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Puerto Rico in the Sixties, by SCOTT CORRALES

According to Sebastián Robiou's *Manifiesto OVNI* (San Juan: Ed. Punto y Coma, 1979) the first reported landing of a UFO occurred in 1963 in western Puerto Rico when an anonymous agricultural engineer from the city of Aguada saw an intense bright light near the surface at eight o'clock in the evening on an unspecified date. The engineer thought that a car had driven off the road and landed upside down, with its headlights pointing upward. Upon getting closer, he realized that it wasn't a car, but instead "a small object on the ground, about the size of a small vehicle." Coming within one hundred feet of the strange object, he noticed that it was surmounted by a gyrating red light and a gridded lower section, through which the white light he had originally seen, poured through. After a while, the object lifted itself into the air, remaining motionless dozens of feet off the ground, and then took off horizontally in a

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northwesterly course, toward the Mona Passage. This would mark the beginning of saucer activity in the new decade, although it would not be a particularly fruitful period for sightings.

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March 14, 1964 would bring with it the high-altitude transit of a strange object over several Puerto Rican communities at around five thirty p.m. The object was described in an article for the *El Mundo* newspaper as being rocket-shaped and at an estimated altitude of twenty thousand feet, although neither Roosevelt Roads Navy Base or the Ramey AFB at Punta Borinquen had any explanation for it, and it was ultimately dismissed as "space junk".

A nineteen year old resident of San Juan's El Condado neighborhood, returning from an early morning mass on December 23, 1966, supposedly took a photo of a "dark blue, opaque object that remained motionless at an elevation of two thousand feet." Lester Rosas, who took the snapshot --which would subsequently appear in various UFO publications - would go on to allege that he had maintained telepathic contact with the vehicle's occupants and had even met some of the same "Venusians" who had interacted with George Adamski a decade earlier.

Less contactee-flavored reports would emerge later in the last third of the decade. On January 19, 1967, residents of Mayaguez, Aguada and Hormigueros in the island's western half reported sightings of "luminous bodies crossing the sky and vanishing as though falling into the ocean". One witness told *El Imparcial* newspaper that "one of those strange devices almost touched the surface of the sea west of Mayaguez and lit up the Industrial School," adding that on some occasions, three such objects had merged to form a single one. With regard to the same case, *El Mundo* reported that at 5:00 a.m that morning, dozens of citizens reported the passing of a strange luminous object flying slowly and in silence. Juan Ruste, one of the witnesses interviewed, said that the vehicle "looked like a square object with some yellow, low-intensity lights." After Ruste and his family observed the apparition for some three minutes, the object fired an intense, white beam and accelerated into the distance.

A similar sighting occurred in February 1967, when students on the rooftop of one of the male dorms at the Interamerican University in San Germán reported seeing an unusual object that made a quick upward turn before losing itself in the firmament. According to Ruben Roig, one of the witnesses, the object had issued a deep, engine-like sound that caused the students to gaze skyward. They all agreed that the object had some sort of "glass capsule" on top of it.

1967 would also bring the first of many incidents - some of them tragic - involving small private planes and unidentified flying objects.

Before noon on April 6, 1967, two Cessna 150 training flights were approximately one mile north of the Tortuguero Lagoon on the northern coast of the island at an altitude of three thousand feet. It was a sunny, clear day with excellent visibility. One of the Cessnas flew directly above and ahead of the other; each of them carried an instructor and a student, maintaining sporadic contact between both planes. At one point, the flight instructor aboard one of the Cessnas radioed his counterpart, saying, "a strange object was tailing him." The pilot of the second plane, the one flying under the first, made a 180 degree turn to take a look, just as the UFO flew past before the pilot had

completed his turn maneuver. The intruder was flying some fifteen hundred feet under both planes and at high speed, making a northward 90-degree turn without slowing down. The event had played out at such speed that the pilot of the second trainer - the one that had turned around to see the unknown object - never got a chance to see it. The description came from the pilot of the first aircraft and his student. 3

The Tortuguero UFO would later be described as being "flat metallic gray or dull white in color and measuring an estimated sixty feet long, three times the size of the Cessna 150." It lacked any visible features and was noiseless. The one unexplained event in this incident was that the chronometer aboard the Cessna that had made a turn to get a better look suffered "irreparable damage" for no apparent reason.

On August 18, 1968, fifteen witnesses reported seeing a disk-shaped UFO with partitions or "windows" that emitted a bright, fluorescent light. The sighting took place at 02:00 hours at Playa Borinquen, outside Ramey AFB, and the witnesses happened to be not locals, but members of the base's security personnel. The object was about fifteen hundred feet over the sea, lighting the entire area. At one point during the observation, the object expelled a small luminous orb that remained beside the disk-shaped craft and wobbled before taking off at astonishing speed. Moments later, the windowed disk would do the same, leaving the onlookers bewildered. The entire sighting lasted between twelve and fifteen minutes.

The year came to an end with the sighting of a humanoid entity on the ground standing next to its hat-shaped vehicle: on December 31, 1968, an uncle and nephew were making their way toward San Juan from the town of Isabella to meet the rest of their relatives at a New Years' Eve celebration. At 19:30 hours, driving near Vega Baja, their car's headlights fell on white object they first believed was a damaged car. While the nephew, who was at the wheel, tried to identify the unusual object, he noticed that something was standing beside the object - a humanoid creature standing some five feet tall and whose mouth resembled that of "an elderly toothless person". Frightened, the driver stepped on the accelerator and sped away, just as his uncle was beginning to notice the object on the ground. Looking back as they sped away, the uncle reported that the white object lit up with a greenish-blue light that shifted to a reddish hue as it began to rise into the air.