

# SOFTLY, SOFTLY IN MENDOZA

Charles Bowen

WHAT did Dr. Condon's University of Colorado UFO investigative project set out to do? Was the intention *really* to investigate the problem with a view to deciding whether or not it was worthy of further and more intensive study? Or was its objective merely to find a way to throw a wet blanket over the subject *as far as the public is concerned*?

For a few months FSR was prepared to rub along with the committee, offering a measure of assistance, and magazines, which were accepted. We were even prepared to concede that a proper investigation might be under way, although one editorial article had contained a hint that the project may have been set up because the United States Air Force was tired of the bad press it was receiving for its UFO explanations, and wished, by so doing, to gain breathing space.<sup>1</sup>

However, the 1967 summer months brought a trickle of disturbing news items which started us speculating. We would have preferred to have avoided this, but the appearance of unfortunate statements attributed to Dr. Condon, and remarks by Mr. Low to friends of ours at the 1967 Prague Astronomical conference, caused us to feel very uneasy. When the dirty Colorado linen was eventually washed in public in May 1968,<sup>2</sup> it was recorded in black and white for everyone interested in the subject to read and interpret that prejudgment of the UFO case seemed to have been the order of the day.

## Negative

When the Condon Report appeared on January 9, 1969, "ufologists" knew that the Condon conclusion<sup>3</sup> that "... further extensive study of UFOs cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby"—based as it was on "careful consideration of the record as it (was) available to us [the Condon Committee]"—had in effect been based

on a small hand-picked sample of cases. Even in that careful selection there were cases which defied explanation, yet Dr. Condon stated negatively that "... those scientists most directly concerned . . . have individually decided that UFO phenomena do not offer a fruitful field in which to look for major scientific discoveries."

That this was not unexpected was made clear in the pages of FSR, although we were sure that the phenomenon would go on apace somewhere or other in the world in spite of the general acclaim which would be accorded Dr. Condon's conclusions. And that is precisely what happened, for we have been treated to one of the phenomenon's northward surges through the South American continent, a fact that has remained unremarked in all but a few circles, and thereby hangs a tale.

In a recent FSR Editorial<sup>4</sup> the immediate effect of the January 9th release was examined. The continuing effects have been seen to be similar: scientists who might have become interested now know that they have been warned off; national newspapers, if they publish anything at all about an incident, take care to see that only its unusual aspects are presented, suitably magnified and completely out of context, so that they appear doubly crazy.\* Which is why nothing is known of the progress of the South American wave, other than that there has been an incident in Brazil where it was reported that a man had seen a flying saucer that had landed, and that he saw little green men as well, but was dissatisfied with the newspaper report that announced it because the little men were *red*.<sup>5</sup>

## Another "message"

Nevertheless, while most people are busily "getting the message" of the first few paragraphs, the good doctor has a few more things to say in the remaining paragraphs of his opening conclusions and recommendations.

Dr. Condon is careful not to dismiss UFO reports out of hand, suggesting that any future new "clearly defined, specific proposal for study should be supported,"<sup>6</sup> although later adding that the present is not the time for the federal government to set up a major new research agency.

Thus UFOs, although of no apparent *scientific* value, are not denied; indeed, Dr. Condon carefully leaves the military forces to sort them out for themselves "... within the framework established for intelligence and surveillance operations" but *without* the continuance of Project Blue Book.

I suggest that there, in the "intelligence and surveillance operations", is precisely where UFOs always have been, and will continue to be accommodated.

## Banned in Mendoza

Let us now hark back to the case which so intrigued me last October: a "funny, ha ha!" case in which the witnesses suddenly did a swift about-turn and confessed that the whole thing was a hoax. I refer to casino cashiers Peccinetti and Villegas of Mendoza in Argentina,<sup>8</sup> and I would like readers to look once more at the small "box" alongside the introduction to the article. This carries an extract from a news item headed FLYING SAUCERS BANNED<sup>9</sup> in which it is stated that "... the authorities have issued a communique that the spreading of saucer rumours is an offence penalised by law", and added that prison terms were contemplated for people indulging in spreading unwarranted fear. The authorities

\* This article was written and typeset before it was known that the *Sunday Express* would be publishing extracts from Robert Chapman's book *Unidentified Flying Objects*. While this is a welcome exception to an otherwise dreary rule, nothing serious has to date appeared *anywhere* relating to current important UFO events—C.B. (19.4.68).



Forced to recant: Fernand José Villegas (left) and Juan Carlos Peccinetti



Alleged humanoid calligraphy on the ancient Villegas Chevrolet calls for intense study

quoted were those of Mendoza Province, so it is small wonder that UFO contact claimants Peccinetti and Villegas felt obliged to recant.

### Recapitulation

Briefly, these two gentlemen were the ones who claimed that their veteran car had been stopped on the calle Nequén in Mendoza city, at a place where they encountered a landed object and its "crew". The crew had shown them a TV-like documentary with a moral, while another of their number had etched crude hieroglyphs all over the precious car. Thereafter the witnesses had their fingers pricked before the creatures returned as if along a beam of light to their "machine".

There was something about that case that I found fascinating, in spite of the recantations, and I am now doubly glad that I wrote it up, and published it.

### Softly softly . . .

The effects of the Condon Report, as well as the threats of legal action and police repression, are such that people begin to tread warily. So it was not surprising when one of my many trusted correspondents in Argentina sent me a follow-up to the Peccinetti and Villegas case, and it came with a request for anonymity both for the individuals concerned and for the writer of the letter.

The sequel to the Mendoza story

is as follows: a builder working at the house of the niece of my correspondent (in a big city in mid-Argentina) told the young lady and her husband that he had visited Mendoza earlier this year. While there he had learned from a nurse at the hospital where Peccinetti and Villegas had been admitted, that doctors and psychiatrists had found the two casino workers to be completely sane and rational. While in Mendoza the builder had gone, out of curiosity, to see the landing site. He said: "There was a foreign car there, with foreign-speaking people measuring the place, and nobody was allowed to get close". The police were everywhere, he added, and he believed the foreigners were Americans.

An "intelligence and surveillance operation" in progress? Softly softly catchee monkey? Possibly; which prompts me to observe that "someone" somewhere still cares. That same someone who dreamed up the Colorado Project—headed by the leopard guaranteed not to change his spots<sup>10</sup>—to divert or discourage public interest? To dampen down that interest with a big, expensive wet blanket? It could be so.

### Remember Chascomús

That "someone" could be the same "someone" who was so interested in the car of the "Vidals" which disappeared with its owners near Chascomús in Argentina. The car was being driven to Mar del

Plata where its owners were to attend a dinner party: other members of the party were driving the same route.<sup>11</sup>

Two days later the missing couple telephoned their distraught and puzzled friends from the Argentinian consulate in Mexico City. A large crowd of reporters met the "Vidals" when they stepped off the air liner from Mexico, and it was learned that they had been transported the 6,400 kms. in most peculiar circumstances (teleported?) after driving into a thick mist or fog on the Mar del Plata road. It was also learned that their car, the paintwork of which had been burnt as if with a blow torch, had been sent to the United States. However, even before the reluctant travellers returned to Buenos Aires, the clamps of silence were being put on the case, and nothing more has been heard about it other than that Vidal is not the true name of the principals.

### Closing thoughts

The way I read the situation is that without the world-wide reports from citizens there would be no subject to funnel into the secret realms of Intelligence: reports by service personnel alone would hardly be sufficient to keep it alive. So, although regulation JANAP 146 (liability to 10 years' imprisonment and \$10,000 fine for U.S. service personnel disclosing UFO information to "the" public) has not been revoked, and although Project Blue,

Book has had the Condon finger put on it (this "public relations" section of the U.S. Air Force failed in its debunking mission) I sense that interest in the subject will never be crushed out of hand because it is of vital interest to Intelligence. While that interest remains, however, we will have to expect occasional "wet blankets" like the Condon Report, solely to check the growth of public over-enthusiasm for the subject.

The Mendoza case gives a hint as to how those members of the public who report a UFO experience may well thereafter find themselves in a cleft stick. I can see this sort of thing posing as big a problem for interested Intelligence circles as it does for us, for they will have to tread very warily for fear of cutting off their supplies of information. As for us, we will find from now on that we will have to rely more and more on private information, and even rumour-type stories, to give us the initial leads we need. That, however, is one of the ways Intelligence works, so we should not be averse to its use.

It all boils down to the fact that we will have to keep ourselves informed, for with newspapers, radio and television looking for the most part for a laugh or a smirk, and with Intelligence agencies play-

Marks on the door of the car



ing hard to keep the ball in their own court,<sup>12</sup> it will be up to us to organise ourselves into news-relaying networks, channelling our findings into fact-recording media like FLYING SAUCER REVIEW. Only in this way, for the present, will the public be able to educate itself in these matters.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Editorial, *Taking Stock*, FSR, January/February 1967 (Vol. 13, No. 1).
- <sup>2</sup> Fuller, John G., *Flying Saucer Fiasco*, LOOK magazine, May 15, 1968.
- <sup>3</sup> *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects* (edited by D. S. Gillmor and published in paperback by Bantam Books), hereafter called the Condon Report. See Section I, *Conclusions and Recommendations* by Dr. Edward U. Condon.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial, *Getting the Message*, FSR, March/April 1969 (Vol. 15, No. 2).

<sup>5</sup> *The Sun* (and other newspapers) for 15.2.69. This case has been investigated and reported in very great detail by representatives in Brazil and will appear in a forthcoming issue of FSR.

<sup>6</sup> *Conclusions and Recommendations* (Condon Report), page 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Conclusions and Recommendations* (Condon Report), page 5.

<sup>8</sup> Bowen, Charles, *One Day in Mendoza*, FSR, November/December 1968 (Vol. 14, No. 6).

<sup>9</sup> *Buenos Aires Herald* issue for September 7, 1968. (Note that the alleged encounter took place on September 1.)

<sup>10</sup> See Editorial, *The Leopard's Spots*, FSR, May/June 1968 (Vol. 14, No. 3).

<sup>11</sup> Galindez, Oscar A., *Teleportation from Chascomús to Mexico*, FSR, September/October 1968 (Vol. 14, No. 5).

<sup>12</sup> It has been suggested that covert interest in the subject could spring from a hope to be the first to make contact with the alleged occupants of UFOs and so gain any possible political or military advantage.

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