

THE ARICA ENCOUNTER

CHILEAN SOLDIER'S "TRIP INTO THE FOURTH DIMENSION"?

Gordon Creighton

ACCORDING to reports published in the press of Argentina and Chile, it appears that the first half of 1977 has been notable for a remarkable re-crudescence of UFO sightings over the southern part of the West Coast of South America, and one newspaper (*La Crónica*, Buenos Aires, May 23, 1977) noted that in fact June 1977 would see the thirtieth anniversary of the first UFO sightings over that particular continent.

Our Buenos Aires correspondent, Miss Jane Thomas (to whom I am vastly indebted not only for many pages of press extracts but also for English translations of them, which render the job of reduction and compilation far lighter and save me a great deal of time and effort) seems to feel a certain degree of doubt as to whether things "got going" in South America quite so soon as June 1947.

At first sight it seems likely that one might feel surprise and scepticism on that score, probably because so many folk imagine that June 1947 saw the start of the whole "UFO business" in the world (in the shape of the two American cases of Maury Island on June 21 and the Arnold sighting on June 24.) However many people also realise that such a view is quite incorrect. The U.S. Air Force had already had plenty of UFO reports from their own territory and also from overseas during 1946 and the first half of 1947. Leaving aside previous centuries, throughout the whole of World War II there had been a trickle of reports (not to mention the many wartime sightings of the smaller *foo fighters* and there had already been the big UFO flap over Scandinavia in 1946 with the sightings of the *ghost rockets* as these were termed at the time in the Scandinavian and British press.

So it may very likely be true that the UFO phenomenon was also well under way in South America by the summer of 1947, and on checking my files I see indeed that José Higgins'¹ alleged encounter with some lumbering great creatures from a landed disc at Baurú, Brazil, dates from July 23 of that year — only twenty-nine days after Kenneth Arnold's sighting.

The extraordinary affair which is the subject of the present report took place in the early hours of April 25, 1977, near Putre (Arica region) in the northern tip of Chile, some 2,130 kilometres from the Capital, Santiago.

Corporal Armando Valdés of the local Rancagua Regiment of the Chilean Army (this unit comes under the Huamachuco Brigade based at Arica) was out on a routine night inspection patrol with seven soldiers in the Andes, at a spot near Pampa Lluscuma, 150 kilometres north-east of Arica. Anyone who has experienced or read about this harsh, arid part of

the globe can imagine for himself just how chilly it would be at such a place on the bleak *puno* lands, at 4.00 o'clock in the morning and at an altitude of not less than 4,000 metres. The seven conscript soldiers with Valdés were named in the press as Humberto Rojas, Iván Robles, Germán Riquelmo, Raúl Salinas, Pedro Rosales, Juan Reyes, and Julio Rato. Five of them were huddled against a *pirca* (dry-stone wall) beside the fire. The other two men were on watch, a few metres distant.

At about 4.00 a.m. Rosales, who was one of the sentries, came running over to report the appearance of two large violet-coloured lights which had descended from the sky and one of which was still in sight, about 500 metres from them, very low, and bathing the whole area around in its vivid glow.

This light seemingly began to make for the party, so the corporal ordered his men to screen off the fire with blankets, presumably with the thought of avoiding detection. The great light was totally silent, and they could now see that it had "two red dots" on each side. After moving nearer to them, it began to move away again.

At this point Corporal Valdés got up and decided to go forward and investigate the light. He looked at his watch. It showed 4.15 a.m. As he explained later to the press, he stepped over the dry-stone wall and, calling upon God for protection, started walking towards the light, shouting as loudly as he could, challenging it, asking who or what it was, and bidding it depart. He was still only a matter of a few metres from the camp fire and his men, all of whom were watching him. And then suddenly he simply vanished before their eyes.

Corporal Valdés recalls nothing of what happened to him after that. He only knows that at about 4.30 a.m. he became aware that he was lying beside the fire again, but feeling very, very strange. Then he blacked out once more.

The mystery of the corporal's beard and wrist-watch

When the corporal came to his senses again after his second black-out, he was still totally incapable of giving any account of what had happened. He seems to have spent about fifteen minutes away from the men. As the men have testified, and as his superior officers have corroborated, Corporal Valdés had shaved but a short while before going out on the night patrol. His appearance was as it should be, and everything about him was in order.

He now had a beard which was the equivalent of five days' growth. (As Valdés himself emphasised later when talking to the newspapermen, this was

A Grand account
subsequently appeared in
Standard No 29 under the
title ECOMI de
Putre

all the more incredible, inasmuch as beards grow abnormally slowly up there on the high Andean plateaux.)

It was about 7.00 a.m. when the corporal came out of his second swoon. He promptly gave orders for the party to return to their unit to report on the events of the night.

And now came the second discovery. Not only had his wrist-watched stopped showing 4.30, the time of his experience with the light, but the calendar date indicator on the watch now showed not April 25 but April 30. It had advanced by five days.

Soon after leaving the scene of these events, Corporal Valdés and all his men were interviewed by a local gentleman, Professor Pedro Araneda of the settlement (largely Indian) of Putre. Professor Araneda, who seems to have been very knowledgeable on the subject of UFOs, took the precaution of tape-recording his interviews with the corporal and his men.

This is fortunate, because as soon as the patrol were back at their base and had reported the affair officially, Colonel Oscar Figueroa, Governor of Arica Province, at once issued an edict prohibiting the publication of anything about the case in the local papers unless it had first been submitted to his office for scrutiny. This action, the Governor explained, was taken "in order to avoid press speculations lacking a scientific basis."

Governor Figueroa also confiscated Professor Araneda's tape of the interviews with the corporal and his men, but this did not prevent the story leaking out into the press very rapidly, as the Professor had already managed to distribute parts of it to newsmen. (The first paper that got the story, *La Estrella*, published in Arica, was forced by the Governor to withdraw the whole transcript of what the corporal and his men had said.)

Meanwhile, away down south in Santiago, the Capital, a spokesman for the Chilean Ministry of Defence announced that the affair was being investigated intensively. Gradually the story penetrated the whole press of Chile and Argentina, and created a sensation. All the attempts to hush it up had failed.

The "Message"

According to the soldiers of the patrol, there was however yet one more astonishing thing to relate. When Corporal Valdés suddenly re-appeared among them — neither he nor they were able to explain quite how — he was murmuring over and over again,

and with difficulty, the words "You don't know who we are nor where we come from ... we will soon return."

In a statement given subsequently to the press by Corporal Valdés, he emphasised that he was most anxious to have the affair fully investigated. He told newsmen: "The events which I have related lay me open to being taken for mad. But I am not mad. And the soldiers who were there with me also witnessed the apparition. I want to recover the memory of those missing fifteen minutes, and I would even be prepared to submit myself to hypnosis in order to ascertain the facts and clear my mind of the uncertainty as to what took place."

However, on April 21, it was announced in the Argentine press (*La Crónica*, Buenos Aires) that a Chilean UFO investigation group at Temuco² had warned Corporal Valdés that it would be extremely dangerous for him to retrieve the details of his UFO experience by means of hypnosis, and in support of their argument they quoted the sad case of the young Argentinian truck driver Dionisio Llanca who had had an encounter with entities and had also been hypnotized, in the hospital at Bahía Blanca, by an investigation team of twelve doctors and psychiatrists, and who was now completely insane.

References

1. See Case No.1 of "The Humanoids in Latin America" in *The Humanoids* edited by Charles Bowen (Neville Spearman Ltd., 1969; also Henry Regnery Co., Chicago; more recently as a Futura paperback, 1977).
2. Centro de Investigaciones Espaciales, Temuco.

Newspapers consulted:

- Clarín* (Buenos Aires) May 20, 1977
La Crónica (Buenos Aires) May 19, 21, 23 and 24, 1977.
La Razon (Buenos Aires) May 19 and 20, 1977.
Sunday Express (London) May 26, 1977.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NEXT ISSUE OF FLYING SAUCER REVIEW

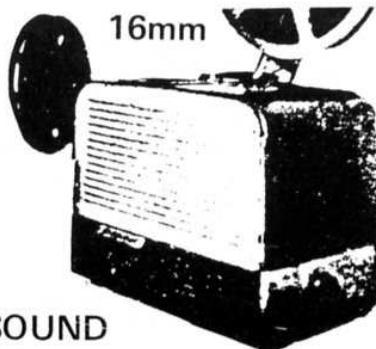
(Vol. 23, No. 6) . . .

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A "Flying Humanoid in Puerto Rico" Sebastion Robiou Lamarche

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SHAPE-CHANGING UFO AT LAINDON

Andrew Collins

Another report made during the British wave of 1976/77, and investigated by Mr. Collins, an independent researcher in S.E. England, for UFOIN. Submitted in June 1977, the report has been held over due to pressure of events.

NOTIFICATION of this sighting came at 14.00 hrs. on May 23, 1977, from P.C. Smith of Basildon Police, after he had received a telephone call from a Mr. Jackson of 108 Brendon, Lee Chapel North, Laindon, Essex, who reported that the boy next door, a Stephen Sambrook, had been badly frightened by an object the previous evening. The Police had logged the sighting with basic details but did not take any further action, other than to contact myself.

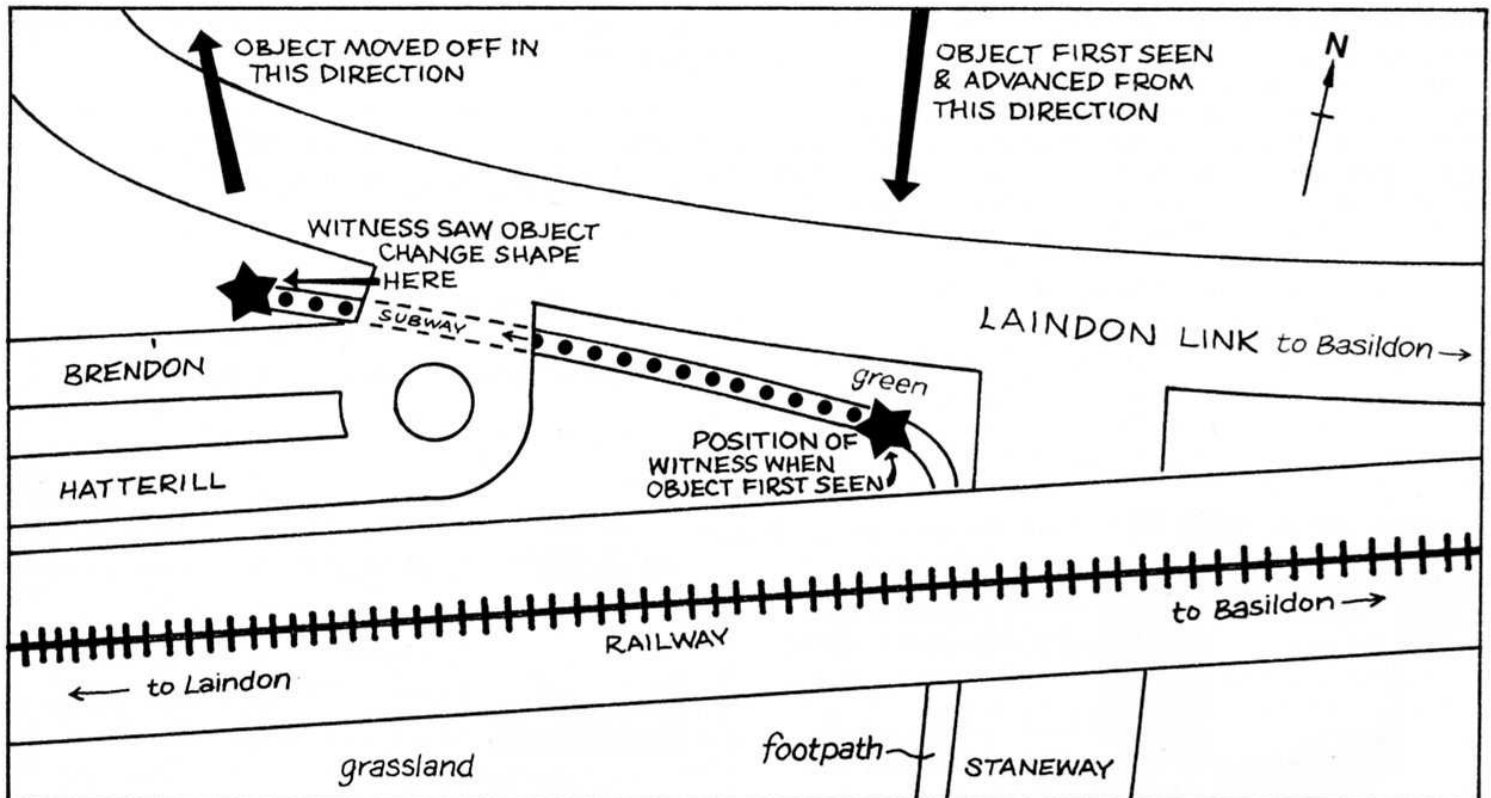
Account

The witness had been to see his girl friend at Westley Heights, and was on his way home walking along the Staneway Road. He carried on down almost to the end of Staneway until it had almost ended, and then cut across the small green by the footpath that eventually goes under Laindon Link road as a subway. The time was about 22.20 BST. Just then he caught sight of a large yellow sphere in the sky towards the north. It was moving to the right, and appeared to have a faint aura, also yellow in colour, surrounding its periphery. It moved slowly

and did not pulsate or make any noise, but suddenly it stopped, and appeared to remain stationary for a few seconds. Then it started to move upwards, slowly at first, then very fast, until it again stopped in a clear part of the sky.

The frightening experience came next, for the object shot straight towards the witness, and it was at this point that he lost sight of it as he passed through the 100 ft. subway. On reaching the other end of the subway he saw the object was within 200 ft. of him, and he could see that it was in fact spinning on its vertical axis. Suddenly a noise like "the air brakes of a lorry" was heard all around, and the object discontinued [sic] like "a light bulb being switched off." The noise lasted for about four seconds and after a few more seconds the object re-appeared a little to the left of where it had discontinued.

This time it appeared as a vertical cigar shape with a large deep red pulsating light at the top. The cigar was dark in colour, but when the red light was on, a silvery grey colour could be seen in its central area,



Position of witness during incident of May 22, 1977