

THE VILLA SANTINA CASE

An important early contact claim

by Gordon Creighton

IF, as seems likely, the alleged encounter of the Brazilian José Higgins with alien entities from a landed machine (on July 23, 1947) is the first known case during the modern phase of the "Flying Saucer Problem", that is to say since Kenneth Arnold's¹ famous postwar sighting, the one which I present below must surely be the second. Until a brief account appeared in the recent special issue of FLYING SAUCER REVIEW (The Humanoids), it had never been reported in our journal, and I have only vague memories of seeing some slight reference to it in other publications in English. It is of course well known in some European UFO research circles, and I submit it not as any startling new discovery but merely in pursuance of our aim to make the REVIEW as full a record as possible, wherein future researchers, perhaps years from now, may be able to detect vital clues that escape our understanding at present.

Personally, I must confess that I find it very difficult indeed not to take this story seriously, and those to whom I have shown it have been struck by many points that seem to have the authentic ring of truth.

My translation is from the original Italian account, *Ho visto un disco volante*, in CLYPEUS No. 2-5, of May 1964. This journal is the organ of the Centro Studi Clipeologici, Via San Secondo 15 Torino (Turin), whose energetic founder and director is Signor Gianni Settimo. FLYING SAUCER REVIEW is grateful to Signor Settimo and to Professor Johannis for their consent to reproduction of the full story in English.

As readers may know, the Latin word *clipeus* (occasionally *clipeum*) denoted the round bronze shield carried by the Roman soldiers. Certain Roman writers refer to sightings of a *clipeus ardens*, and our friends in Turin are not alone in thinking that some of these things may not have been natural or meteorological phenomena.

The author of the account, Professor Rapuzzi Luigi Johannis, is a well-known Italian painter and writer, who lives in Milan. No attempt has been made to conceal the facts that among Professor Johannis' numerous writings there are at least fifteen or sixteen books, published mainly in the

collection *I Romanzi di Urania*, by Mondadori in Milan, that from their titles are clearly works of Science Fiction, and it seems that the Professor is well known in Italy for his magnificent paintings and in both Italy and other countries of Europe for his Science Fiction writing.

As always, readers of FLYING SAUCER REVIEW will have to form their own opinions as to whether what follows is the account of a real experience.

I SAW A FLYING SAUCER

(As told by Professor R. L. Johannis)

During the first half of August 1947 I was in a small village called Raveo, near Villa Santina, in Carnia (Friuli).² In my boyhood I spent a large part of the summers in that district where I am consequently well known.

I have always been interested in geology and anthropology, and I spent all my leisure time studying these, my favourite sciences, an integral and indispensable part of which involves the systematic search for fossils.

On the morning of August 14, 1947, as usual, I was making my way again up the short valley of the mountain stream called the Chiarsò. This valley ends on the lower slopes of the central mountain massif, the Carnico del Col Gentile. I had with me a small knapsack and my geologist's pick.

I was following a path along the left bank of the stream (which was almost dry) which winds up through clumps of fir trees and deposits of alluvial rubble and detritus. On my right the face of the mountain, with a gradient of about 45°, towered away, consisting of fractured and weathered rock mixed with layers of gypsum.

As I emerged from one of these clumps of fir I noticed, on the rocky river bank, and at a distance of about fifty metres from me, a large lenticular object of a vivid red colour. I am slightly short-sighted, and so I quickly put my glasses on. When I had arrived at a spot a few steps distant from the "thing", I was able to establish the fact that it was a disc—seemingly of varnished metal like the metal of an ordinary toy—having the shape of a lens and a low central cupola⁴ with no apertures.

At its tip a sort of shining metallic antenna, of telescopic form, was protruding, roughly similar to those we have on our present-day motor cars.

(And here I must state straight away that I knew nothing whatever in those days of flying saucers and I do not think that the Italian newspapers had even started to talk about them.)

The object, some ten metres wide, was embedded, to the extent of about a quarter of its length, in a great transverse cleft in the friable rock of the mountain side, and was at a height of about six metres above the bed of the stream.

Without more ado I decided that I would climb up there to it and see what it was, but first of all (and anybody else would have done the same) I looked round to see whether there was anybody about who—should the need arise—could help me.

It was then that I perceived, at a distance of fifty metres or so from me, right on the edge of the grove of trees from which I had just emerged, two "boys". At any rate, that is what they seemed to be, at first.

I shouted to them and pointed to ^{the} their disc. And then I started towards them. When I had halved the distance between them and myself, I stopped, petrified.

The two "boys" were dwarfs, the likes of which I had never seen nor even imagined. They were coming towards me slowly, with tiny strides, with their hands at their sides and their heads motionless. When they had come to a few paces from me, they halted. I had no strength left. I seemed to be paralysed,⁵ or to be dreaming. But I was still able to observe them in every detail. And those details have remained impressed upon me so indelibly that even now I could make a portrait or even a statue of those extraordinary beings. However I must confess that the dominating sentiment in me then was one of enormous astonishment combined with fear, as you will well understand.

They were no more than 90 centimetres⁶ in height, and were wearing dark blue coloured overalls made of some material that I would not know how to describe. "Translucent" is the only term for it. They had collars and rather deep belts, all of a vivid red colour. Even the cuffs and the shins of the legs ended in "collars" of the same type.

Their heads, according to the impression that I got, were bigger than the head of a normal man, and gave them a caricaturish aspect. But I think the sight of their "faces" would have put an end to anybody's desire to laugh.

At this point, I am obliged to explain that the terms I have used in this description are purely indications, and are of a purely anthropomorphic

nature, because I don't know, today, whether those things that I have defined as nose, mouth, eyes, and hands were like that or whether it would be more correct to name them in some other way.

They had no signs of hair but in place of it they were wearing a sort of dark brown tight-fitting cap, like an Alpinist's bonnet. The "skin" of their faces was an earthly green⁸ (*verde terroso*). The only colour that comes close to it is that of the plasticine commonly used by sculptors or of clay dipped in water. The "nose" was straight, geometrically cut, and very long. Beneath it was a mere slit, shaped like a circumflex accent, which I saw opening and closing again at intervals, very much like the mouth of a fish. The "eyes" were enormous, protruding, and round. Their appearance and colour were like the colour of two well ripened yellow-green plums (*due prugne giallo-verdi ben mature*).

In the centre of the eyes I noticed a kind of vertical "pupil". I saw no traces of eyebrows or eyelashes, and what I would have called the eyelids consisted of a ring, midway between green and yellow, which surrounded the base of those hemispherical eyes just like the frame of a pair of spectacles.

I remained there in astonishment, for what seemed to me an interminably long time, gazing at the two extraordinary creatures. Only later was I able to calculate roughly how long it was. I think the silent confrontation lasted no more than two or three minutes. Then I raised my arm with the pick and waved it in their direction and then in the direction of the disc, and, in an agitated voice, I shouted and asked who they were, where they came from, and if I could be of any help to them. They wheeled round very quickly and I can't remember what I said after that, for things began to happen fast.

I now believe that the two beings had interpreted my precipitate gestures as being threatening to them. But I don't know for sure, and don't suppose I ever shall. What is certain is that one of them raised his right hand to his belt, and from the centre of the belt there came something that seemed as though it might be a thin puff of smoke. I now think it was a ray⁹ or something of the sort. Anyway, before I had time to move or do anything, I found myself laid out full length on the ground. My pick shot out of my hand, as though snatched by an invisible force.

Only once in my life have I had the experience of suffering a violent electric shock. That was in 1924, when I was a student at the Technical Institute in Udine, and the Physics professor made us all form a chain and take the charge from a Leyden jar.

Well, I can only tell you that as soon as I was struck by that smoke-ray, I felt a similar sensation. Moreover I felt myself deprived of all strength and all my efforts to raise myself meant an expenditure of energy that was beyond me.

Meanwhile, the two midgets were coming towards me, and they halted at a spot two metres from me, where my pick had fallen. I managed to roll over on to one side and I saw one of them bend down and pick up the tool, which was longer than he was. And this was how I was able to see his green "hand" quite distinctly. It had eight fingers, four of them opposable to the others! It wasn't a hand: it was a claw, and the fingers were without joints.

I also noticed that the chests of the two beings were quivering; like a dog's chest when it pants after a long run.

I made fantastic efforts to get up, and finally managed a sitting position. But I had to brace my arms against the ground so as not to fall back again.

Meanwhile the two entities had arrived beneath the disc. I saw them climb up, slowly but surely, to the cleft in the rock and disappear into the disc itself, which was imbedded almost vertically in the rock.

A few more minutes elapsed, and then the strange object shot straight out from the rock and rose into the air. A cascade of stones and earth fell down on to the bed of the river. And that was the only noise that broke the silence in that lonely spot. The stream, being at low water, was trickling silently over the pebbles.

The disc remained there stationary in the air, like an enormous suspended gong. I could distinctly see its sharply cut flange four or five metres from me, and for a moment I was seized with terror that it was going to come down and cut me in half like a worm.

I am not sure, but I think I shouted at the top of my voice. At any rate, I am certain that I made every effort to get up and escape. The result was that I kept falling back again, supine and racked with pain.

Meanwhile, the disc had tipped slightly away from its vertical position. Then it suddenly grew smaller,¹⁰ and vanished. Immediately afterwards, I was struck by a tremendous blast of wind (the air shock?), which rolled me over and over on the ground and filled my eyes with dust. I ended up against the stones in the river-bed and remained there for I don't know how long. Finally I managed to get into a sitting position again and it was then that I looked at my wrist watch. It was 9.14.

But it was only at about midday that I was in a fit state to get back home. In the meantime, I even

slept for an hour. My bones all felt as if they were broken and my legs were weak and trembling, as though after a fearful bout of drinking. I looked in my rucksack for my thermos flask of coffee, and was not surprised to find it shattered to pieces, but what did surprise me was not being able to find any trace of its metal casing. Also gone were my aluminium fork and an aluminium can that had contained my cold lunch.¹¹

Everything had been soaked with coffee, including a pack of cards with sketches of the region which I usually carried with me.

I had to be content with bread soaked in coffee and throw away the salami and all the rest.

Finally I should add that I searched in vain for my pick, which would have been very useful to me at that point as a walking stick.

At 2.00 p.m. I reached Raveo and went to bed. I told the proprietress of the inn where I was staying that I had fallen from a rock, and she replied that that served me right for it was high time I stopped going around picking up stones (she has known me for more than 35 years since I was a boy).

Next morning I armed myself with another pick and—I confess—with a revolver, and went back to the spot. Naturally there was nobody there. I climbed right up to the cleft in the rock since I thought the two creatures might have thrown my old pick—to which I was very much attached—in there, but I found nothing.

I believe that that old pick of mine is now in a museum on some other planet. I hope that somebody up there is trying to decypher the marks cut in the handle, my name and a mountaineering motto, and a pair of stylised Alpine flowers, and an eagle. And I hope they rack their brains to a standstill trying to make it out.

Finally I must tell you that at that time I tried to explain my strange adventure in many different ways, but none of them having anything whatever to do with flying saucers or other craft of extra-terrestrial origin. At first I thought the "saucer" was an experimental machine of the Allied Forces which were then in occupation of the Campoformido aerodrome in the Friuli area. My next thought was of some device of Russian origin. Finally, I wondered about some unknown civilisation still hidden away in some unexplored regions of the world like the Matto Grosso of Brazil. The most absurd hypotheses could be adapted to fit my extraordinary adventure. But not one of them was satisfactory, since not one of them could account for the presence of those two little men.

Anybody else in my position would have decided that the only sensible thing to do was to

say absolutely nothing whatever to anybody about what had happened. And this was what I did, quite consciously. I had no wish to be considered a crazy visionary, or worse, and I don't think anyone could blame me.

Two months later, I sailed for New York. During the crossing I heard for the first time about the flying saucers seen by Kenneth Arnold. Only then did I realise that I had seen a flying saucer.

During my five years in the USA I followed with the greatest of interest all developments in the "Flying Saucer Story", and in 1950 I decided to relate my experience to two persons in whom I have confidence, who can give their testimony about it at any time, and whose addresses I have given to the president of the Centro Studi Clipeologici in Turin which has now been good enough to publish my account.

In 1952, before returning to Italy, I read an article in the weekly review *L'Europeo*, about the book by the American Scully,¹² who spoke of two flying saucers that had landed in America and, as he stated quite clearly, contained the corpses of little men. Then I sent a letter from New York to the director of *L'Europeo*, asking him to publish the account of my experience which, at any rate, possessed the merit of priority in time.

When, two months later, I returned to Italy, I went to Milan, and called upon the director of *L'Europeo*. There I was told that the subject was an interesting one but that, in order that it could be published, it was necessary for me to furnish "proofs" (!) of its authenticity.

I replied that if on that morning in August 1947 I had imagined that I was going to encounter creatures from another world, I would certainly not have hesitated for one moment to take along with me a whole troop of journalists cinematographers and (why not?) a company of soldiers too.

As a result of my experience, I had made enquiries in the village next day (August 15, 1947), as to whether anybody had noticed any sort of "aeroplane" the day before. Two people (an old man and a boy) told me, separately, that they had seen one, in the one case at 8.30 a.m. and in the other case at approximately 10.00 a.m. The old man had been sitting down in the village square enjoying the sunshine. He noticed a red globe being carried aloft by the wind "behind the mountain on the slope of which the village lies. The boy was with his mother and other people, working in a field scarcely outside the village, and he noticed a red ball ("like the ones they have a fairs") which was rising at great speed and vanished in the clear sky.

That is all that I have been able to gather in

the way of "local testimony". It is doubtful whether it would have been of any interest to the director of *L'Europeo*.

And with that, my story is finished. I will only add that I was deeply disgusted by the mean campaign of vilification which has been carried on in the USA in connection with the matter of the flying saucers and which I followed closely in all its details between October 1947 and 1952. And my disgust ended by turning into bitterness here in Europe when I realised the enormous levity with which the important question of the flying saucers is treated. I say "levity", because I don't regard as worthy of any sort of consideration at all the hoaxes and the frauds perpetrated for the purpose of making money or for witless propaganda.

And I must conclude this brief account with a warning similar to the one with which the American, Major Donald E. Keyhoe, closes his book *Flying Saucers From Outer Space*¹³ : -

"There are intelligent beings that are coming from Outer Space and have been observing us for years, perhaps for centuries. Perhaps there will be beings similar to us. Others might be very different from us as regards their physical aspect (I am not sure about this).

"We must be ready, at any time, for meetings with these beings, and ready to demonstrate that we are 'civilised'. When? Perhaps tomorrow or perhaps in two centuries from now. We don't know. But it is certain that, immediately, at the first meeting, we must give them the impression that we are in fact not their enemies. Because, while we can surely learn from them things that will increase our scientific knowledge, we might be treated by them on the same level as inferior beings or savages. And we cannot deny that our own 'highly civilised' exploratory expeditions in Africa, Australia, Malaysia and Arizona, have answered the poor arrows of the natives with their more lethal leaden bullets. What sort of reply might the 'flying saucer people' give to our modern weapons? The mysterious power (magnetic?) which silently drives their craft should make us think."

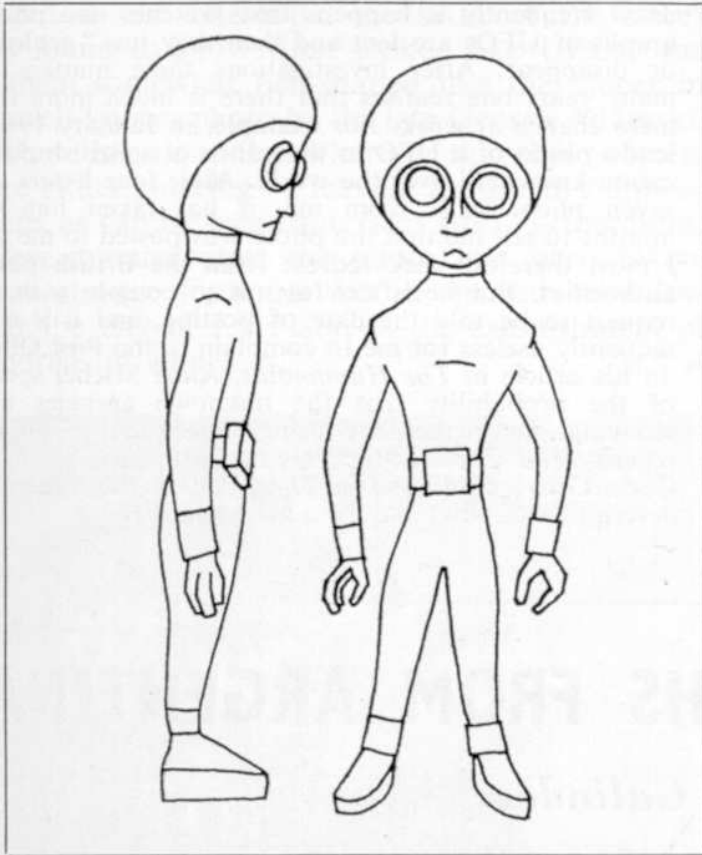
Letter from Professor R. L. Johannis to Gianni Settimo, Director and Founder of the Centro Studi Clipeologici, Turin.

Milan,
March 20, 1964

"My dear Settimo :

In accordance with your request, I am sending you two China-ink sketches to illustrate the account of my meeting with a 'saucer' and two of its 'pilots' in Carnia away back in 1947.

As I told you, at such a distance in time, many



of my recollections—exact enough at the time—have weakened and have consequently become a little confused. I refer particularly to the exact appearance of the ‘bodies’ of the two ‘beings’ met by me, as well as the shape of the eyes since I am no longer certain whether they were vertical or horizontal slits or whether weren’t any pupils at all.

When I sent my account of the episode from America to the Italian weekly *L’Europeo*, I sent with it a sketch of the ‘pilots’, but when I came back to Europe that sketch was not returned to me because their editorial office had lost it.¹⁴

That sketch was done by me two months after the meeting, and consequently was much more faithful a reproduction than the ones done by me now.

However, generally speaking, the front view of the ‘head’ can be taken (apart from the pupils) as corresponding to the absence or not of ears or something similar that I can’t recollect absolutely.

The sketches of the complete figures are to be considered as rough and approximate outlines and consequently of purely general value. Besides, I am at present inclined to believe the two pilots were nothing more than two ‘robots’¹⁵ whereas in 1947 I was convinced that I had met real and actual extraterrestrial beings.

Please give all these considerations, as contained in the present letters, to the *CLYPEUS*

readers, for I want my account to be taken at its just value and not decked out with suppositions that are purely gratuitous and therefore of no value.

With all best wishes,
Yours,

L. R. Johannis.”

Notes by Gordon Creighton

- ¹ The Higgins case was 29 days after the Arnold Sighting and the Johannis case was 50 days after it.
- ² Friuli is the extreme north-eastern province of Italy, north of Venice and bordering on Austria and Yugoslavia. The mountains are the Venetian Alps and Carnic Alps.
- ³ On pages 199-200 of his excellent new book *El Gran Enigma de los Platillos Volantes* (Editorial Pomaire, Barcelona) Antonio Ribera gives a summary of the Johannis case and reproduces the sketches of the entities. But by some curious quirk or error, he translates the Italian word for pick (*piccozza*) as *easel* (*caballete*) in Spanish, and portrays the professor as walking up the mountain side carrying his easel and his paint-brushes (*su caballete y sus pinceles*) and as waving a fistful of paint-brushes at the entities. It seems to me important to have this small point (in what is otherwise a splendid book) rectified, for even to alien entities a pick would presumably seem a more dangerous weapon than a cluster of paint-brushes.
- ⁴ Note the striking resemblances (disc shape, low central cupola, metallic antenna) to the features shown in the seven much disputed photographs of a landed disc—with small entity near it—allegedly taken at 9.30 a.m. on July 31, 1952, by the Italian engineer Gianpetro Monguzzi near the Cherchen glacier on the Italian side of the Bernina Massif, a little to the south of St. Moritz. The Cherchen glacier is not much more than 100 miles from the scene of the Johannis encounter. And both cases occurred after 9.00 a.m.
- ⁵ First Prof. Johannis feels the “paralysing effect”. Later the process is taken further and he is felled to the ground.
- ⁶ See *The Humanoids* Special Issue of F.S.R. There were twelve South American reports in 1965 of little creatures of between 80 cms and 1 metre, and no less than nine came from the mountainous area of the Andes. *The Johannis and Monguzzi cases were also both in mountains.*
- ⁷ Here are Aimé Michel’s “pumpkin-heads”, the little men seen at Valensole, “with brains at least three times as big as ours.”
- ⁸ Do we have here the creatures that gave rise to the stories about “little green men”? Compare Case 64 of my article in *The Humanoids*, relating how, in October 1965, some Argentine children, on their way to school on the western slopes of the Andes, encountered “several creatures of short stature, greenish skin, and only remotely resembling human beings”, who tried to capture them.
- ⁹ “Flashes” or “rays” from the belt or chest are now seen to be frequent features in reports of encounters with small entities.
- ¹⁰ The disc “grew smaller before it vanished”. One feels that there is something of fantastic importance here, a tremendous clue. Captain Howard told me that his gigantic UFO, seen over the Atlantic in 1954, seemed to grow smaller while remaining at the same

distance from the observers. In the Whidby Island case of October 1963 (see FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, November-December 1964, p. 13), the grey ten-foot long craft, shaped more like a wing-aeroplane than a disc, "suddenly shrank considerably in size and tilted so that its rear portion dipped into the ground". Professor Johannis' disc was also tipped up in a strange way and sticking into the rock. For Heaven's sake, will all our experts on tempic fields and the plurality of dimensions please put their thinking caps on about these cases!

¹¹ It looks very much as though the entities put Johannis to sleep and then came back and rifled his rucksack robbing him of all metal objects.

¹² Frank Scully: *Behind the Flying Saucers*. (Gollancz, London, 1955. Second British edition).

¹³ I have not found these exact words in my English edition of Keyhoe's *Flying Saucers from Outer Space* (Hutchinson, 1954). They may however appear in the Italian translation of that book.

¹⁴ How frequently it happens that sketches and photographs of UFOs are lent and then they just "get lost" or disappear. After investigations these matters for many years one realises that there is much more than mere chance at work. For example, in January 1966 I lent a photo of a UFO to the editor of a British publication known all over the world. After four letters and seven phone calls from me, it has taken him ten months to tell me that the photo was posted to me and I must therefore seek redress from the British postal authorities. But he is careful not to comply with my request to be told the date of posting, and it is consequently useless for me to complain to the Post Office.

¹⁵ In his article in *The Humanoids*, Aimé Michel speaks of the probability that the unknown agencies now studying our planet are using, inter alia, *biological robots*. And Coral Lorenzen's fantastic account of the Cisco Grove case, also in *The Humanoids*, contains a description of what may be a **mechanical robot**.

UNUSUAL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ARGENTINA

by Oscar A. Galindez

Representative of Flying Saucer Review
in Argentina

I: A FLYING CONE

AT 4.30 p.m. on July 3, 1960, Captain Hugo Francisco Luis Niotti, a graduate of the National School of Aeronautics at Córdoba, was driving in his car from Yacanto to Córdoba when, at a spot 70 kms from Córdoba, he perceived an object at what he estimated to be about 100 metres from the ground. It was raining at the time—a very fine drizzle. The object was rotating on its axis and travelling slowly southwards. He was astonished by its shape and the total absence of any sound from it. There was nothing to indicate any motor or engine, any smoke or flame.

He got out his 35 mm. camera and took this picture. Despite the fine rain, visibility was good.

After he had watched the object moving slowly and silently along, it suddenly shot straight up vertically and vanished among the clouds.

We consider this piece of documentary evidence of the greatest importance in view of Captain Niotti's standing in the Argentine Air Force and his reputation for probity.

The negative was analysed by Argentine Air Force photographic experts. They reported that they found no signs of trickery or tampering, and concluded: "What the photo shows is a faithful reproduction of what was photographed."

The photo was published, as an exclusive feature, in Number 222 of *La Revista Nacional de*

Aeronutica, the official organ of the Argentine Air Force.

II: UFOs SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE MOON

ABOUT a year ago the Reverend Father Segundo Benito Reyna, a Jesuit priest who is the Director of the Adhara Observatory at San Miguel in the Province of Buenos Aires, held a press conference and showed the newsmen a sensational photograph taken with the powerful telescope of that observatory.

Father Reyna, a distinguished scientist who holds the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Science, has kindly made a print of this photograph available for the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.

The history of the picture is as follows: At 8.30 p.m. on December 1, 1965, the Observatory began to receive numerous phone calls informing them that there was something strange on the Moon and asking if they could see it.

As it happened, the staff of the Observatory were indeed occupied with the Moon, but they were taking photographs of it at four-minute intervals and were not looking at the Moon itself.

When however they came to develop the pictures, which had been taken with a camera