

THE MYSTERY OF THE MORRO DO VINTEM

How did the men with the lead masks die?

by Charles Bowen

IT took the report of a landing—or near landing—of a UFO both to enliven and to complicate the scene when police enquiries into the seemingly senseless death of two young electronics enthusiasts on a hilltop near Rio de Janeiro, on August 17, 1966, had led to one dead end after another.

On the face of it the UFO report seemed to be a fairly good one: so good that the police wrapped a cloak of security around certain aspects of it. And from then on, the focal point of the investigations switched to a beach at Atafona in the State of Espírito Santo. There, on June 13, 1966, a violent explosion had occurred which rocked buildings as far as fifteen kilometres away. There was talk of mysterious experiments on the beach, and, shortly before that, in a garden in Campos where some unusual device was tested. Whatever the experiment at Atafona, there was certainly a vast explosion, and a ball of fire was seen by many. Indeed, local fishermen went so far as to say, in their uncomplicated way, that a flying saucer was seen to fall into the sea after the big bang.

Among those present both in the garden and on the beach were Miguel José Viana and Manuel Pereira da Cruz, the men who later were to die with strange masks of lead beside them on the Morro do Vintém hill at Niterói.

The clamps go on

The reported investigations were interesting, but a trifle confusing. From the mass of newspaper cuttings which poured into our office, it seemed that the Brazilian press and public were reeling from a surfeit of speculation.¹ Whenever a new line was tried, new 'revelations' came tumbling out. Then, as suddenly as it had all begun, so it ended. Unlike its apparent beginnings in the garden at Campos and on the beach at Atafona, it ended 'not with a bang but a whimper'.

Questions to our correspondents only elicited replies that the case had been killed, and that the security clamps were on. Why? Because it really was a genuine UFO case? That we may never know but here, for the record, are the main facts of this bizarre story.

Death visits a hilltop

FLYING SAUCER REVIEW carried a brief report of the case in the *World Round-Up* features of the November/December issue of 1966. Miguel Viana

(34) and Manuel da Cruz (32), both married and with young families, were highly regarded in the city of Campos where they lived. They had set out by bus for Niterói at 9.0 a.m. on Wednesday, August 17, having left word that they were off to Sao Paulo to buy a car and electronic equipment. They took with them a sum of money estimated at around three million Cruzeiros (Cr\$3,000,000).*

Their bus reached Niterói at about 2.0 p.m., and as it was raining, they purchased identical raincoats for Cr\$9,400. Their next visit was to a bar, where they bought a bottle of mineral water. They retained the receipt so that the refund on the empty bottle could be claimed. Then, at about 3.15 p.m. they set off on foot up the Morro do Vintém.

At about 5.0 p.m. a boy saw them sitting at a point high up on the hill, and, puzzled by what he had seen, returned to the spot next day. He saw the men lying on the ground, and, thinking they were asleep, he left the place. That was on the Thursday. On Saturday, August 20th, the same boy was out hunting birds on the hill when he was nauseated by a strong odour. He ran and told friends, who in turn told the police. The bodies of Miguel and Manuel were discovered, each neatly dressed in suits and new raincoats, and each with a strange leaden mask on the ground beside the head.

Also discovered were notes with simple electrical formulae, and other information as follows: "Sunday, one capsule after lunch; Wednesday, one capsule at bed-time", and "Be at the place arranged at 16.30. Take capsules at 18.30. After feeling the effects, protect half the face with lead masks. Await the agreed signal". Some days later it was discovered that the handwriting of the note was not that of either of the dead men (*O Cruzeiro*, September 9).

Puzzle

According to the Sao Paulo newspaper *Ultima Hora* of August 24, Miguel was found to have Cr\$157,000 in a plastic bag in his clothing, while Manuel had only Cr\$4,000 in his pockets.

Naturally enough, the first theory was that the

* The Brazilian Cruzeiro is greatly inflated, and at the time of writing, the exchange rate is Cr.\$6,165 to £1 Sterling. The men therefore had the equivalent of about £485 with them.



men had been attacked and robbed. A large number of Cruzeiros had disappeared, and there was no sign of any electrical equipment they might have purchased — indeed, reconstruction of their movements indicated that they could not have made any such purchase.

Autopsies revealed that there were no signs of violence of any kind on the bodies (which, however, had started to decompose by the time they were found), or of burning, and that no poisons were discovered in the internal organs. It was stated that there was no known cause for the cardiac failures.

Together with the theory of robbery, there were suggestions that possibly Miguel and Manuel had been engaged on a smuggling operation, for currency regulations make foreign electronic equipment difficult to come by in Brazil. There was also a hint that they might have been engaged in espionage, but when it was announced that they had not suffered any physical violence, theories about the cause of their simultaneous deaths began to move 'way out'. Skipping the more obvious idea that they could have over-dosed themselves with some alkaloid (the capsules), the authorities and the newspapers played up the hypothesis that the victims had been killed while conducting—with no great skill—an unusual electronic experiment. Another commentator suggested, a little sinisterly, that they had died at the time of the expected signal.

A great deal of head-scratching was rudely interrupted by the next development.

The UFO

The *Jornal do Brazil*, and other newspapers of August 25, startled everyone with the story of Senhora Gracinda Barbosa Coutinho da Sousa, a

society lady (social distinctions are very marked in Brazil) who stated that she had seen an unusual object flying over the Morro do Vintém on the evening of August 17.

In the *Jornal do Brazil*, Senhora de Sousa was described as a sensible, well-balanced lady, entirely reliable and very highly regarded in Fonseca where she lives. Her story was that she was driving along with three of her children when they saw an oval-shaped object, of an orangy colour, with a band of fire around its edges. The object was sending out rays in all directions, and was hanging over the top of the hill. She stopped the car, and with her children watched the object as it rose and fell vertically for some three or four minutes.

When she returned home, Senhora da Sousa told her husband about the sighting, and he straight away drove down to the observation point but saw nothing. A few days later when the story broke about the discovery of the bodies on the hill, Senhor da Sousa took steps to keep the news of the tragedy from his wife, and then went to inform the police.

The *Jornal do Brazil*, stated that certain other details not quoted in their report were given to the police by Senhora da Sousa when she was interviewed. These, it was added, were being kept secret by order of the Chief of Police.

The news that someone so prominent as Senhora da Sousa had 'taken the plunge' prompted several other people to telephone the police with confirmation of her sighting. Their reason for not coming forward earlier, it was stated, was that they thought the object was a flying saucer, and they preferred to keep quiet about that!

Another lead mask death

The mystery was heightened by the revelation that in 1962 another man, a TV technician named Hermes, had been found dead on the top of Morro do Cruzeiro near Neves. His corpse also had a lead mask lying beside it.

Speculation continued the outward-bound trend when the *Folha de São Paulo* of August 31 published an article in which a "Professor of Yoga" suggested that the men may have been trying to carry out a telepathic experiment with high-frequency thought waves. He explained that in experiments of this kind, alkaloids such as LSD-25, or Mescaline, are taken to step up mental alertness and the frequency of the brain (whatever that can mean).

Meanwhile, on August 27, a third man, a suspect, had moved into the limelight.

The Third Man

Elcio Gomes, a friend of Miguel Viana and Manuel da Cruz, was arrested for making contradictory statements. In the *Jornal do Brazil*, of

August 27, it was reported that Dona Neli Pereira da Cruz, Manuel's widow, had stated that she had been present when there was a quarrel between her husband and Elcio Gomes, described as an assistant of the dead men.

Once Gomes was under examination, there were many more statements. We learn that Miguel and Manuel, like Gomes, were "scientific spiritualists"; that in common with many other Brazilians they regularly attended seances; that they were members of a secret society with unknown aims, but apparently devoted to "spiritism". Another revelation was that almost all electronics specialists and enthusiasts in the district are spiritualists as well. Furthermore, it was told how Miguel and Manuel were hopeful of entering into communication with beings "on Mars"; that they collaborated in many strange "electronic" experiments; that they and Gomes had engaged in an experiment in Manuel's garden (this was confirmed by Manuel's father) when a device they had built had exploded violently. Above all, Gomes's story of the happenings on June 13, 1966, was made public.

The Atafona Beach explosion

It seems that with others, Gomes had gone down to Atafona beach on June 13, at the invitation of Miguel and Manuel. They had just arrived when an intensely luminous object came down over the shore. Five minutes later, when it began to rise, there was a blinding flash and an explosion which rocked the city of Campos, and buildings far beyond. When enquiries were made, local fisherfolk testified that they had seen a flying saucer fall into the sea.

At this stage, we begin to read in the reports that the Brazilian Naval and Air Force Intelligence services were taking an interest in both the deaths and the explosions. In the very last report we have on the case, appearing in *O Cruzeiro* of September 16, there was a story that the Navy's monitoring service had intercepted a strange conversation over the air between three radio hams on the evening of June 12. The station prefixes were CKJ-22 and CK-22, who were talking to CKJ-21. Details of the conversation were not disclosed, but investigations had shown that no such prefixes existed in the register of amateur radio transmitting stations in Brazil.

Two last words on the case were recorded in the same article. One was that the remnants of the lead from which the masks were made had been found in Miguel's workshop at his home. Also, a book on scientific spiritualism was found, with passages marked regarding masks, intense luminosity and accompanying spirits. The other was that Miguel's sister had disclosed that her brother

had told her, a day or two before the Atafona incident, that he would soon be carrying out an important mission but that it was a secret he could not disclose to anybody. He repeated the words a few days before he and Manuel were found dead on the Morro do Vintém.

From then onwards there has not been another whisper of the case in the Brazilian press.

Comment

Too many amateur Sherlock Holmeses have been trying to solve this case for me to wish to add my name to the list. It does appear, however, that theories of normal causes for the abnormal deaths have mostly been ruled out. It has also been established that Gomes and other friends had been in Campos, four hours' drive from Niterói, when Miguel and Manuel were climbing to their rendezvous with death. Again, I cannot comment on the strange experiments in which the pair took particular delight, apart from echoing a remark in *O Cruzeiro* to the effect that electronics and voodoo appear to be strange bedfellows. I will restrict myself, therefore, to a few words on that part of the case which is of particular interest to us—the reports of UFOs.

One possibility is that the men were killed by a close encounter with ball lightning, and that this was the phenomenon observed by Senhora da Sousa. However, Maxwell Cade has already quoted instances of some of the lethal effects of fireballs,² and surely the burning effects inflicted by such an apparently close encounter with the phenomenon would have been obvious to a pathologist, even after decomposition of the bodies had set in. Again, if the Atafona object was also ball lightning, then it would have been a startling coincidence for the two gentlemen in question to have had two such encounters in such a short time.

A correspondent has suggested that the device experimented with in the garden at Campos may, either by accident or design, have shot down a saucer at Atafona, and that the tragedy on the Morro de Vintém was an act of revenge; that Miguel and Manuel were tricked into making their visit to the top of the hill.

I suppose this last idea is no more "way out" than some of the other speculations which have been bandied about. After all, we have no idea of the nature of the forces that may have been invoked by the victims' dabbling with spiritism. And we must not forget that we still have no real clues as to whence the flying saucers or their occupants come, or to what extent they may have infiltrated among us.

Two things are certain. The first is that in Brazil there is a tremendous interest in spiritualism, that a great amount of spiritualistic healing takes place, and that amazing operations for the painless removal of diseased tissues and cancerous tumours are regularly performed by gifted mediums. It would seem that Brazil is a country where the paranormal is rapidly supplanting the normal. The second fact is that Brazil has far more than its fair share of UFO cases. It remains to be seen whether or not there is any connection between these two facts.

For the time being the clamps are on, but in Brazil things often have a habit of leaking out after a while. Maybe one of these days we will learn a lot more about this absorbing case.

NOTES

1. All newspaper reports were translated by Gordon Creighton. Reports consulted other than those mentioned in the article, *Folha de Sao Paulo* of 25.8.66; *Noticias Populares* of 27.8.66; *O Globo* of 29.8.66; *Ultima Hora* of 30.8.66; *O Dia* of 30.8.66.
2. C. Maxwell Cade: *UFOs and Electromagnetic Weapons*. FSR Vol. 12, No. 4 July/August 1966.

THE RUSSELL PHOTOGRAPHS

Further details

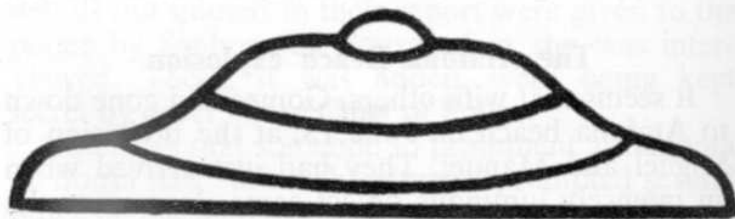
by R. H. B. Winder

The shape changes in the Russell photographs (see *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW* January-February, 1967) will attract most attention. The witness insists that the object as he saw it did not alter but simply changed its aspect as it moved. It dropped out of the sky and stopped with a suddenness that impressed him more than anything else. Then it descended further with slow falling-leaf motion, during which time he got his first two shots with the single convertor and 1/125 second exposures. He then left the window, hastily added the second convertor and set the exposure to 1/25 second. Back at the open window he saw the thing stand on edge to present its full circular plan to him, then it turned through 90° about a vertical axis until it was edge-on and started to move off to his right. His third exposure was obtained at that moment and is badly blurred either by the motion or by camera shake. The fourth shot was taken when it was well on its way and gives an excellent impression of a reflective flying machine seen through haze with the sun glinting on it. That shot was not included in the last issue because it is extremely difficult to reproduce, and I regret the block-maker has again been unsuccessful.

By the time Russell succeeded in re-setting his camera—he was pretty excited by now and thinks it took him about 1½ seconds—the thing had gone; almost vertically upwards.

The on-edge manoeuvre is reminiscent of the Melbourne photograph taken at 2.20 p.m. on 2nd April 1966 (*FLYING SAUCER REVIEW* July-August, 1966), in somewhat similar circumstances, but the Australian object had a pronounced hemispherical shape. The Russell pictures belong more properly to a growing class of silhouettes seen against diffusely illuminated backgrounds and revealing little detail. This class includes the Pratt and the Birch photographs (*FLYING SAUCER REVIEW* September-October, 1966). There is a hint of base illumination in the smudged third shot and a trace of brown or dark red in the colour of the object as seen in the original. Russell is uncertain about the colour because he had to look at a dark object against a bright background, but thinks it was maroon. In the first shot, heavily enlarged is this

issue, there are indications of a faint efflux streaming to the right from the base. The shape of the object in this shot bears a remarkable similarity to the shape of the object sketched by Police Constable Perks at Wilmslow in December 1965.



The enlargement of the second shot reveals some strange shadow effects. For instance, the shadowy "patch" which appears to slant downwards towards "7 o'clock" from a position just to the left of the object, has puzzled all who have seen the slides and the prints produced from them—not the least of these being Mr. Percy Hennell, who examined and processed the pictures on our behalf.

Why no radar report?

The two-mile visibility during the sighting locates the object at not more than that distance NNW of the suburb of Streatham Common, which could put it close to the eastern approaches to the main London Airport (Heathrow). We understand that it was not spotted on the radar there, but aircraft were at that time being brought in from the west; and in view of its completely non-aircraft-like manoeuvres and its short stay (1 or 2 minutes), it could quite easily have been missed by the operators, who have many conventional objects to watch carefully. Is it conceivable that the object's dizzying fall into view occurred at a moment when the sweep of the Airport radar beam was away to the West, and that the object then stopped and fluttered slowly downwards once it was tucked away in the "ground clutter" safe from the eyes of the operators?

The camera is a Zenith 3M single-lens (135 mm.) reflex, with a focalplane shutter moving from left to right as viewed in the pictures. The Palinar conver-