



Mystery of the Deadly Russian Ball Lightning

by Paul Stonehill

We know very little about the nature of ball lightning. We do not know if it is made of plasma; whether its origin is terrestrial; whether it is associated with high voltage power lines; whether it is anti-matter, an electrical discharge, a self-closed longitudinal electromagnetic wave, a nuclear reaction... There is no explanation. We do know about the devastating effects it has had on those who have been attacked by it.

The Soviet Chronicles

Very few people in the West know of a deadly incident that took place in the Soviet Union in August 1978. A group of Soviet mountain climbers had climbed to the

altitude of 12,000 feet in the Caucasus Mountains. During the dead of night on August 17, a brightly luminescent object entered their tent as they were sleeping. Viktor Kavunenko, one of the climbers, later recalled that he awoke because he felt a presence in the tent. He looked up to see a bright yellow ball.

The object then entered Oleg Korovin's sleeping bag, causing Korovin to scream in sharp pain. The ball sprung out and continued its flight over the sleeping bags, entering one after another. When it reached Kavunenko's sleeping bag, the climber felt intolerable pain, as if touched by a welding gun. He fainted.

When Kavunenko regained his senses, the strange ball was still inside the tent, at-

tacking the mountain climbers. It was definitely following a trajectory of some kind. The men screamed from excruciating pain, but to no avail.

When the deadly mysterious object finally vanished, Oleg Korovin was dead. The others suffered various injuries. A helicopter brought them to a hospital; the doctors there concluded that the climbers' wounds were of a more serious nature than regular burns. The doctors had never seen anything similar. The results of their medical examination were mind-boggling.

The ball lightning was explained away as a natural phenomenon caused by anomalies of the atmosphere, and as such, devoid of any intellect. Yet its actions and seemingly aggressive conduct might have indicated something to the contrary. What did the doctors think of the chemical processes involved in the incident?

The muscular tissue of the Soviet mountain climbers was burned to the bones. Could this indicate a connection to spontaneous human combustion?

The ball lightning did not touch a single metal object, injuring only people. Oleg Korovin's sleeping bag was placed on a rubber mattress, insulating it from the ground.

The Caucasus incident was reported in the *Soviet Weekly* on February 11, 1984, and in several other Russian publications after 1991.

Usually ball lightning appears as a glowing, hovering ball of light that moves slowly near the ground before disappearing or exploding. Ball lightning is known to travel long distances. Metal in the high-

energy balls will react with any water-containing substance, including flesh. When human beings touch ball lightning they can be severely burned or killed. Ball lightning carries extremely high levels of energy...but what kind of energy? What is its power supply?

There have been around 10,000 sightings of the mysterious phenomenon over the past few decades in the Soviet Union, and later Russia. One of the most interesting sightings was of an 80-centimeter glowing blob that bounced on a Russian teacher's head more than 20 times before vanishing.

In January 1984, the Soviet TASS news agency reported a case in which ball lightning entered a Soviet airline flying out of the Black Sea city of Sochi. At an altitude of 3,600 feet, a fireball about four inches in diameter appeared on the fuselage in front of the crew's cockpit. It disappeared with a raucous noise, but reemerged several seconds later in the passenger's lounge, after passing in an eerie way through the airtight metal wall. The fireball slowly flew about the heads of the amazed passengers. In the tail section of the airliner it divided into two glowing crescents, which then joined together again and left the plane almost noiselessly.

Upon landing back at Sochi, holes were discovered in the fuselage of the Ilyushin-18 aircraft, fore and aft.

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a loose, porous aggregate of particles. In his theory, the heat and light come mainly from electric effects, but not oxidation. Lightning can transform many organic materials in the environment (not just metal residues from the soil) into airborne polymer threads. Once that happens, the threads can twist up into an elastic ball. Such a ball can hold electric charges in place and permit huge buildups of energy on the ball's surface, but the materials in the "twist" must be electrical insulators. The energy is stored in well separated patches (a mosaic, really) of positive and negative charges.

The newly formed ball can yield heat and light when high voltages begin breaking down gases near the surface. This process could create the orange or blue coronas that some observers have sighted.

According to an article in the June 21, 2001, issue of the Russian newspaper *Pravda*, there are many legends in Russia connected with ball lightning. The phenomenon is supposed to appear near electricity transmission lines and follows every moving object. It is believed, therefore, that one should stop moving at once when it appears. Some tales describe ball lightning

drifting through windows into apartments where fires then appear. Sometimes it even penetrates houses without breaking windowpanes.

Ball lightning still remains baffling to scientists all over the world. A fascinating report shows that people in the 17th century were baffled, too.

Robozero: The Ball of Fire

The Robozero sighting is the most famous UFO case in the history of ancient Russia. Yuri Roszius and other Russian researchers of paranormal phenomena have studied it extensively. The details of this amazing and enigmatic event were found within a collection of historical records published in 1842, among which was a 17th-century document signed by Ivan Rzhovsky, a laborer, in which he bore witness to a remarkable event.

According to Rzhovsky's testimony, on August 15, 1663, between 10:00 a.m. and noon, a great noise resounded over Robozero Lake (located in the Vologda Region, about 80 miles southwest of Belozersk). From the north, out of a clear sky, appeared a huge, flaming sphere at least 130 feet in diameter. Two beams of flame projected about 20 *sazhens* (140 feet) from the front of the object. From its sides poured bluish smoke. This huge ball of fire, comparable to a modern 15-story building, hovered over the lake. The phenomenon was observed by a multitude of people who had gathered for Mass at the parish church on the lake shore.

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The noise occurred just as the thanksgiving singing had begun. Terrified by this noise, the people emerged from the church, but upon seeing the "frightful sight" they returned and "prayed to the Lord and the Virgin Mary with tears and weeping." Shortly afterwards "the great flame and the two smaller ones vanished," but it reappeared on two or three more occasions, moving in a westward direction (seemingly becoming brighter each time) before finally dimming and disappearing from view a full hour and a half later.

Peasants were sailing in a boat on the lake at the time, but the scorching heat forced them to the bank. They saw that light from the unknown object had penetrated the water and reached the bottom of the lake "about four *sazhens* down" (28 feet). They saw "fish fleeing from the flame toward the shore."

Another eyewitness, a peasant by the name of Levko Fedorov, corroborated Rzhovsky's story, and he also received written confirmation from the local priests that "such a token was observed on that date." Only then did Rzhovsky report the occurrence to his superiors. Despite providing a detailed description of the phenomenon, Rzhovsky does not offer any subjective interpretation of it.

Others have tried to interpret the Robozero phenomenon. Russian astronomer D. Svyatski, in his book *Astronomical Phenomena in Russian Chronicles*, claims that the eyewitnesses saw pieces of a meteorite that flew apart after an explosion, but

this does not account for the sighting of the people in the boat approaching a hovering body. Others have tried to explain it as ball lightning, but there was no storm or rain that day. The lifespan of lightning is short, and its diameter is no more than three feet; certainly not 130 feet.

Yuri Roszius analyzed Rzhovsky's report and came up with a fresh interpretation of the sighting. His detailed analysis included the study of one interesting episode related by eyewitnesses. The document notes a change in the outer appearance of the object: an increase in its brightness when it came into view for the third time. For some reason this change preceded the start of the object's progressive movement westward. In modern times, such an increase in brightness could be attributed to the firing-up of cruise engines (an increase in its thrust). Is it by chance that the object's brightness increased before its departure?

Mankind did not possess such advanced technology then, but it is possible that the population of Robozero was being observed by an alien civilization. To this day, no known scientific theory has explained the phenomenon.

Paul Stonehill is a California-based writer, researcher, and TV consultant. He is the author of The Soviet UFO Files (1998).

