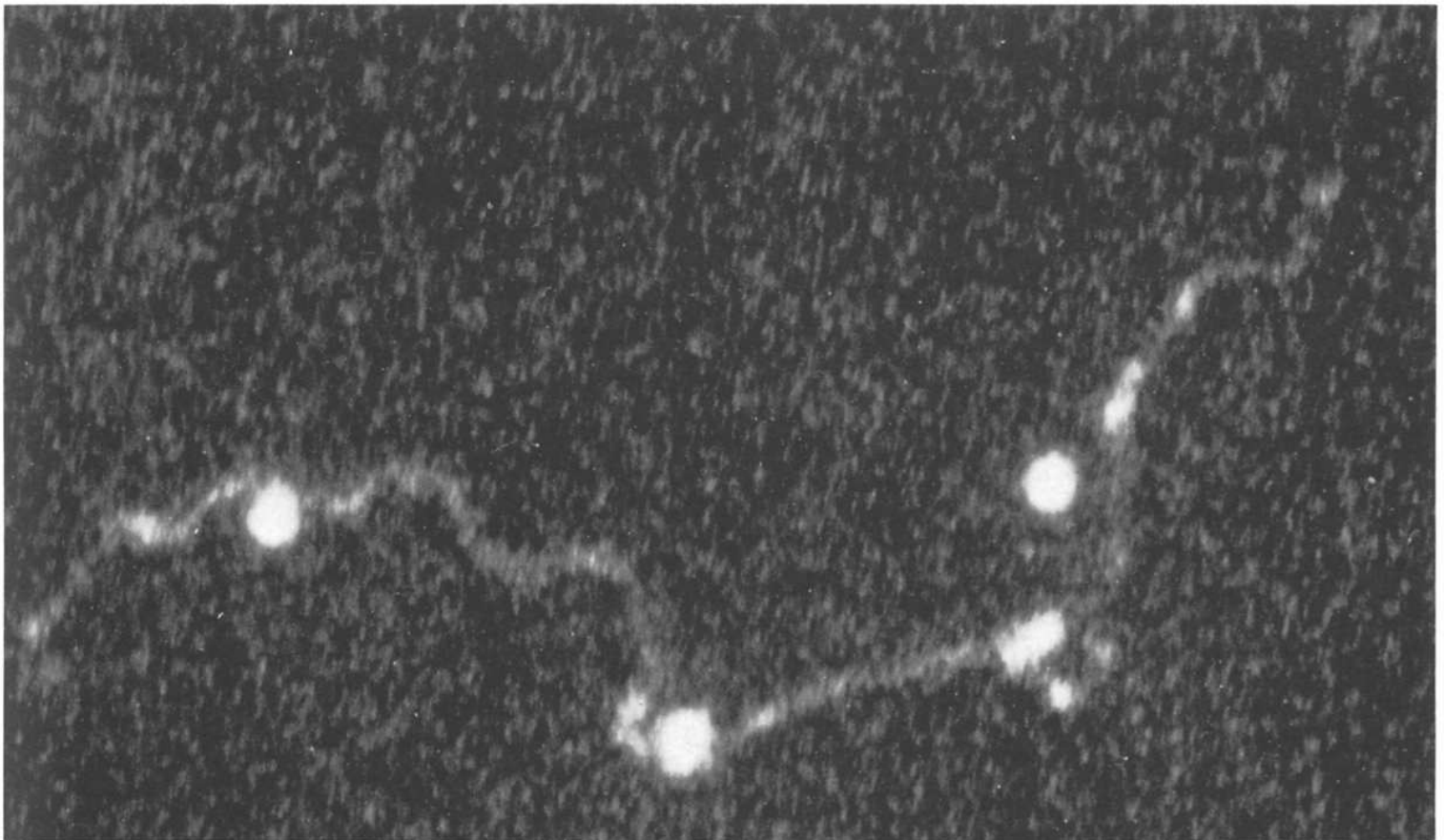


Witney photograph "B" enlarged $\times 175$.

that in 1980 a book was published in Britain in which it was claimed that a whole family of five individuals had been taken aboard a UFO by alien beings and given the usual medical examinations, and that their experiences had been recovered under hypnosis.

This book is *The Janos People*, by Frank Johnson (pub. Neville Spearman).

The important points to note are (1) that it is claimed that the abduction as described in this book took place late on the evening of Monday, June 19, 1978 — in other words just about two months before "John's" photographs were taken, and (2) that the location was allegedly on route 417, about a mile from Faringdon.



Witney photograph "A" enlarged $\times 175$.

And Faringdon lies just ten miles south of Witney, where "John" says he had his first sighting and took his photos.

I know nothing about the "Janos" story, nor about its author, so that I should be in no position to express any sort of opinion regarding the truthfulness of his book. I wish merely to point out the extraordinary closeness of these two alleged "UFO events" in respect of both time and place. And it must be borne in mind that, when the Janos story was published in 1980, "John's" experiences were known only to a tiny handful of people.

I certainly do not believe a word of the tale that the "Janos People" are supposed to have told the abducted family regarding dire events that had caused them to quit their home-planet (distant "several thousand light-years from us").

Nevertheless, to be honest, I would suggest that the book merits the most careful study, for I confess that I find a very great deal in the abductees' stories that seems to have the ring of truth. If the book is a fabrication it is a very clever one. G.C.

A RECENT UFO "FLAP" IN TURKEY

Halûk Egemen Sarikaya

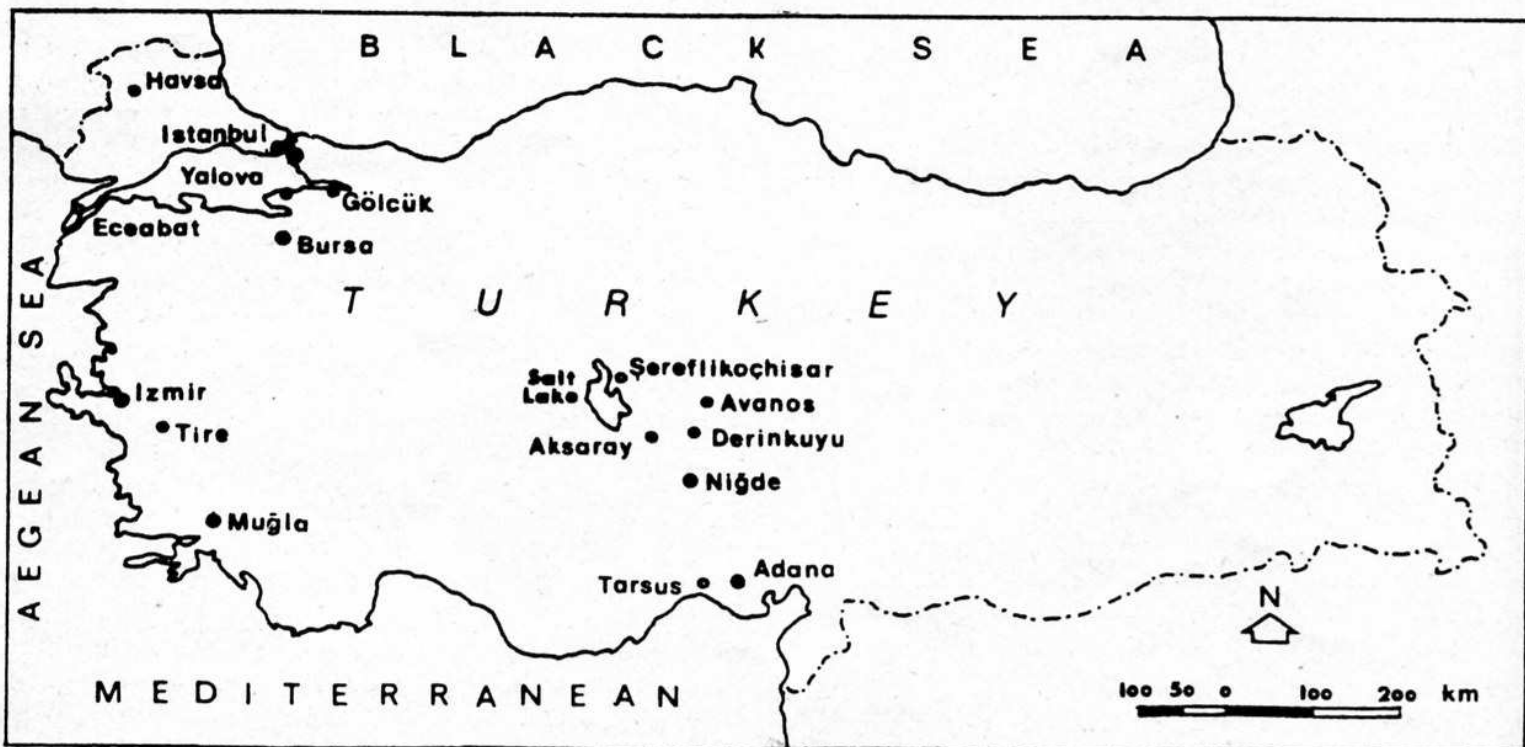
Director, Bilim Arastirma Merkezi (Science Research Centre), P.K. 1072, Istanbul.

THERE exist more than one hundred well-documented Turkish reports of Ufological phenomena over the last hundred years. However, the most intensive phase of such activity, and also the best observed one, concerns a recent two-month period, covering December 1981 and January 1982, of which I give a detailed account below.

Since mid-December 1981 UFO sightings have been repeatedly reported from central, western and north-western Turkey, witnessed by thousands of people. This UFO flap of December 1981-January 1982 over Turkey has been especially focussed on Aksaray, a town situated in the province of Niğde, central Anatolia. Below is a brief compilation of the reports of sightings, most of which appeared in the papers and some of which were sent directly to our Science Research Centre by various witnesses:

It all began on December 15, 1981, when Mr. M. Ali Özel of Aksaray, sometime after sunset, saw an extremely bright light hovering at a distance of 200-300 metres over his car. The luminous object emitted orange beams, made certain manoeuvres, and then disappeared in a south-westerly direction.

On December 21, another UFO was sighted above the building site of the Aksaray Engine Factory, and it was observed by the townspeople and by Captain O. Çelen, the foremost military authority in the town. According to Mr. Dağ, a grocer, at around 07.30 p.m. "a huge glittering silent object was seen giving off greenish light above the building site. When Capt. Çelen rushed to the site it was still hovering over there." After a while it shot away in the same direction as before. Its altitude was estimated to be around



The Turkish Wave: December 1981 and January 1982.