

LANDING AT COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

A report of a remarkable case with physical, electrical and animal effects

Ted Phillips

HERE is a report of an interesting incident which features in my Missouri File (No. 409) and Physical Trace File (No. 568). The location of the sighting is a half-mile south-east of Columbia (population 37,000), Boone County, Missouri. The witnesses live in a mobile home outside the city limits of Columbia. It is situated at the end of a dead-end lane about 1,000 feet north of State Road WW. With the exception of the front yard, to the east, the home is surrounded by scattered trees. A house is located across the lane, to the east, and is occupied by an elderly lady who was asleep at the time of the observation.

The event took place from 12.30 a.m. to 1.05 a.m. The witnesses are James G. Richards, aged 41, an animal care technician at the University of Missouri, his wife Shirley, daughter, Vanea, aged 16, and son Jamie, aged 3.

Information was gathered during three visits to the home of the Richards family on July 9, 14 and 28, 1973. The bulk of the information was obtained from a taped interview on July 28, 1973, and part of this report will consist of direct quotes from that interview.

The incident

The event began as Vanea went into the kitchen to place a baby bottle in the refrigerator. The refrigerator is located by the north window of the trailer and that window was open at the time. Vanea heard a rather loud thrashing sound (it could be heard above the sound of a record player in the living room) in the direction of scattered trees some 80 feet north of the window. At this point she could see nothing in the dark wooded area. As she listened at the window the sound seemed to be moving around a large tree (tree A in Fig. 4). As the sound persisted she became rather frightened and called to her father to come to the window.

Mr. Richards and Jamie were sitting in the living room at this point. Mr. Richards stated that as it was late, he was tired and was slow in going to the window. Vanea ran to the screened porch at the front of the home and locked the outside screen door and the front door. By this time Mr. Richards had reached the window and was looking from the left side towards N.N.E. Vanea took up position on the right side of the window and was looking toward tree A.

As he watched, Mr. Richards noted two beams of light (Fig. 1) which were located at a point between the fence and the trees. The light beams

Our contributor is well-known as an investigator for the Midwest UFO network (MUFON) — we have published his catalogue of Missouri cases in *FSR Case Histories* Supp. 8, December 1971, and his investigation of the Delphos case in *FSR Case Histories* Supp. 9 — who specialises in landing trace cases. This report was the subject of a discussion between Dr. J. Allen Hynek and myself during the Northwestern University astronomer's August 1973 visit to the UK. Dr. Hynek, who had assisted in the investigation, kindly left the documents with me for publication.

EDITOR

would have been about 50 feet from the window. The beams were tapered, about four feet wide at the top, and tapering to about two feet wide at the ground. They were some five feet apart. The beams were bright and silver-white in colour. He could not see any form above or behind the beams.

Suddenly, the beams disappeared, faded out rapidly, and a bright oval form was seen just above the original position of the beams. Mr. Richards and Vanea estimated the glowing form to be 12 to 15 feet in diameter and very near the ground. The object was described as extremely bright (Mr. Richards had to turn his eyes away briefly) and silver-white in colour. The edges were fuzzy and no surface details were visible. The glow did not fade out or brighten during the observation.

The trees around the form, to the left and right, were quite visible in the glow. The area was "lit up bright as day." No sound could be heard other than the thrashing noise in the trees and grass. No other forms were seen. The witnesses noted that the trees were moving back and forth as though blown by a strong wind (see weather data below). Tree A showed a different motion: it was described by Vanea as a "tugging" motion. It seemed that something was pulling that one tree towards the ground. Shortly after the entire object was visible the thrashing noise ceased. The tugging motion on tree A was still evident. Mr. Richards and Vanea heard a loud cracking sound and the tugging motion stopped. It was this tree which was damaged, and the following morning, a large limb was found broken at a point 17 feet above the ground.

The area was now very quiet. Mr. Richards moved to the various windows around the trailer, and it was at this time that he noticed his dogs lying very still between the trailer and a shed nearby (to the west). He told me that normally, during the night, the dogs



Richards' trailer home, looking South from observation far point in field

barked at the various night animals in the area. It seemed very strange to him that his dogs were not barking at all this noise and at the bright lights.

Mr. Richards then went to the bedroom at the south end of the trailer to get his guns. He brought the guns to the kitchen, removed several shells from the cabinet, loaded the guns and placed them on a deep freeze by the north window. He joined Vanea at the window once again and noted that the object was still in the same position. The light from the glowing form illuminated trees as far away as 100 feet. At this close position (about 50 feet) the object was silver-white or aluminium in colour, no other colours being visible.

Mr. Richards said: "It was real, real bright at the centre, dull white at the edges, way beyond a normal light (such as an automobile headlight at the same distance) in brightness."

Of the brightness, Vanea said: "It was bright, but it didn't hurt my eyes."

After the object had remained in this close position for several minutes Mr. Richards decided to call for help. The object began moving away towards the north, passing below tree limbs through an open area some 20 feet wide. It moved parallel to the ground until it reached the edge of the field and then raised slightly and hovered some 200 feet from the house. At this point it was not as bright as they could see that it was silver-white at the centre with a blue band of light and an orange glow extending around the outer edge. It was still low enough to be

below a line of trees at the northern edge of the field. When it was at this far point "the colour...it was something to behold, I'm telling you, it was, really," said Mr. Richards.

The object moved about 10° to the west, stopped briefly, and moved back to its original position over the field. The motion was smooth and slow.

While the object was some distance from the trailer Richards dialled 113 for directory assistance, and the operator who took the call* later told me that Mr. Richards was very excited and seemed to be frightened as he described the event. He told her that he needed help and asked her to contact the police, the F.B.I. or anyone who could help him. After about one minute she told him that she would contact an exchange operator and have her call him back. As he talked with the directory assistance operator the house lights dimmed twice. He hung up and returned to the window. While Mr. Richards and Vanea were watching the object, the directory assistance operator contacted an exchange operator† and gave her the phone number. The lady immediately dialled the number; there was neither a "busy" signal, nor a ring, and in her opinion, the Richards line was dead. She tried dialling the number five times, pausing after the third or fourth attempt to contact the directory assistance operator to be sure she had the right number. After the fifth try (she stated that it would have taken perhaps three minutes to dial five times, waiting briefly after each dialling and contacting directory assistance, she did get through.

During this time Mr. Richards was concerned because no one had called back (in a situation such as this a minute or two could seem to be a very long time) so he picked up the receiver to call out again. Over *his* end of the line he could hear no sound or "busy" signal. He tried again and again to call out. Suddenly, as he recalls, the exchange operator was on the line saying: "Richards?" To which he answered: "Jefferson City?" (Actually, the operator was in Columbia, Missouri, and Mr. Richards could not be sure just why he thought it was Jefferson City on the line.)

Mr. Richards then described what had been happening (see interview with the exchange operator), and that he was frightened for his children. This operator *thought* (she could not be at all sure) that she contacted the Richards home at about 12.45 a.m. To her best recollection, he repeated his story over and over, pausing to ask Vanea if the thing was still there, and what it was doing. Both the exchange operator and her directory assistance colleague felt that Mr. Richards was sober and telling the truth.

After what seemed to be several minutes (she couldn't be sure of the time) the exchange operator contacted the Flight Service Station (Federal Aviation Administration) at the Columbia Regional Airport. The lady on duty+ at that time stated that Richards sounded sincere and sober. He seemed to be frightened as he described the event. After several minutes she told Mr. Richards that there had been another sighting on June 24 at Jefferson City. She then told him that she would contact the police for him and they hung up.

The object was again moving toward the trailer and Mr. Richards and his daughter became very frightened. He stated: "It came back and we had it, I'll tell you. We didn't know what to do, we both got kind of scared. I said, what's gonna happen? Something's gonna happen here. This cold feeling came over me; I got speechless at this time. I just had this cold feeling when it came back that second time. I

was just sure, like you almost feel that you were gonna get killed or something. Like death was at you, this was it. I didn't know what to do. I just froze. I just knew this was it and no one would come, no policemen. I was scared to go out the door — I wouldn't have gone outside, no way."

The object moved to a point among the trees near to its original position and remained there for an undetermined period of time. It suddenly moved away through the trees towards the field. It moved with a smooth slow motion and no sound. Mr. Richards noted that the trees did not move during the second close approach and there was no thrashing sound. As the object reached a point at the nearer edge of the field it rose slightly until it reached a point over the field some 200 feet away. It hovered and no motion could be seen. It was still below the tree line to the north. The orange and blue bands could be seen again, while it was silver-white at the centre. The glow seemed to shrink; even though it was getting smaller the orange and blue bands were visible until it just disappeared by growing smaller and smaller. It does not appear likely that it was growing smaller because it was moving away into the distance as no motion could be seen and it would have hit the trees to the north had it flown away. After the glow had faded out the object was not seen again.

At about 1.45 a.m. the police arrived. One young officer walked to the area with Mr. Richards and looked around briefly. He told Richards that the tracks looked like they were made by rabbits, Mr. Richards told him to forget the whole thing and he returned to the trailer, followed by the officer. He told the officer if he thought they were rabbit tracks he should forget the whole thing. It was very possible that the officer did not see the deep imprints. They did not see the broken limb at that time. Mr. Richards called the Flight Service Station after the object disappeared and the lady on duty stated that he seemed relieved that he could talk with someone about the event.

The three phases of the UFO phenomenon — based on a rough sketch by James Richard —

- # 1: Two beams of light
- # 2: Silver-white oval form, fuzzy edges
- # 3: Silver-white centre, surrounded by a blue band, orange glow extending around outer edge.

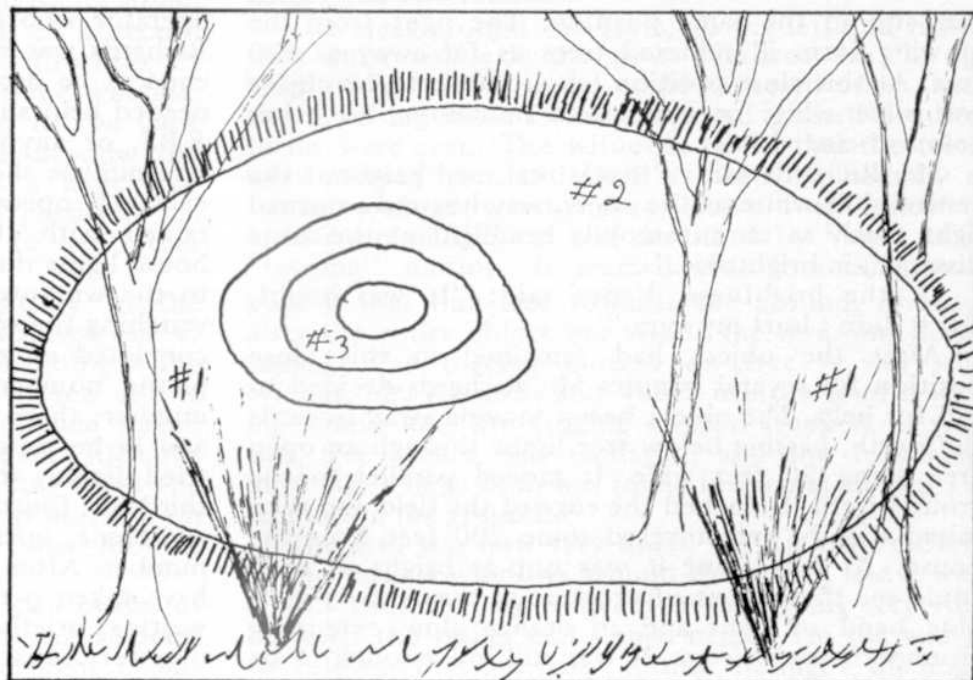




Fig. 2. "Far off"

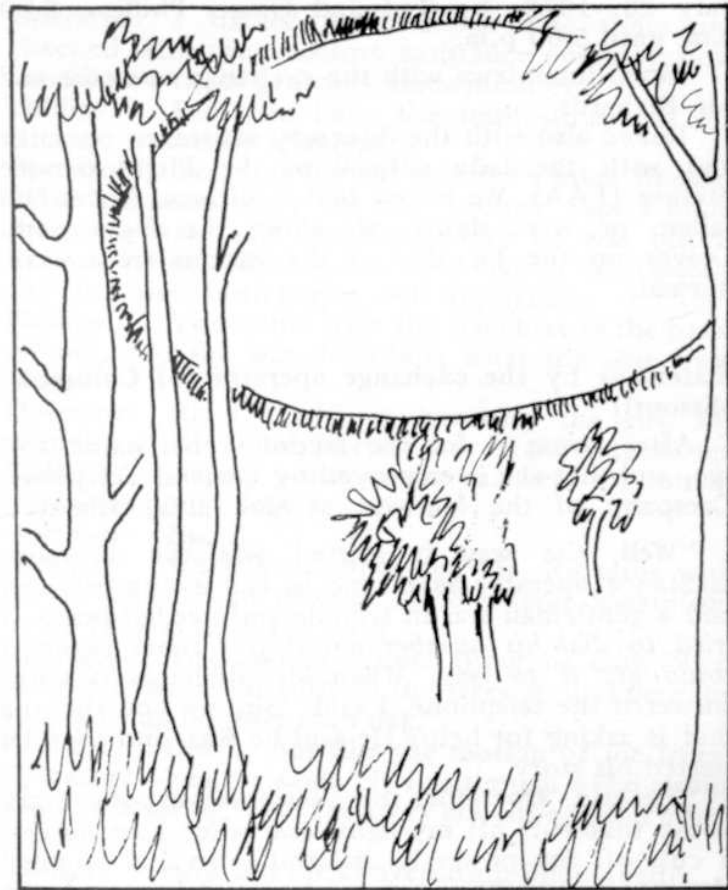


Fig. 3. "Close up"

Sketches, based on drawings by Vanea Richards (July 14, 1973), depicting how the object appeared to her

Investigations at the site

July 9, 1973: by Ted and Ginger Phillips, 9.00 a.m. until 12.00 noon.

We visited the site for a brief time en route for Chicago. As we were not in a position to spend a great deal of time in Columbia I obtained only brief details of the observation and spent most of the time obtaining measurements and taking photographs of the site. The imprints, and the damage to the trees, are located in an area of scattered trees north of the trailer (Fig. 4). There is a fence at 25 feet from the window, and the first imprint was found some 50.5 feet beyond the fence. This seemed to be a series of imprints rather than just one. The imprints at this point numbered four, and they were 0.5 feet by 0.4 feet with a depth of 0.2 to 0.3 feet.

This first set of imprints is 9.5 feet from a large broken tree limb. This limb is 0.4 feet in diameter and was still attached to the tree trunk. It appeared to have been twisted slightly and pulled towards the ground. The limb was broken at a point 16.5 feet above the ground. Two smaller limbs, each 0.1 feet in diameter, located on the larger limb, were broken off. A small limb 17.0 feet above the ground extending from the tree trunk at the point of the break, shows signs of being rubbed. All the breaks are fresh. Leaves in this area around the broken

limbs are dying, and there are signs of scorching on them. It was noted that three limbs on tree B had leaves which were turning brown. These leaves are 25 to 35 feet above the ground.

To the north of the first imprint (along the alleged flight path) we found a complex series of imprints. It is very hard to determine a pattern as the object moved through the area at least four times, coming in and going out. The most prominent imprints are shown on Fig. 5. Bob Gassaway, a reporter with the *Columbia Tribune*, visited the site on the day of the sighting. He told me that he tried to make a heel mark by one of the imprints and although he weighs over 300 pounds, he could insert his heel to a depth of only $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. As the imprints are generally 0.5 by 0.4 feet with a depth of 0.3 feet, we must assume a weight on each imprint of well over 300 pounds. One other limb, near imprint I, (Fig. 5.) had dead leaves. There were no marks of any kind in the field. The area was checked for radiation on June 28, but none was detected.

July 14, 1973: by Ted and Ginger Phillips, with Dr. J. Allen Hynek, 11.30 a.m. until 4.00 p.m.

Additional photographs of the site were taken. One change was noted: the leaves on the three limbs of tree B were now barren.

July 28, 1973: by Ted and Ginger Phillips, 9.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m.

Taped interviews with the exchange operator and Mr. Richards.

Talked also with the directory assistance operator and with the lady official of the Flight Service Station (FAA). We noted that additional leaves had fallen, or were dying, all along the flight path. Leaves on the far side of the various trees were normal.

Statement by the exchange operator (of Columbia, Missouri)

After giving — for the record — her name and age, and that she is employed by General Telephone Company of the Midwest at Columbia, Missouri:

“Well, the way it started was the directory assistance operator asked me to call a number, and said a gentleman was in trouble and needed help. I tried to dial his number about five times before I could get it to ring. When Mr. Richards (finally) answered the telephone, I said: ‘Sir, are you the one that is asking for help?’ He said he was, and then he started his story.

“He said, ‘Operator, there is something above my house that cuts off my lights and when I try to dial it cuts off my power to dial and I can dial no one.’ He continued, ‘It’s real bright in lights, and it’s blowing my trees like a strong wind, and there is no wind out there, yet my trees are bending.’

“And he went on: ‘I have a dog that I keep for the purpose of keeping people away and not to harm my children, and my dog is so frightened that he is laying as close to the ground as he can get and not making a sound...I have loaded my guns for protection, and my daughter is at the window watching. This has been going on for some time, and as it gets closer to the house my lights and telephone both go dead...I have tried to get help and there has been no one to help me. I am not frightened, only for my children. When this thing comes closer to the house I hear noises in the bottom, but the lights are so bright that I can’t see.’

“Then he turned to his daughter — I forget what her name was — and he asks: ‘Is it still there?’

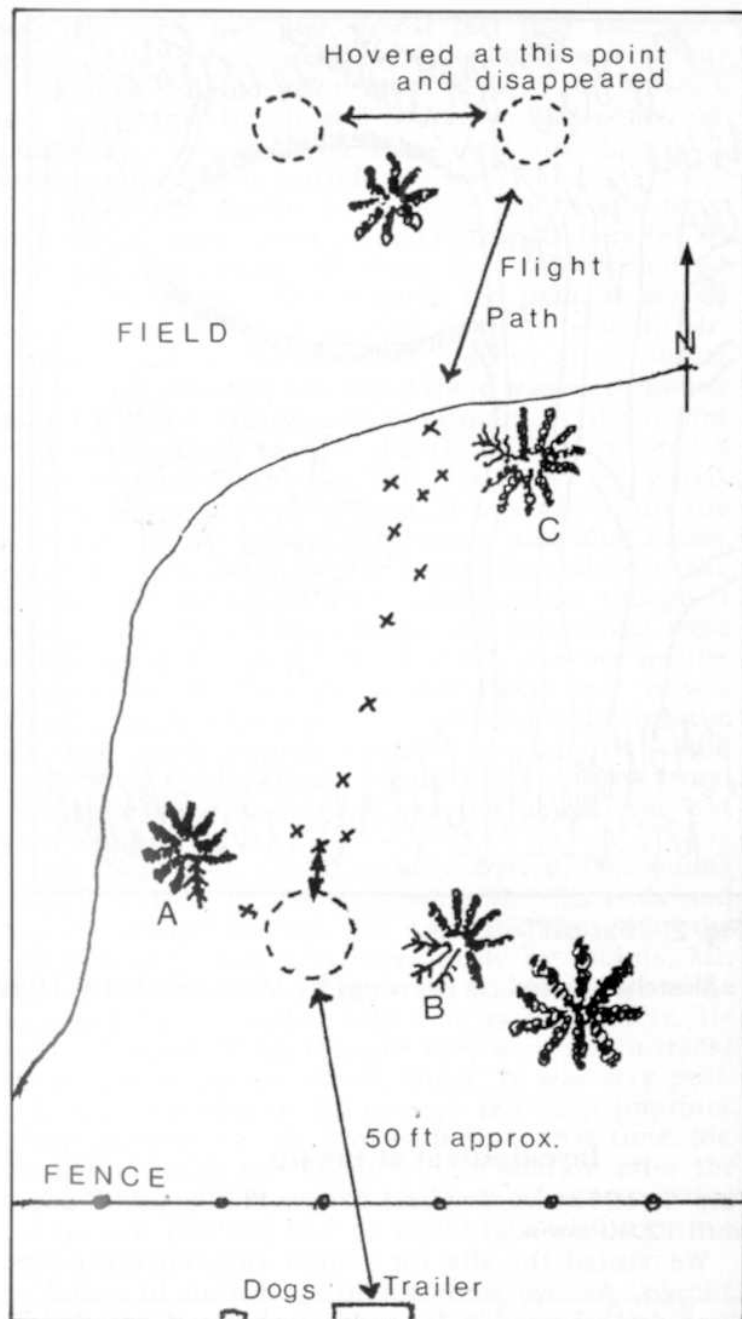
“She replies: ‘Yes, it’s still in the air.’

“‘What does it look like?’ he asks.

“‘It’s still got orange and bright lights, and various coloured lights, but it’s staying up high enough now that it isn’t cutting us off.’

“And he said: ‘Keep a watch while I talk,’ and he went on to explain how this had been going on for quite some time. He talked with me for about 15 minutes, repeating over and over how it would come down and go back up, and cut the electricity off, and then I told him after about 15 minutes that I would call the Flight Service Station for him, which I did.

“I said: ‘Mr. Richards, I cannot stay on the line with you, unless you request it, as it is the rule of the company that we have to cut out, and he said: ‘Would you please, because I’m afraid they will cut us off.’



Scale: 1 inch = 40'

Fig. 4.

Diagram showing flight path of the object and the relative positions of damaged trees and imprints in the ground

“He told the Flight Service lady practically the same thing that he told me.”

Phillips: Now who was that?

Operator: I have no idea what her name was.

Phillips: What time did you call Mr. Richards?

Operator: Well, I believe it was pretty close to 12.45 a.m. when I called him, and about 1.15 a.m. when he finished his conversation, to the best of my knowledge.

Phillips: Did you check a clock during this time so you can be sure of the time?

Operator: Well, yes, I have to get off duty at 1.00 a.m. and when 1.00 a.m. came I had called the

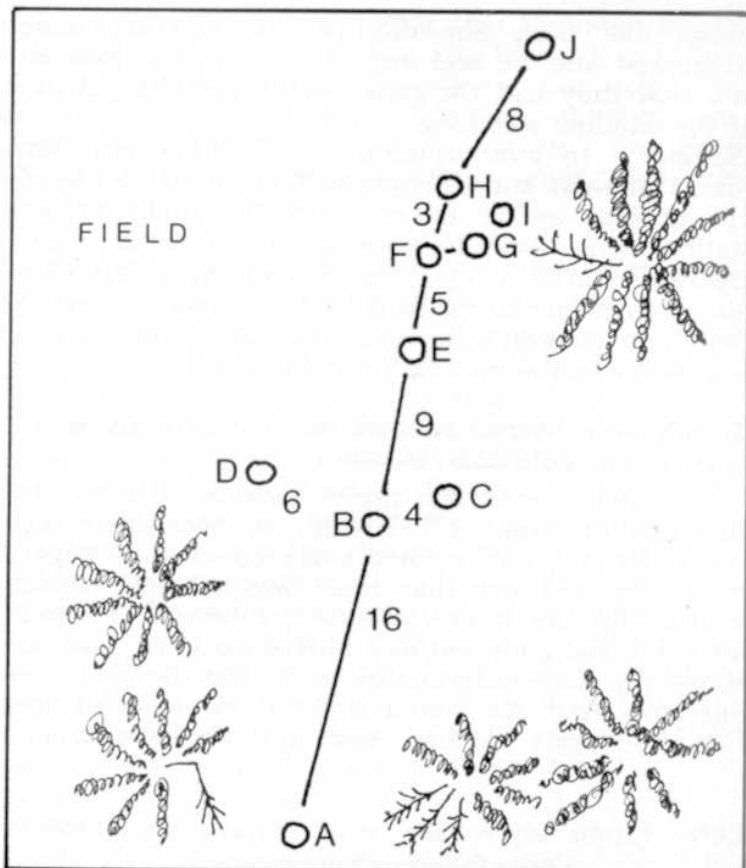


Fig. 5. Diagram to show the relative distances between the imprints (in feet)

Flight Service Station and I would not leave the call.

Phillips: Did the phone go dead at any time during this period?

Operator: No, it did not. The girl said, 'Daddy, while you're talking it seems like staying up above.' It didn't come back close.

Phillips: You didn't hear any unusual sound on the line?

Operator: No, I did not.

Phillips: You said that you were unable to reach Mr. Richards right away?

Operator: I made five attempts before I got his number to ring.

Phillips: Why couldn't you get through? Any idea?

Operator: Well, I didn't have any idea because at that time I didn't know what was happening, but I know I tried and I couldn't get it to ring and I said to the directory assistance operator: "Are you sure you gave me the right number?" She repeated it again and I said: "Yes, that's the number I'm dialling but I can't get through." Then, on the fifth attempt, it did go through.

Phillips: Normally, when you place a call such as this, if the line is "busy", you would get a signal.

Operator: You would get a "busy" signal.

Phillips: Well, would this, in your mind, indicate that the line may have been dead at that time?

Operator: Right, because that's the way it acted, no ring, no sound at all.

Phillips: How long would it take for you to dial that number five times?

Operator: I dialled the number five times and checked with the directory assistance operator; both would have taken probably three minutes.

Phillips: Did you have the impression that Mr. Richards was really frightened?

Operator: Yes, but for his children's sake. He said, "I'm frightened only for my children" but I know the man was, and I really believe he was sincere because he described it, and his daughter described it, and they were both pretty well frightened.

Phillips: You could hear the daughter in the background, and she was describing what the object was doing?

Operator: Right, and not knowing the girl, she sounded a little timid, like she was afraid to speak up.

Phillips: At any point, could you hear the sounds they were describing?

Operator: No.

Phillips: When you connected Mr. Richards with the F.A.A., did he give the same general description to the lady as he did to you?

Operator: Yes, and one other thing, he said: "It is so bright that even with all the trees around here the yard is lit up brighter than day."

Phillips: Did he describe the motion of the trees?

Operator: Yes, he said: "It's as though a real strong wind is blowing, and the trees are large and it's just bending them over."

Phillips: How did the conversation finally end?

Operator: The flight service lady told him "I will call the police for you." And Mr. Richards said: "That will be fine," and he hung up.

Phillips: While you talked with Mr. Richards did you note any change in his reaction to the situation?

Operator: No, but when he started his conversation he was so excited, he just didn't let up at all. He just kept talking and talking and really about all I could say was *yes* and *no*. Finally I told him I would connect him with somebody who might be able to help him.

Phillips: In your opinion, did you at any time feel that he had been drinking?

Operator: No sir, I sure did not.

Phillips: I'm sure you probably have had drinkers on the line...

Operator: Many.

Phillips: This man didn't sound like he had been drinking?

Operator: No, he sounded very sincere.

Phillips: So you feel that he was just trying to get help?

Operator: Right, he wanted to tell somebody, and of course I wasn't the one that could really help him, and that's the reason after he told me his story I figured he should be connected with the flight service station.

Phillips: How did the lady at the flight service station react to Richards's story?

Operator: She seemed very much interested and she also added at the end of his conversation that they had had a similar report from Jefferson City about three or four nights before. (Note: This was stated to have been an aerial sighting.)

Phillips: Did she ask him any questions?

Operator: Not too many, just where he lived and



things like that. She did ask him if they were frightened and he said no, except for the children, and that they had the guns loaded, and the girl was at the window watching.

Phillips: In your opinion, after talking with him for 15 minutes and listening to him for an additional 15 minutes as he talked with the flight service station, what would be your feelings about the man?

Operator: Well, I think the man was very sincere in his description as to what was happening, and I definitely do not believe the man was drinking, and I do think that he was really frightened.

Telephone conversation with the directory assistance operator, of Columbia, Missouri

This lady stated that she received a call from Mr. Richards at about 12.55 a.m., as best she could recall. He was very excited and seemed to be frightened. He told her that there was a bright object lighting up the trees close to the house, and that his lights had gone out as it moved close. He gave her about the same information as he did the exchange operator. And she stated that she talked with him for about one minute, and told him she would

Left: Limbs above site with leaves dying; many have fallen to the ground

Below: Broken limb on tree A. Note smaller limb to the right which has been rubbed



contact an operator, and that that operator would call him back. She said that Mr. Richards told her that he didn't want any publicity, just help. She stated that Mr. Richards, in her opinion, was "definitely sober and telling the truth." She then contacted the exchange operator, giving her the number.

Telephone conversation with the lady assistant at the flight service station, Columbia, Missouri.

This lady confirmed that she received the call placed for Mr. Richards by the exchange operator, but she had no way of knowing what time the conversation began. Richards described the object, trees bending, dogs frightened, etc. She stated that he seemed to be relieved by the fact that he could talk with someone; he did seem quite upset and frightened, but she felt that he had a great deal of self restraint considering the situation he was in. He seemed to be trying very hard to control his emotions and to remain as calm as possible. After listening to his story, she told him that there had been another report of a UFO a few evenings before from Jefferson City. Finally she told him that she would call the police. She checked her log at the Flight Service Station and the call terminated at 1.06 a.m. as stamped in the log. She stated that Mr. Richards seemed both sober and sincere. She believed that he

was describing what was to him a real event. She did not feel that he had been drinking.

Summary

The duration of the sighting was about 30 minutes. I feel that we should consider the fact that five or six witnesses to an automobile accident would give slightly different accounts of the event. That the times given by the operators differ does not trouble me in the least. It is my opinion that this is a perfectly normal state of affairs. We do have a definite time line from the F.A.A. Log. I was impressed with Mr. Richards' approach to the time line; he asked me several times to check with the operators as they might have taken the times down. He just could not estimate the times of the various movements of the object. He was frightened and found himself in a very bad situation in that he couldn't get help and didn't know what the object might do next. I was impressed by the fact that he would not make any wild guesses as to the times, as he suggested over and over that I contact the operators to confirm his story and the times involved. It is interesting to note that he told the operator he did *not* want any publicity, only help. He told the officer that he wanted no publicity. Like the operators, I believe that he was indeed sober at the time of

(Continued bottom of page 26)



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BOOK REVIEW

THE SPACECRAFT OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Luis Schönherr

Josef F. Blumrich: *Da Tat Sich Der Himmel Auf: Die Raumschiffe Des Propheten Ezechiel Und Ihre Bestätigung Durch Die Modernste Technik.* (Econ-Verlag, Düsseldorf and Vienna, 1973.)

THIS book, the English title of which would read: *The Heavens Opened: Ezekiel's 'Space-craft' confirmed by the most modern technology*, seems to me to be, amid the welter of speculations about possible extraterrestrial interventions in Biblical times, certainly quite a remarkable study, inasmuch as its Austrian-born author, Dr. Josef F. Blumrich, (Steyr, Oberösterreich, 1911), is today a NASA research engineer at Huntsville, Alabama, and he is therefore able to apply scientific and technological principles to Biblical texts. So far as I know, there is no English translation of this book yet, but I consider that in importance it ranks with, for example, the work by Rho Sigma entitled, *Research In Shackles*, which was reviewed in FSR for May/June 1973.

In his preface, Herr Blumrich admits that his original intention had been to disprove the speculations of Erich von Däniken to the effect that Ezekiel's visions were actually descriptions of "space-ships", but "seldom was a defeat so amply rewarded, so fascinating and so delightful."

According to Blumrich, the object seen on several occasions by Ezekiel was a combination of a nuclear rocket and a helicopter, and Blumrich proceeds to deduce its technological characteristics from the Biblical text. But this is only one-half of his approach, for he also checks all his deductions from that text in the light of his own knowledge as an engineer, and in the light of recent achievements in Space Technology. Thus, for example, Ezekiel's account of the central unit of the machine observed by him is compared by Blumrich to a semiconical ballistic

object for re-entry into the atmosphere of a planet, such as was proposed by R.A. Anderson of the Langley Research Centre in 1964.

Another of Blumrich's conclusions is that the extraterrestrials were not basically different from humans, and here again he is able to compare the deductions made from the Biblical text with an engineer's evaluation of the mechanical system of the human body.

There is also a chapter on the "mission" of the "space-craft" in question. Like so many observers and investigators of UFOs, Blumrich inevitably comes to the question: was the "contact" planned or did it occur by chance? He leaves both possibilities open, but nevertheless adds some very thought-provoking suggestions of his own.

One of Blumrich's chief concerns is that engineers shall be brought into the work of studying archaeological discoveries and interpreting ancient texts, and this is a very reasonable thesis. Unfortunately, as he himself admits, he did not have the aid of an expert on ancient languages on this book. He gives various reasons for this, but from the point of view of methodology it would unquestionably have been far better if he *had* had such help and had not done this book entirely on his own. The work might in that case have been more likely to attract that degree of attention from the academic world that it doubtless merits.

Finally, I would like to make a suggestion to Herr Blumrich. There exist, among the Jewish people, ample written and oral traditions about the Prophet Elijah, a predecessor of Ezekiel, who was "snatched up into Heaven by a whirlwind", while his servant observed "chariots and horses of fire." Expert research into the case of Elijah might be equally rewarding and might yield equally remarkable results.

LANDING AT COLUMBIA, MISSOURI (Continued from page 25)

the event. To suggest that he and his 16-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son were all drunk is ridiculous. I believe the man has described a very real event which is somewhat confirmed by the operators and the physical effects found at the site.

Weather conditions

The weather conditions at the time of the observation were provided by Don Semancik, Columbia Regional Weather Bureau on July 14, 1973 and are

for the time period at 0100, June 28, 1973. Sky: clear, visibility 20 miles +; Air Temperature: 66° F; Wind Speed: 5 knots at 290°.

Astronomical conditions

Negative. All bright celestial objects were in other regions of the sky as the observation was to the north. Moon — negative, direction and moon was near New Moon phase.

*†† Names (on file) withheld at their request.