

1965

## V

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### VALENSOLE CE2/CE3

On several occasions during the last week of June 1965, Maurice Masse, who farmed just north of Valensole, a small town in France's Basses Alps, discovered that someone was picking shoots from some of the lavender plants in a field he worked each morning. The damage was minor but nonetheless annoying. Masse hoped to catch whoever was responsible.

At 5:45 A.M. on July 1, Masse smoked a cigarette just prior to starting his tractor and getting on with the day's work. He was positioned next to a seven-foot-high rubble pile at the edge of a vineyard to his east; the lavender field lay to the south of the vineyard. A sudden whistling sound startled him, and he stepped out from behind the pile to detect its source.

Masse's first thought was that an aircraft had landed. An unusual-looking aircraft, to be sure, perhaps an experimental one. The size of a Dauphine automobile, shaped something like a rugby ball, it rested on four legs. In addition, it had a central pivot stuck in the ground. The object was some 200 feet away from him, in a spot in the lavender field on the south side of the vineyard. Some 70 feet of open space separated it from the vines. Near the object were two figures he would later compare in size and general outline to "boys of about eight years." As soon as he saw them, Masse would recall six weeks later,

I knew that it wasn't with men that I had to deal and I watched them the whole time as I was moving across [through the vineyard]. Both these beings were down on the ground. They were squatting down. One had his back to me and the other one was opposite him, and it seemed to me that they were looking at a lavender plant ["A Tentative Reply," 1966].

Though he recognized the strangeness of the situation, Masse was more curious than frightened, and he crossed through the vineyard trying to keep himself concealed from the strangers. But even when it was no longer possible to hide his presence once he had stepped into the field, he continued on his way.

Now that he was in the open, the beings suddenly became aware of him. They stood up, and Masse got a good look at them from his vantage point 15 or 20 feet away. They were dressed in gray-green overalls and had smooth, bald, pumpkinlike heads. Like the heads, the hands were bare but of more normal human appearance. Their eyes were large and slanted, and their mouths had no lips; the mouths resembled little holes more than anything else. The chins were small and pointed. The beings were less than four feet tall. There were grunting sounds associated with them, as if they were speaking to one another, but the mouths did not move, and Masse was not sure from where on their bodies the sounds were emanating.

Masse would never discuss what happened immediately after that, except to insist that the entities were kindly disposed and "human," though not from the earth. Years of pleas and proddings from investigators would all be to no avail. Masse was determined not to talk, and no one ever persuaded him to change his mind. He has hinted only that there was some communication, apparently telepathic, between him and the beings.

Then one of them pointed a pencil-like object at him, and Masse found that he could not move. The being put the object into a case or holster on its left side. (Each carried a small case on its left and a larger one on its right.) The two figures moved with surprising agility to their craft, which they entered through a sliding door. The UFO shot off with a whistling sound





Maurice Masse's July 1, 1965, encounter with humanoid beings in his lavender field near Valensole, France, is among the best-investigated and most puzzling close encounters.

at enormous speed in a westerly direction and vanished within seconds. It took Masse 20 minutes, however, before he had regained full control of his body.

He went over to the spot where the UFO had rested. There were marks where the legs and pivot had connected with the ground.

Badly shaken, Masse decided to go to town and confide his experience to a friend who ran a cafe. The friend heard him out and did not doubt his word—Masse had a solid local reputation—but urged him to contact the authorities. Masse, suddenly wishing he had said nothing about the experience, blurted out that it was just a joke and they should both forget it. He left, and his friend, who did not believe for a moment that Masse had been anything less than wholly serious, began telling others about the strange event. Soon it would be widely known in the village and soon after that all over France. In short order he

would be besieged by police investigators, reporters, and ufologists.

*Ground traces and other effects.* In the evening Masse returned to the site with his 18-year-old daughter. Now, as he looked over the traces, he noticed a change in the central hole, shaped like a reverse funnel. In the morning it had contained liquid mud; now that mud had hardened like cement. Masse kept his daughter from approaching too closely. He feared that the site might contain radiation or other dangerous energies. (Subsequent testing detected no such radiation.)

The following day a visitor described the site thus:

I was able to establish the existence, in a lavender field with light, freshly hoed soil, of some strange and more recent marks. These consisted of a shallow basin about 1 meter 20 in diameter, in the center of which there was a cylindrical-shaped hole 18 cms. in diameter



and 40 cms. deep. Also to be seen were four shallow grooves, each 8 cms. in diameter and approximately 2 meters long, which formed a sort of cross having the cylindrical hole as its center. The earth at this spot was densely packed [*ibid.*].

Three days after the encounter, Masse began to suffer a huge loss of energy. He slept 12 to 14 hours on the first day—two to three times more than his normal sleep. The next day he slept nearly 24 hours and probably would have slept more if his concerned family had not awakened him and insist that he eat. After some weeks he resumed his pre-encounter sleep patterns.

On August 8 one of France's leading ufologists, Aimé Michel, interviewed Masse and studied the site. He observed that "the traces of the lavender are visible for a good hundred meters or so along the take-off trajectory, as far as a little shanty . . . towards Manosque, and even beyond. These traces are: a degeneration of the young shoots prior to July 1, which are going dry and falling off, and a singular vitality of the shoots after July 1" (Michel, 1965).

Under a microscope, Michel found, each plant showed

one or two sprigs (sometimes more) that are desiccated, exactly similar, so far as one can see, to twigs that have been dried naturally by great heat or by the autumn. These twigs crumble to dust between the fingers. On August 8 such plants as these, with desiccated twigs, were found over a distance of about 100 meters *beneath* the trajectory of the alleged take-off. The non-desiccated twigs (of these plants that had the desiccated twigs) showed nothing particular. This phenomenon of desiccation could be seen over a width of 2 or 3 meters [Michel, 1966].

Unfortunately, so far as is known no laboratory analysis of the traces was ever conducted. Thus what may have been significant evidence of a UFO event would never be properly documented.

On August 21, 1967, Michel and Charles Bowen, editor of England's *Flying Saucer Review*, drove to Valensole and interviewed Masse. Masse's serenity was in stark contrast to his evident distress of two years earlier, when Michel had last seen him. Masse

had long since plowed under the imprint marks; yet clear evidence of the earlier event remained. At the landing site, "a circular area of land in the midst of the precise rows of lavender plants," only a few weeds grew. "The area is about 3 yards in diameter," the investigators wrote, "and around the perimeter a number of lavender plants are stunted and withered-looking. They are certainly not healthy plants like those in the rest of the field" (Michel and Bowen, 1968).

In November 1968 French astrophysicist Pierre Guérin easily located the site, now overgrown with weeds but still devoid of lavender plants. The spot was still discernible on a later visit, in March 1969. During that same visit Guérin interviewed Mme. Masse at her home while her husband was off at work. According to her, her husband thought of his visitors daily, considered his encounter with them a spiritual experience, and wanted to keep the hallowed ground where they had landed in the family forever. At the same time he endeavored to mislead outsiders into believing he was no longer interested in his UFO experience (Lemaitre, 1969).

Jacques Vallee, a French-American author of several UFO books, met with Masse in Valensole in May 1979. Masse said he had seen the object, though apparently not its occupants, on at least one other occasion. He denied that the July 1965 incident had any religious implications, but he said experiences like his should not be discussed with anyone, even one's family. "One always says too much," he said. Meantime Masse stayed out of the limelight and occupied himself with his farm work and various charitable activities. Vallee remarked that it was "clear Masse has never told the entire truth about his experience" (Vallee, 1990).

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## VALENTICH DISAPPEARANCE

On Saturday, October 21, 1978, 20-year-old Frederick Valentich left Moorabbin airport in Victoria, Australia, and flew over Bass Strait on his way to King Island. He was in a single-engine Cessna 182 airplane. The flight was to take less than 70 minutes.

Just after 7 P.M. he spotted what he took to be another aircraft passing uncomfortably close to his and then hovering over it. Valentich's Cessna began to experience engine trouble. At 7:06 he radioed Melbourne Air Flight Service and spoke with controller Steve Robey. The following exchange, slightly abridged, ensued:

*Valentich:* Is there any known traffic below five thousand [feet]?

*Robey:* No known traffic.

*V:* I am—seems [to] be a large aircraft below five thousand.

*R:* What type of aircraft is it?

*V:* I cannot affirm. It [has] four bright, it seems to me like landing lights. . . . The aircraft has just passed over me at least a thousand feet above.

*R:* Roger, and it is a large aircraft? Confirm.

*V:* Er, unknown due to the speed it's traveling. Is there any Air Force aircraft in the vicinity?

*R:* No known aircraft in the vicinity.

*V:* It's approaching now from due east towards me. . . . [Brief silence.] It seems to me that he's playing some sort of game. He's flying over me two to three times . . . at speeds I could not identify.

*R:* Roger. What is your actual level?

*V:* My level is four and a half thousand. Four five zero zero.

*R:* Confirm that you cannot identify the aircraft.

*V:* Affirmative.

*R:* Roger. Stand by.

*V:* It's not an aircraft. It is—[brief silence].

*R:* Can you describe the, er, aircraft?

*V:* As it's flying past, it's a long shape. [Brief silence.] [Cannot] identify more than [that it has such speed]. [Brief silence.] [It is] before me right now, Melbourne.

*R:* And how large would the, er, object be?

*V:* It seems like it's stationary. What I'm doing right now is orbiting, and the thing is just orbiting on top of me. Also it's got a green light and sort of metallic. It's shiny [on] the outside. [Brief silence.] It's just vanished. . . . Would you know what kind of aircraft I've got? Is it military aircraft?

*R:* Confirm that the, er, aircraft just vanished.

*V:* Say again.

*R:* Is the aircraft still with you?

*V:* [Brief silence.] Approaching from the southwest. . . . The engine is rough idling. I've got it