

A RUSSIAN "JELLYFISH"

Gordon Creighton

TWENTY YEARS AGO, when the Russians were stealing a march on the world with their first *sputnik* (and fondly imagining that they were going to be the undisputed masters of the world in Space Research — a dream that failed to materialize because they still do not have the requisite technological edge on the USA) the Soviet press used to carry a vast amount of speculative and educational articles on such issues as interplanetary travel, life in the Cosmos, and so on. Even something that looked suspiciously like a UFO sighting occasionally managed to sneak into their press, though naturally always with the correct "explanation," and we were sometimes able to publish such items in *Flying Saucer Review*. Such outrageous subjects as "landings" or "humanoid occupants" were of course thoroughly taboo in Russia, and I recall one interesting occasion when the Soviet press lashed itself into a considerable lather to prove that "...little men from a landed flying saucer had *not* been seen rushing about in Kazakhstan and asking people for sweets" (from which I instantly concluded that there *had* to be some truth in any report that required such vigorous denial).

In more recent years, since the USSR Academy of Sciences came out strongly in support of Condon with lengthy articles in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* demonstrating conclusively that all the chatter about UFOs was nothing but un-Marxist twaddle and unscientific nonsense, the subject over there seems to have been reduced to a pretty low profile, if one can use the current jargon. Throughout the period since then, *Flying Saucer Review* has continued to have its readers in the USSR, and we have continued to have our own "pipeline" to the group of dedicated UFO researchers in that country. And now, suddenly, there are again some indications of a change. It looks, for example, as though there is a considerable traffic there in clandestine *samizdat* material (unofficial typewritten or multigraphed writings, passing "underground" from hand to hand) not only on matters relating to the basic and vital questions of freedom and human rights, but also, believe it or not, about UFOs!

And now, once more, we have received what looks like a UFO report from the Soviet press, and I take this opportunity to express our very special thanks to that Soviet reader of *Flying Saucer Review*, and his colleagues, who were good enough to send me a copy of the Moscow newspaper *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* ("Socialist Industry") for September 23, 1977. (There was even a brief item about the report in the London *Daily Telegraph*,¹ and an abbreviated AP version of it in *El Nuevo Dia* of Puerto Rico, also on September 23 — our thanks to Sr. Sebastian Robiou Lamarche of Puerto Rico — and no doubt in other newspapers.)

One is naturally tempted to speculate as to why such a thing as a UFO report should ever need to get into a Soviet paper at all, for the controls are highly efficient. Maybe the clue in the present case lies in the fact that, as the report itself makes clear, the phenomenon had been observed by a great many members of the public. One can understand that, in such cases, it may sometimes be felt wiser to publish than to reach for the blue pencil.

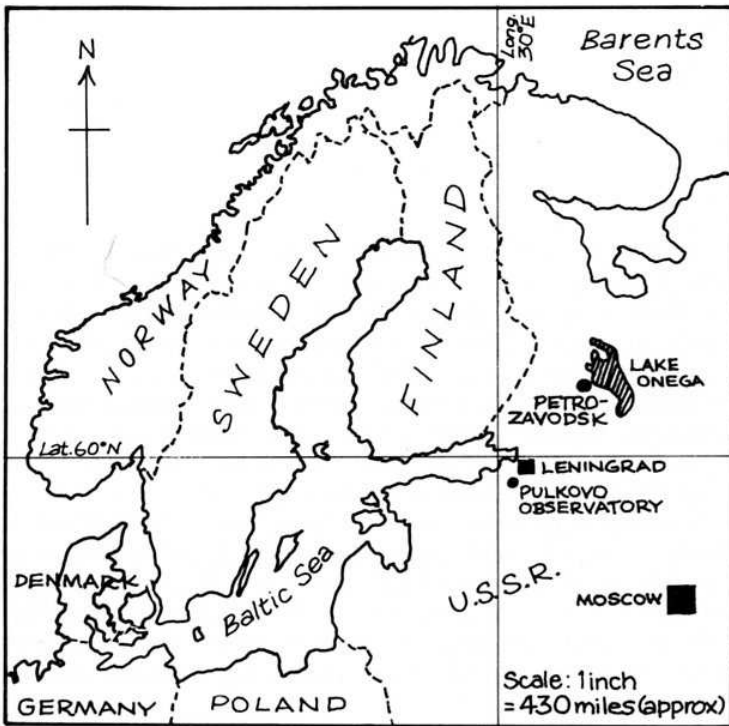
Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya is, as its title makes clear, a specialized journal devoted to industrial matters, and an organ of the TSK KPSS (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR). Unfortunately we do not know whether any account of the sighting got into the really big Russian mass-readership papers like *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. (Since however we have received no other clippings, I think we can take it as certain that there were none.)*

The most important point to be noted is that the Russian witnesses are quoted as having described "... a huge, shining, *Medusa*-like something" that hovered overhead and poured down a rain of fine beams of light. The word *meduza* in Russian is the ordinary term for a *jellyfish*² (cf. French *meduse* and Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, *medusa*) the name deriving of course from the original Greek *medousa*.³

The good folk of the remote north Russian town of Petrozavodsk are not — so far as I am aware — UFO buffs or avid readers of *FSR* or *LDLN*, and they are therefore hardly likely to know that the literature of "our subject" already contains precisely such accounts, in which the same simile, *medusa*, or *jellyfish*, is employed. I have not the time now to search for these cases, but *FSR* readers will no doubt remember some of them. There was one particularly good case not long ago in France, in which there was a vivid description of the long streamers of light pouring down from the "jellyfish" like the snaky locks of the Gorgon. There was also the case of the *Leibnitz Spider* in Austria in March 1960; the photograph of it which appeared in *FSR* (Vol.6, No.4, July/August 1960, p.16) was also not unlike a "medusa."

Here now is my translation from the issue of *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya*, published in Moscow on September 23, 1977. The article was headlined: **An Unknown Natural Phenomenon**. It was signed by TASS News Agency representative N. Milov of Petrozavodsk:

"Inhabitants of Petrozavodsk have witnessed an unusual phenomenon of nature. At about 4.00 o'clock on the morning of September 20, an enormous 'star' flashed into view on the dark horizon, emitting pulsed⁴ clusters of beams of light.



This 'star' moved slowly towards Petrozavodsk and, coming to a halt overhead, it bathed the whole town in a mass of extremely fine beams that gave the impression of a torrential rain of light pouring down.

"After a while, this illuminatory effect ceased. The 'jellyfish' then changed into a bright semicircle and began to move off again in the direction of Lake Onega, over which area the horizon now became shrouded in grey clouds. In this shroud there appeared, as it were, a semicircular hole of light, bright red in the centre and white on the edges. According to the testimony of the eyewitnesses, the phenomenon lasted for some ten to twelve minutes.

"The Director of the Petrozavodsk Hydrometeorological Observatory, Yu. Gromov, told your correspondent that the personnel of the meteorological service stations in Karelia had never before seen anything similar to this. As to what had given rise to the phenomenon, that remained an enigma, he said, for no abrupt atmospheric changes had been recorded by the meteorological stations during the preceding twenty-four hours or, indeed, even in the course of the day before that. Mr. Gromov furthermore laid emphasis upon the fact that it is known that no technical experiments of any kind

had been taking place in the region during the period in question. But, he said, to attribute it all simply to a mirage was also not feasible, inasmuch as this unwonted phenomenon had been observed by a great many eyewitnesses, whose testimonies were in many cases identical, and, although the observation of an unwonted phenomenon did not, he said, in itself constitute material proof of anything, nevertheless these reports had come in to him from various places throughout the town."

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"Note from the Editorial Board of *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya*:

"The TASS News Agency's representative in Leningrad has contacted V. Krata, Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and Director of the Academy's principal astronomical observatory, and asked him for his views regarding this affair.

"The astronomer's reply is as follows:

" 'A bright fiery ball travelling rapidly through the sky from south to north across the Leningrad Oblast' and Karelia in the early morning hours of September 20 was also seen by astronomers at the Pulkovo Observatory. It is not yet possible to explain with complete certainty the precise origin of the phenomenon, as the reports from observers and eyewitnesses are still coming in to us and are being analyzed.' "

[After this article was typeset we were delighted to receive a cutting from Pravda from a reader in Kharkov—EDITOR]

References and comments

1. See the "World Round-up" column in FSR Vol.23, No.3.
2. Most folk probably know what a jellyfish looks like. It has received the name *medusa* in several languages, including Russian, because its streaming tentacles on the underside recall the writhing snakes on the head of the most famous of the three Gorgons. The ordinary, or common jellyfish (*Aurelia flavidula*), has not quite such long filaments and tentacles. There is another species, *Dactylometra quinquecirrha*, the body of which is round, just like the ordinary jellyfish (and also like many UFOs) and, as its Latin name indicates, it has even longer streaming tendrils. A third species, *Physalia Arethusa*, is the famous "Portuguese man-of-war," and its streaming filaments are the longest of all. These last-named two species would seem to resemble very much what eyewitnesses have attempted to describe after seeing the type of UFO that is reported to pour down streams or lines of golden light.
3. In Greek mythology there were three horrific monsters known as *Gorgons*. Hesiod names them as Euryale, Stheino, and Medusa, the last-named being the most awful to behold. Her locks of hair consisted of writhing snakes, and all who contemplated her were turned to stone. Perseus, son of Zeus and Danae, is famous for his rescue of Andromeda from the barren rock to which she was chained, and also for his act of public service in cutting off the head of the Medusa.
4. This reference to *pulsed* beams of light must also be carefully noted. Talk of "pulsed bursts of light" crops up frequently in our Ufological literature. Where would the good Party-members of Petrozavodsk have heard of such heretical ideas?

YOUR CLIPPINGS of newspaper items are very welcome. We apologise here for being generally unable to acknowledge these items as the pressure of work on our tiny staff and on our postage resources is too great. However, please do not be deterred by this seeming lack of courtesy. We really do appreciate anything you care to send.