

MORE ON THE COYNE HELICOPTER CASE

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IN Vol. 22, No. 4 of *Flying Saucer Review* I discussed *The Coyne Case*, an apparent close encounter between a UH-1H helicopter of US Army Reserve and an unidentified lighted object. The event took place on October 18, 1973, at 11.05 p.m. near Mansfield, Ohio, in the midst of a full-blown "flap" which spread over the eastern United States and produced several reports of particular interest (the Pascagoula, Mississippi, fishermen incident had taken place the previous week).

On the basis of intensive interviews of Captain (now Major) Lawrence J. Coyne and two of his three crew members, it was established that an unidentified bright red light rapidly approached their helicopter from the south-eastern horizon, decelerated to a near-hovering relationship in front of, and above, their machine, then accelerated once more, made a decisive course change, continued its flight, and disappeared on the northwest horizon.

The object was described as cigar-shaped, with sharply delineated edges; the red light on the nose, a white light at the tail, and a green light aft/below, which swung around in the manner of a manoeuvrable spotlight and threw a "pyramid-shaped" beam of intense green light into the cockpit. There were apparent malfunctions of the radios and the magnetic compass, and a climb of 1800 feet for which the pilot disclaims responsibility.

Analysis of the crew testimony points to an uninterrupted observational time of approximately 5 minutes (a revision downward from a previous

estimate of 5.5 minutes) and on the basis of the time reconstruction, the precise positions of the lights, the horizon-to-horizon flight path, the sharply delineated structure, and the deceleration at closest approach, any suggestion of a meteor hypothesis was considered to be untenable.

The investigation has continued. The next question put to test was: "Could the object have been a high-performance aircraft?"

The table contrasts *what was reported* (left-hand column) with *objections to the object being a normal aircraft or helicopter* (on the right). In summary, neither the flight characteristics of the unknown object, nor the light configuration, or the speed of the object at an altitude of 2500 feet above sea level, conform to the flight capabilities of conventional aircraft, or to the Federal Air Regulations governing aircraft in US airspace at night.

Ground witnesses to the event have now been found and interrogated¹. First off, we now know the exact location of the event: about a mile-and-a-half farther to the west than the projected course of the helicopter, at the shore of a large reservoir, 997 feet above sea level. Thus the previously published chart showing altitude vs. elapsed time must be recalibrated. The helicopter, at lowest altitude and closest approach of the object, was about 700 feet, not 400 feet above the terrain. The previous chart had been necessarily based on the highest elevations in the hilly wooded area, which are 1300 feet above sea level.

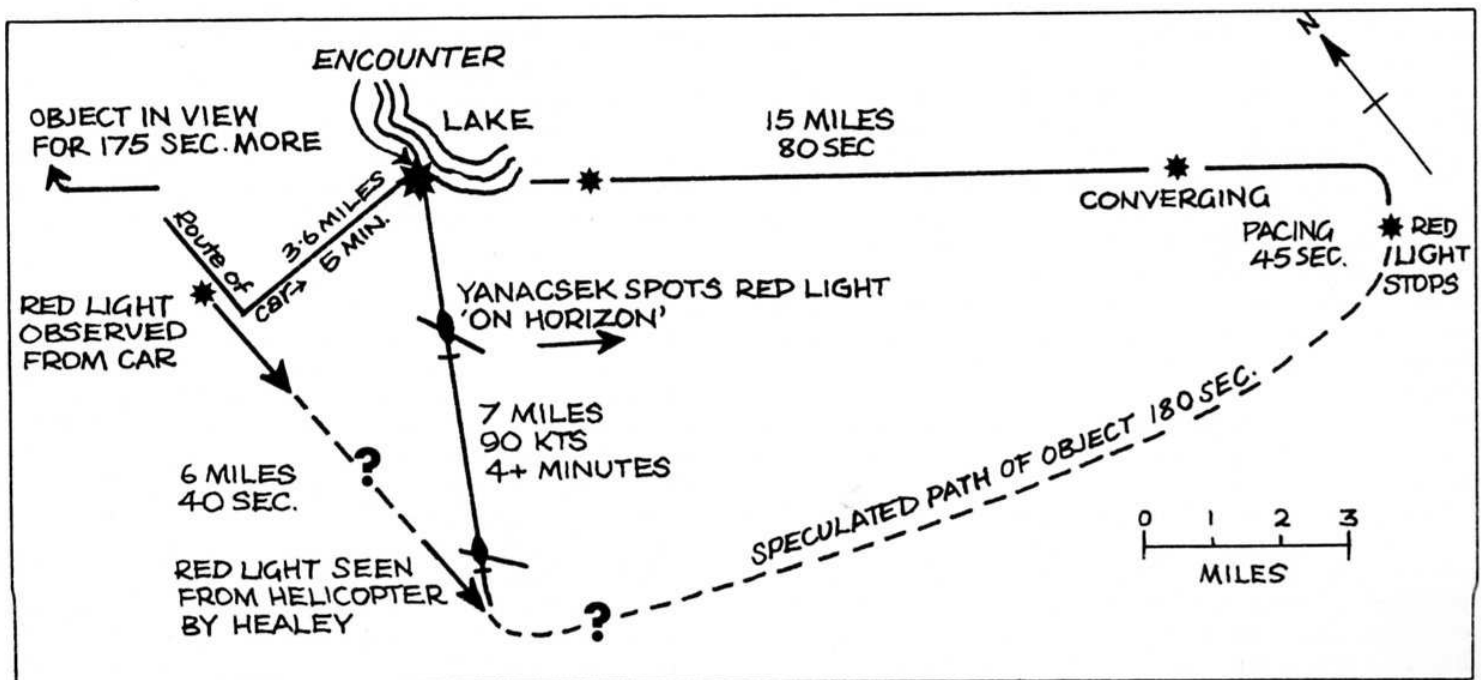


TABLE:

1) Reported:

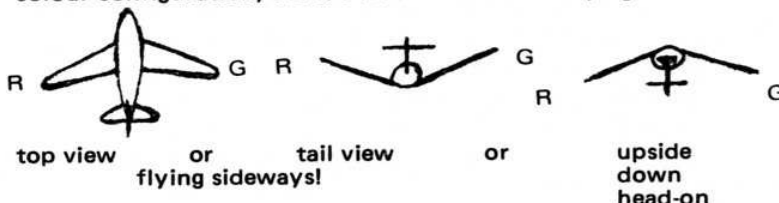
object motion

R - G W

light positions

Objections:

In order for any fixed-wing aircraft to present the reported colour-configuration, the a/c would have to be flying:



None of the above take into account the bright white "tail" light.

2) Reported:

Object as slowest speed as it passed directly in front of and was closest to the helicopter.

Objections:

- a) A fixed-wing a/c moving across the line of sight at generally constant velocity would appear to move most rapidly when passing directly in front of the observer.
- b) A fixed-wing a/c would not have the capability of decelerating from jet speeds to near-hover within a few seconds.
- c) A helicopter would have the ability to hover, but would not be capable of the high forward speeds reported.

3) Reported:

Object had very bright red light on nose.

Objection:

No conventional aircraft carries a bright red light on the nose.

4) Reported:

No noise or turbulence was noted during the close approach of the object.

Objections:

- a) A conventional aircraft, if within 500', would have produced noise heard inside the helicopter.
- b) The night was calm and the flight totally smooth. Any turbulence would have been noted as an anomaly.

5) Reported:

All lights on the unknown were constant.

Objection:

FAA requires either a strobe or a rotating beacon on top or bottom of fuselage.

6) Reported:

Object at speeds as high as 600 kts at altitude as low as 1800 feet msl.

Objection:

FAR Part 91 stipulates that below 10,000' msl no aircraft shall fly faster than 250 kts.

7) Reported:

Unknown object presented bright white light as a tail light.

Objections:

- a) Conventional aircraft do not have bright white tail lights.
- b) Neither piston nor jet aircraft present bright white engine exhaust.

8) Reported: (Checked by Coyne)

No FAA records of other aircraft in the area.

Last F-100 landed at Mansfield at 10.47pm.

Objections:

Same

9) Reported:

Jezzi saw no object, only a light.

Others, including ground witnesses, saw essentially a smooth featureless cigar shape.

Objection:

Some of the features of a conventional aircraft should have been seen: e.g., wings, engine pods, windows, empennage, logo, numbers.

WAS THE COYNE OBJECT A HIGH-PERFORMANCE AIRCRAFT?

The ground witnesses — a mother and four children — were returning to their rural home from a visit to Grandma in Mansfield. As they drove south, they first observed a single steady red light, brighter than a normal aircraft port-wing light, which was flying south "like a jet at medium altitude." For those readers without an FSR Vol. 23, No. 4, close at hand, let me recapitulate: Sgt. Healey, one of the helicopter crewmen, observed a light of precisely this

description and course "three to four minutes" before the beginning of the "main event" observation, when the helicopter was approximately seven miles to the south-west of the encounter site (see sketch). Whether the two red lights (and indeed, the object of the encounter) were all one and the same of course cannot be established. However, the times and distances fit nicely: the light would have had ample time to travel south (40 seconds) cross

behind the helicopter and swing out to the horizon (180 seconds) pace (45 seconds) and make the run back to the helicopter (80 seconds) — if one assumes (as was reported) that the light was capable of 600 kt. speeds.

About five minutes after this initial observation by the ground witnesses, as they were now driving eastward along a deserted rural road to the reservoir bridge approach, the "main event" began for them.

Ahead, to the ESE, two bright lights — red and green — appeared in the sky, seemingly coming down rapidly toward them. Angular distance between the lights was small and the colours blended together. The red light was the leading one and the more predominant colour. There was no noise. The mother pulled over to the shoulder and over her protestations the two eldest children (step-siblings, both age 13) got out of the car. Coming from the SW then (at the car's five o'clock position) and making "a lot of racket, a loud beating noise" appeared a helicopter.²

The two objects converged, the unidentified object assuming a hovering position over the helicopter, and the green light flared up, bathing the helicopter, the road, the car and the trees in green light.

"It was like rays coming down" the witnesses reported. The object was variously described as "a blimp," "a cigar," or "a school bus." The children scrambled with fright back into the car, and the mother started to drive ahead to the east (the car lights and motor had been kept on). The helicopter continued its course, flying off over the lake to the NE in an apparently normal climb, while the unidentified object "paced" the witness car for about 100 feet, then reversed its direction and proceeded to climb out towards Mansfield, seven miles to the NW.

The only discrepancy in the crew vs. ground

* A report and analysis (72 pages) covering in greater detail these and other aspects of the case — the apparent equipment malfunctions, the apparently unexplained climb, and some insight into the personalities of the witnesses — is now available from the Center for UFO Studies.

witness testimony lies in the last bit about the object pacing the car towards the east; otherwise the independent descriptions of the event are astonishingly compatible.*

My purpose in these two articles has been to demonstrate that the mere casual interviewing of UFO percipients may not only be inconclusive, but blatantly misleading, especially if the investigator has pre-conceived notions and goes only so far, or in whatever direction, to substantiate his own prejudices.³ Such are the methods of the hysteric, not the scientist, and such methods do not reflect the dispassionate procedures requisite to an open-minded, yet critical inquiry.

It is unfortunate that week-end UFO interviews are often the only investigation that a potentially high-yield case is afforded. I am certain that a great deal of information on the Coyne incident remains uncollected — that after several months of "week-end interviewing" I have still barely scratched the surface. Lord knows some significant work has been done in this way (by Ted Bloecher and Ted Phillips in the United States, for example) yet, a mystery incompletely reported cannot be a mystery solved, and I think that only through well-subsidized, full-time, highly skilled and equipped investigators and analysts with immediate reaction capability will we see meaningful progress in this field.

Notes

1. Credit for finding the ground witnesses and for the first two major interviews with them goes to William E. Jones and Warren Nicholson. Subsequent interview and analysis by this writer.
2. A Huey helicopter does indeed make a very loud and distinctive "racket."
3. Phillip J. Klass, who so defiantly expounds the meteor theory in his book *UFO's Explained* (1974, Random House) and in other publications, never interviewed Coyne face-to-face, did not concern himself with basic principles of meteoritics, did not know the exact site of the encounter, nor did he know of the ground witnesses.

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