

Company and continued his wide reading in scientific and cultural matters.

His insatiable intellectual curiosity led him to read Donald E. Keyhoe's *Flying Saucers from Outer Space* (1953), which he translated into Swedish in 1955. He began investigating reports personally, and following his retirement from the electrical company, he was able to devote more time to the subject. He disdained occult or religious approaches to the UFO question. UFOs, in his view, should fit into a "radical, left-wing socialistic and atheistic outlook—that is science above all," he wrote (Blomqvist, 1989). In 1958 he became the Swedish representative of the **Aerial Phenomena Research Organization**, then based in New Mexico.

His first book on UFOs was titled (in English translation) *The Flying Saucers: Documents and Theory* (1966), which was well-received by Swedish critics. By now Rehn was recognized within his country as the leading civilian authority on UFOs and was frequently quoted in the press. Three other books, *UFO! New Facts on the Flying Saucers* (1969), *UFOs Here and Now!* (1974), and *The Challenge of the UFO* (1976), followed; the last of these was a hard-hitting attack on the paranormalist school of ufology championed by Jacques Vallee and John A. Keel and popular in the 1970s. Rehn equated parapsychology with occultism, religion, and superstition. Ufology, he said, has a "thousand times more substance" than parapsychology.

Not long after his ninety-eighth birthday, Rehn was admitted to a Stockholm hospital with pneumonia. He died here on June 17, 1989. With his death, Hakan Blomqvist wrote, "an epoch in Swedish ufology comes to an end" (*ibid.*).

Sources:

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REINHOLD SCHMIDT CONTACT CLAIM

In early November 1957 a wave of UFO sightings hit the United States, beginning in Texas (*see Levelland Sightings*) and quickly spreading throughout the country. One of the most spectacular reports came from a 60-year-old grain buyer, Reinhold O. Schmidt of Bakersfield, California.

Late on the afternoon of the fifth, Schmidt showed up at the sheriff's office in Kearney, Nebraska. Pale and shaken, he asked to see a minister, then explained that he had just had an incredible experience. While driving along a sandy expanse near the Platte River, he saw a flash of light in the sky. When he went to investigate, he observed a blimp-shaped flying object resting on the ground. It was, he said, 100 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 14 feet high, and it caused his car engine to die when he got too close to it. He got out of the car and started toward the UFO, only to be hit by a beam of light which briefly paralyzed him. Two men came out of the craft and ushered him inside.

Inside he met the crew, four conventionally dressed men and two women who spoke "high German" to each other and German-accented English to him. After a brief conversation about the United States' space-satellite program, Schmidt was asked to leave, and the craft departed. On his way to Kearney, the full impact of the experience hit Schmidt, and he decided he had to talk with a man of the cloth. After calling on one who wasn't home, he went to the sheriff's office (Schmidt, 1959a, 1959b, 1963).

Accompanied by Deputy Sheriff Dave Drage and Police Chief Thurston Nelson, Schmidt returned to the site of the landing, where three sets of footprints—two meeting the first, then advancing together and suddenly disappearing—were visible in the sand. The investigators also found a greenish, grease-like substance where the UFO allegedly had come down ("Tells of Seeing," 1957).

Schmidt was held overnight in jail and grilled by skeptical police officers as well as two officers each from the Continental Air Defense Command and U.S. Army Intelligence. By morning authorities learned

that Schmidt had served time for embezzlement in the Nebraska penitentiary in 1938 and 1939. They also discovered an empty can of green motor oil not far from the "landing" site and another empty can of the same material in Schmidt's trunk. Schmidt refused to take a polygraph test ("The Kearney, Nebraska, 'Contact'," 1957).

On the evening of the sixth, two psychiatrists examined him and after two hours of questioning decided that he believed what he was saying and therefore was mentally ill ("Space Ship Visitor'," 1957). Within 24 hours he was placed in the Hastings State Hospital. He was released a few days later.

Within short order Schmidt was on the contactee circuit, lecturing in the company of fellow space communicant **Wayne S. Aho** and Chicago UFO enthusiast John Otto, who charged that all the apparent incriminating evidence had been planted as part of a government conspiracy to smear the contactee (Otto, 1958). Schmidt was now claiming additional contacts. The first of these occurred on February 5, 1958, when he saw a flying saucer land a few miles from Kearney and encountered "Mr. X," captain of the crew he had encountered in November. Schmidt was taken for a short ride, during which X and his traveling companions informed Schmidt they were from Saturn. One evening in April, after a lecture in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Schmidt went for a walk and spotted X and a space-woman in a black sports car. The three of them drove out into the country, and a saucer beamed them and the car inside. They talked for two hours.

Other contacts followed. On one occasion Schmidt was flown to the Arctic Circle. The ship plunged into the ocean and remained there for three hours, where Schmidt saw Russian submarines. In other adventures he went into space and to Egypt to learn the secrets of the Great Pyramid. Like all contactees Schmidt was given a mission. "Our space friends can show us the way to a new and wonderful world," he wrote, "but they said that it is up to us to bring it about. There is so much to be done, and due to the present crisis on earth which affects the welfare of all our people, not a moment should be wasted in applying the solutions to our problems which have been given us" (Schmidt, *op. cit.*).

On May 28, 1961, *Edge of Tomorrow*, an hour-long

film dramatization of the Schmidt story, premiered at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles to an audience of a thousand saucer fans. Produced and directed by Ron and June Ormond, the film was described by one viewer as a "hopelessly boring, technically inadequate, poorly photographed hodgepodge of inanities" (Broman, 1961).

Schmidt's career had peaked. Six months later, in October, Schmidt went on trial in Oakland, California, for grand theft. Alameda County prosecutors charged that he had bilked a widow, Eva Newcomb, out of \$5000. The money was to go into a worthless mining venture in Tulare County, where he claimed to have viewed quartz crystals from a spaceship. Schmidt further claimed, according to prosecutors (though Schmidt denied it), that these "free energy crystals" had healing powers. He acknowledged that he had collected over \$25,000 from elderly women but insisted he had not done so through "loving talk," as they charged. The jury saw *Edge of Tomorrow*, which Schmidt apparently thought would convince it of the authenticity of his contacts with Saturnians, but the prosecution countered this by summoning a young astronomer, Carl Sagan, to the stand. Sagan testified that Saturn could not possibly harbor human life.

On October 26, after a seven-day trial and four and a half hours of deliberation, a jury of seven men and five women convicted Schmidt. Subsequently Judge Donald K. Quayle sentenced him to one to 10 years in prison on two counts of grand theft. Schmidt's four years on the UFO stage had ended, and he slipped into obscurity.

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