

UFO – HELICOPTER CLOSE ENCOUNTER OVER OHIO

The Coyne Event of October 18, 1973: meteor or UFO?

Jennie Zeidman

THE “great autumn wave” of 1973 over the eastern United States produced several reports which have already become classics in the UFO literature. One of particular interest took place near Mansfield, Ohio, and involved an apparent “close encounter of the second kind”¹ between an Army Reserve helicopter and an unknown object. The very high Strangeness-Reliability rating² of this case and some controversy over its interpretation have prompted the Center for UFO Studies to investigate it in depth. A complete technical report will be published by the Center; meanwhile, I should like to review the facts of the case and comment specifically upon the hypothesis that the object was a meteor.

At 11.05 p.m. on October 18, 1973, a Bell Huey UH-1H helicopter of the U.S. Army Reserve, with a crew of four, was en route from Columbus to Cleveland, Ohio, a distance of 96 nautical miles (110.47 statute miles). The aircraft was on a heading of 030° at a barometric altitude of 2500 feet – approximately 1200 feet above the high rolling hills, woods and farmland or northeast Ohio. The night was totally clear and starry with unlimited visibility. The last quarter moon was just rising.

Sgt. John Healey, seated in the left-rear position of the helicopter, noticed a red light off to the west, moving south, which seemed brighter than an aircraft navigation light, but as it was not relevant traffic he did not mention it, and it is unknown whether this light had any relationship to the subsequent events.

Perhaps three or four minutes later, Sgt. Robert Janacek, the crew chief, sitting in the right-rear position, reported a red light on the south-eastern horizon, ninety degrees to their flight path. It resembled the obstruction light of a radio tower and appeared to be stationary. The light was kept under surveillance, and approximately 30 to 40 seconds later it appeared to start to converge on the helicopter at an airspeed estimated in excess of 600 knots. Captain (now Major) Lawrence Coyne, the aircraft commander (in the right-front seat) thought the light might be an F-100 fighter of the Ohio National Guard, based at nearby Mansfield airport. He abruptly took the controls from Lt. Arrigo Jezzi, who had been acting as co-pilot, and put the helicopter into a powered descent of 500 feet per minute. Radio contact was established with the Mansfield tower, with the following conversation taking place:

“Mansfield tower, this is Army helicopter 15444...”

“Go ahead, one-five-triple-four...” the tower acknowledged.

“Mansfield tower, do you have any high-performance aircraft in this area at 2500 feet?”

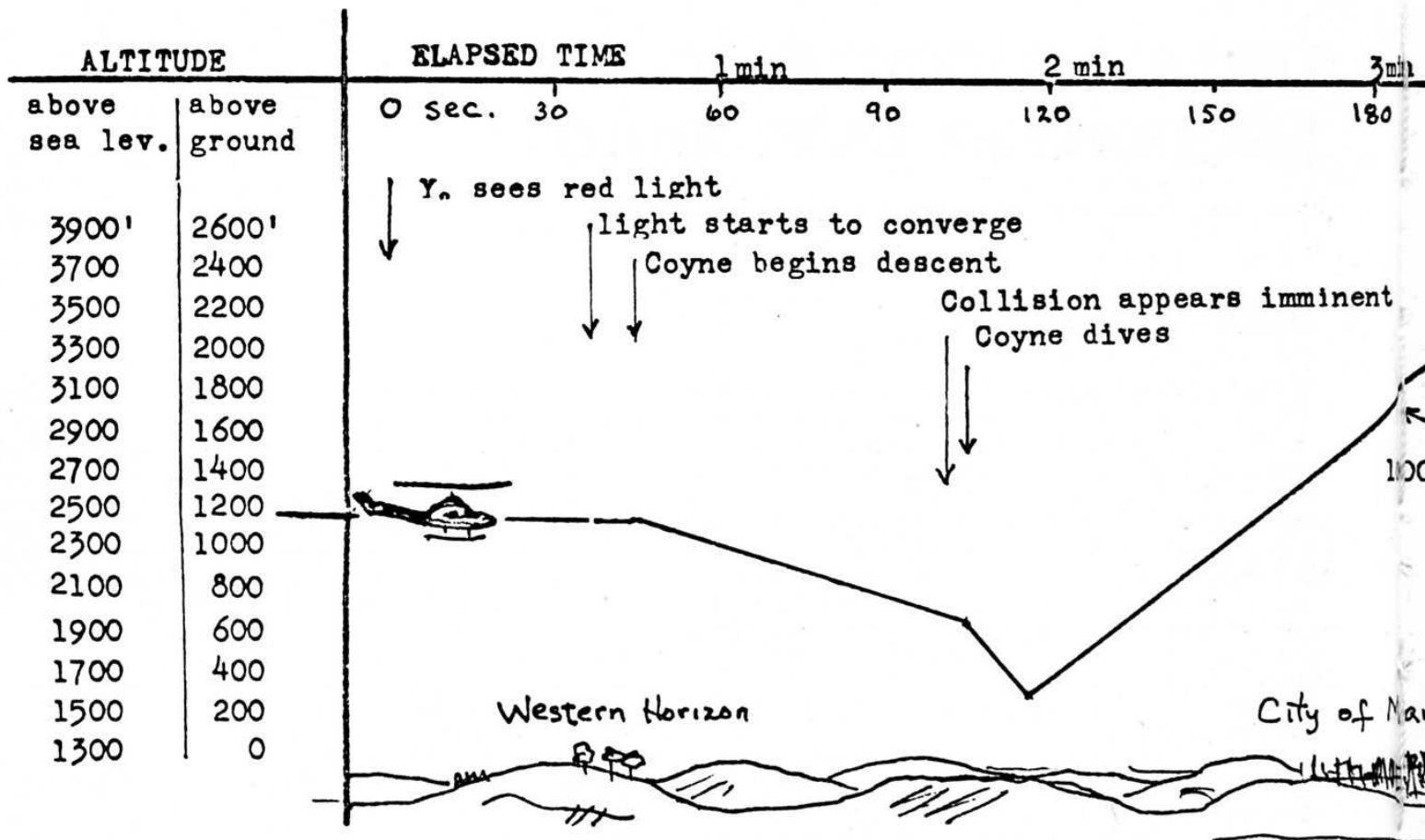
There was no response from the tower. The transmission was attempted several times, but to no avail. Then other nearby stations were tried, on both VHF and UHF channels, also without response. The radio equipment seemed to be functioning normally; the “channel tone” and “keying sound” were both heard, yet Coyne contends that no recording of these transmissions can be found on the control tower tapes. (It is standard procedure to record all tower/aircraft communications.)

The red light increased in intensity, assuming a brilliance described as that comparable to the landing light of a Boeing 727 aircraft at a distance of 500 feet. Coyne put the collective pitch in the full-down position and threw the cyclic forward, thereby increasing his rate of descent to 2000 f.p.m. The light maintained its radial bearing and a collision seemed imminent.

Suddenly the unknown object *halted* in its westward course and assumed a hovering relationship, about ten degrees above, and slightly to the right of the diving helicopter. A cigar-shaped, slightly domed, sharply delineated, grey-coloured structure was observed by three of the crew. (Jezzi reported from his oblique angle he saw only a red light.) The object, from Coyne’s perspective, filled the entire right-front windshield panel. The brilliant red light was clearly defined on the bow, and for the first time a white light at the stern and a green light aft and below were revealed. The reflection of the lights clearly illuminated the grey structure of the craft, which appeared smooth and featureless.

The green light swung around in the manner of a directional spotlight and *beamed* into the helicopter cockpit with seeming deliberation, casting a “pyramid-shaped” green beam upon the crew and their instruments. An undetermined time later (a few seconds?) the object moved off to the west, accelerating rapidly, the white light *increasing* in intensity as it receded. Lastly it made a decisive course change of 45° to the right, and disappeared over the north-west horizon.

In the moment before the object had “hovered,” Coyne had been in a powered autorotation, descending at 2000 f.p.m. The last altitude he noted 1700 m.s.l. (measured from sea level – approximately 500 feet above the ground ± 100 feet).



Coyne's eyes were adjusted to the dark, he could see the ground clearly, he was experienced in night low-level helicopter operations, and had emphasized during our several hours of taped discussions that he was not concerned at that moment with his precarious proximity to the ground.³

In the moment *after* the object moved off to the left, Coyne glanced at his instruments and read 3500 feet altitude (2300 feet above the ground) with a rate of climb of 1000 f.p.m. His left arm was outstretched with the collective still in the full-down position; the cyclic was still forward. In other words, the helicopter controls were in the position for a dive, yet the aircraft was in a 1000 f.p.m. climb! Coyne gingerly manipulated the "reversed" controls until he was able after a few seconds (during which the helicopter climbed yet another 300 feet) to bring the ship back under positive control. Cruising altitude of 2500 feet m.s.l. was re-established. Radio contact was easily achieved with the Canton-Akron tower, a few miles to the east, and the flight continued uneventfully to Cleveland. The crew had been totally unaware of the helicopter's climb or of any G-forces acting upon their bodies during the climb (but they had been acutely aware of the dive as the object approached). They had also been unaware of any noise or turbulence from the object, except for one "bump" after the unknown had already departed towards the west.

Independent reconstructions of the event (by Dr. Hynek and myself) from Janacek's first sighting of the red light until the object disappeared on

the north-west horizon, gives a most logical estimate of elapsed time of 5.5 minutes.

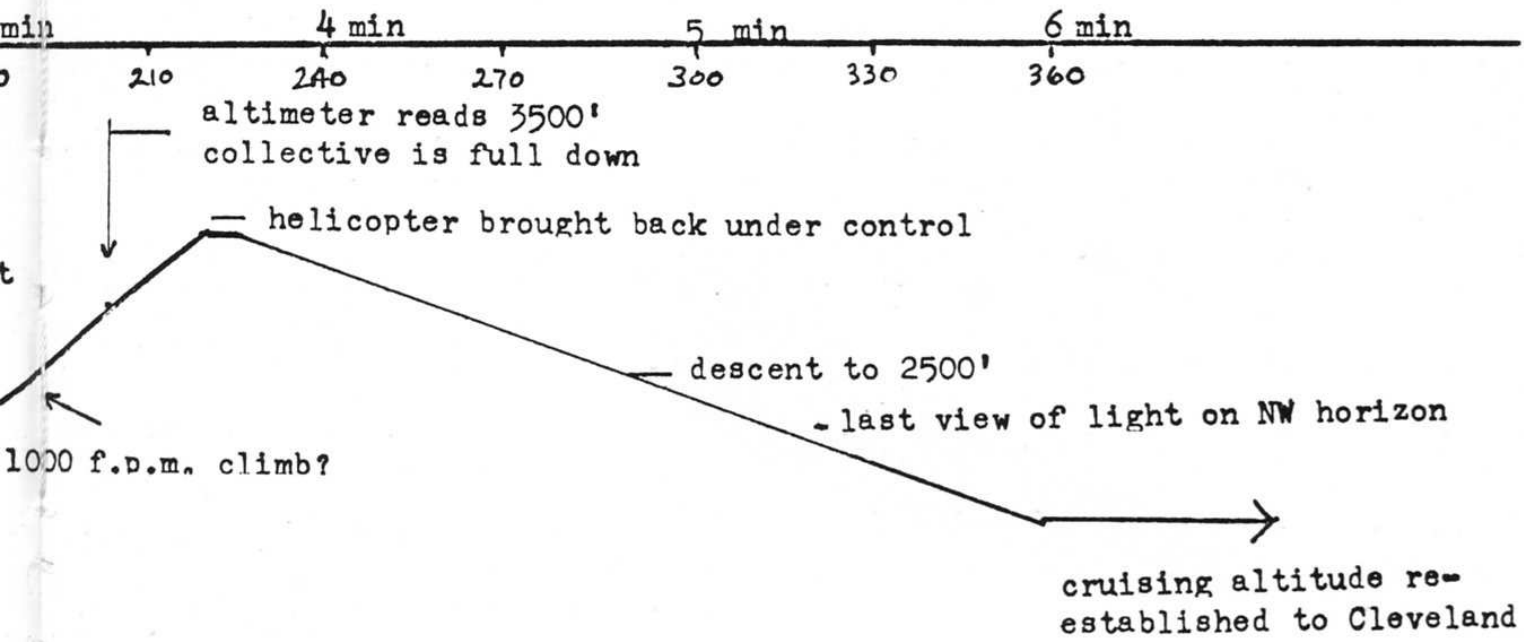
* * * * *

Philip Klass⁴ dismisses the object as a fireball of the Orionid meteor shower, and I should like to respond in detail to that hypothesis.

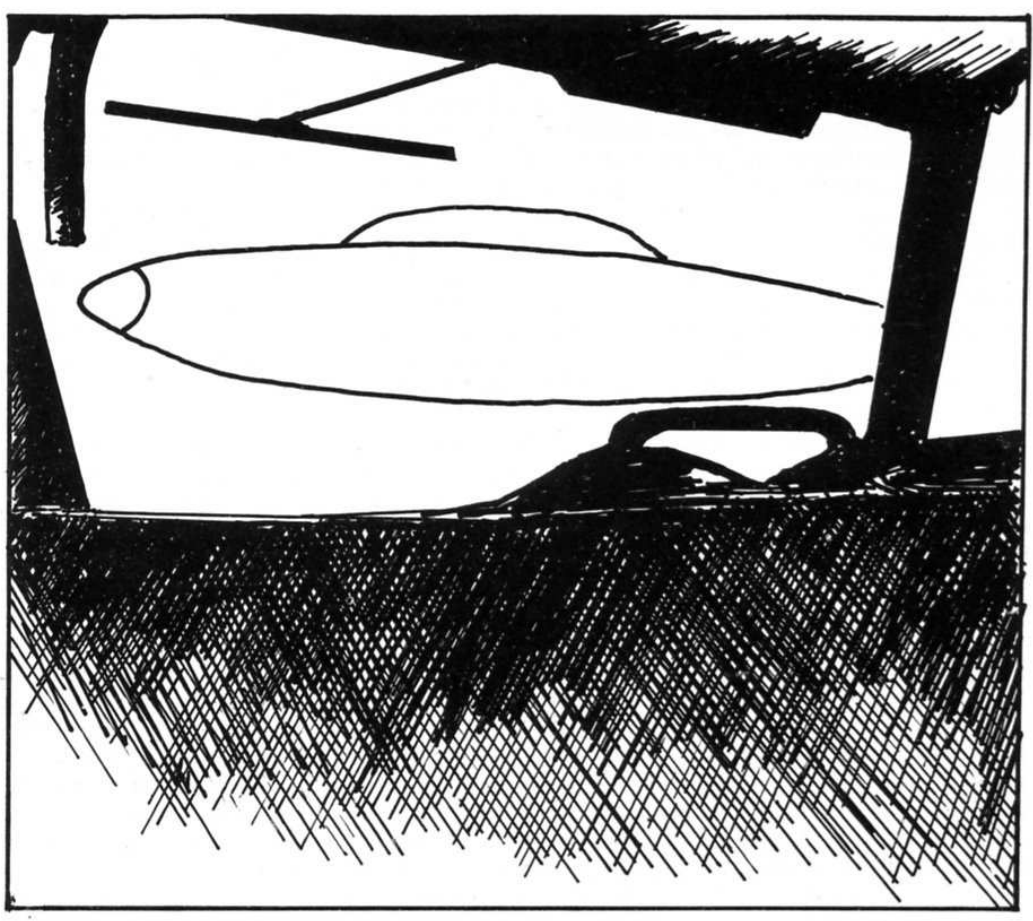
Most obviously against the meteor theory is, of course, the duration of the event. From any astronomy textbook one easily verifies what one has realized from childhood: once a meteor has "tasted" the earth's atmosphere, its fiery flight can endure for only a few seconds. Average shower meteors are visible for less than two seconds; fireballs and bolides rarely last more than ten seconds.⁵ The Orionids (known to be debris from Halley's comet) are a relatively minor meteor shower which does not produce fireballs at all.

Every visible meteor produces a train of excited and ionized atoms⁶ (indeed, it is the train one sees, not the meteor itself) and there is ample photographic evidence⁷ of trains which have persisted, twisting and undulating for half-an-hour or more, before dispersing into the upper atmosphere. However, meteor trains are diffuse and luminescent, and bear no resemblance to opaque objects which blot out the background stars and have a precisely delineated structure.

Meteors "ignite" and become visible at altitudes from 100 to 80 km. For an observer essentially at sea level, an object at 80 km. could theoretically



The object as it appeared in the front front windshield panel





Hovering relationship at closest approach to the helicopter

be visible over a path 720 km. in radius. The Orionids are characterized by swift streaks, persistent trains, and velocities of 66 km/sec, and *theoretically* could travel from horizon to horizon, passing through the zenith, in 22 seconds. A sporadic meteor traveling at the average meteor velocity of 40 km/sec could traverse the entire sky in about 36 seconds, and an extremely slow fireball with a velocity of 12 km/sec (characteristic of pre-midnight meteors, when they are "catching up" to the earth and their velocity must be subtracted from the earth's orbital velocity of 30 km/sec) could *theoretically* have an upper limit of 110 seconds.⁸

But these figures could rarely, if ever, obtain. They are all based on the extreme assumptions that a meteor (not the train) could maintain a horizontal path (relative to the observer) or alternately, could maintain its altitude of entry, continuously skimming the top of the atmosphere for upwards of 2000 km. Empirical evidence indicates that these phenomena do not occur. Meteors are not observed to travel 180° from horizon to horizon. Faint (shower) meteors have a usual path length of about 60 km; bright meteors may have a path length of 300 km,⁹ but in fact, to be visible, they must be within 150 to 200 km of the observer.¹⁰ Angular velocities average about 20° per second;¹¹ thus a meteor, if it could keep itself "alive," on the average could traverse the entire sky in a mere nine seconds.

If an object moves at a generally constant rate from one extreme side of an observer to the other extreme side, its apparent motion will be most rapid when it passes directly in front of (and is closest to) the observer. The Mansfield UFO, after approaching the helicopter with the apparent speed of a jet interceptor, suddenly *decelerated* and assumed a

hovering relationship at its closest point in front of the helicopter — the position where, had it been a meteor moving across the line of sight, it would have appeared to be moving fastest.

Meteors do not make decisive course changes. The course change of the object was not a misinterpretation of the helicopter crew of a change in their own machine — the aircraft maintained a bearing of 030° throughout the event.

It has been suggested¹² that the UFO would have passed *over* the diving helicopter, had the two been in close proximity, whereas a meteor would have presented the reported relationship of always being essentially ahead of the helicopter. Granted that an object at great distance would appear to cross in front of the helicopter, and granted that an object on a "frozen" heading and altitude would have passed over, and perhaps even behind the aircraft. If the UFO were intelligently controlled, however (a speculation only), it presumably might also have the capability of continuously adjusting its flight path so as to maintain any desired relationship with the helicopter.

Klass is encouraged by the facts that the Orionids have a characteristically green colour,¹³ that Coyne's crew reported that a green light flooded the cockpit, and that the upper sections of the helicopter's windshields have an anti-glare green tint. In fact, the UFO had three distinct and separate areas of colour: red, green and white. All three colours were seen through the clear portions of the windshield. (Sitting in the helicopter, I noted that the green plexiglass is so lightly tinted it is, in any event, inconsequential.) The red light was by far the predominant one reported by the crew, both in intensity and in the percentage of the total event-time it was observed.¹⁴

If the object were indeed a bright fireball of such extra-ordinary properties, one wonders why it was not reported by other observers, on the ground or in the air. Surely it would have been a spectacular sight, leisurely crossing the highly populated areas

of Pennsylvania, Ohio, the Great Lakes shores, and Michigan. No fireballs were reported at the time of the Coyne incident; however several other UFO events were reported near Mansfield that evening, and most significantly, there is now known to be a family of four, and another lone person who, apparently, actually witnessed the Coyne event. A small group of very able technical people, the Civil Commission on Aerial Phenomena, based in Columbus, Ohio and directed by Mr. Warren Nicholson, must be commended for their diligence in pursuing this aspect of the investigation.

We have established that the reported events represent an uninterrupted observational time of approximately 5.5 minutes. Even if we totally distrust this figure, and arbitrarily condemn it as being overestimated by a factor of two, we still obtain a time of 165 seconds — still much too long for a fireball, even under the most favourable assumptions used to estimate meteor flight durations.

It is noteworthy that the crew estimated the object's speed at "in excess of 600 kts," as it approached the helicopter, and that when seen, they estimated it to be "on the horizon," a distance they equated with 15 miles. An object travelling at a speed of 600 kts would cover a distance of 15 miles in 78 seconds — a time which corresponds very nicely with the elapsed-time reconstruction done by the crew. The point is, of course, that they are all quite experienced observers (Coyne had had, at the time, 19 years in military aircraft) and their estimates of time deserve high credibility.

May I suggest that the reader now takes his outstretched arm and slowly describes an arc of nearly 180° across the sky, from horizon to horizon, passing at an elevation of about ten degrees in front of him, and making sure that this exercise takes five-and-one-half minutes to accomplish. Upon completion, and possessed with an abundance of well-established textbook data on the behaviour of meteors (and a rather tired arm) the utter folly of the meteor hypothesis should immediately become evident.

Finally, I should add that Coyne and Klass have never met. Coyne informed me that Klass's contact with the crew consisted of three long-distance calls to him (Coyne) and a TV "talk-show" conversation with Healey. No mention is made by Klass in Chapter

29 of *UFOs Explained* of the total duration of the UFO observation — a most crucial part, but one which seems to have eluded Klass and his co-workers completely.

Let me close now with a quote from Mr. Klass himself:¹⁵

"Those of us who investigate famous UFO cases that Hynek finds 'unexplainable' invariably find prosaic, terrestrial explanations after *rigorous* (sic) investigation."

Res ipsa loquitur.

References

1. Where the UFO appears to be within 500 feet of the observer and there appears to be physical interaction or physical traces associated with the event. See Hynek, J.A., *The UFO Experience*, 1972, Chicago, H. Regnery & Co. [Also Abelard Schuman Ltd., London.]
2. Strangeness of the reported event and reliability/credibility of the witness. *Op. cit.*
3. All very well; but had his present rate of descent been maintained, he would have (as pointed out by P. Klass) abruptly encountered the ground in only 12 seconds more.
4. Klass, P.J., *UFOs Explained*, 1974, N.Y., Random House, Chapter 29.
5. Krinov, E.L., *Principles of Meteoritics* (translation from the Russian), Pergamon Press, N.Y., 1960, p.64.
6. McKinley, D.W.R., *Meteor Science and Engineering*, 1961, N.Y., McGraw Hill Co., p. 137.
7. *The Flammarion Book of Astronomy*, 1964, N.Y., Simon & Schuster, p. 382-383.
8. I am indebted to Dr. Wm. M. Protheroe, Professor of Astronomy, the Ohio State University, for supplying the formulae and checking my work on the flight times of meteors.
9. *The Flammarion Book of Astronomy*, p. 381.
10. Abell, Geo. O., *Exploration of the Universe*, 3rd Ed., 1975, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, p. 363.
11. Olivier, Charles P., *Meteors*, 1925, Baltimore, Williams & Co.
12. Klass, P.J., in correspondence with Stanton Friedman, February 4, 1976.
13. I was unable to find any source for the colour of Orionids; Klass cites Dr. David Meisel, director of the American Meteor Society, as his source.
14. Klass attributes the red colour to the ionized gases flowing from the meteor head.
15. In a letter to the Editor of *People*, magazine, Vol. 6, No. 10, September 6, 1976.

UFO seen from Trident (continued from p. 4)

no clouds in the sky, and these were ten times the size of any aircraft returns that you ever get on any aircraft Radar. Very large, and there appeared to be a cluster of them. We turned the lights down and started to look for them, but we couldn't see anything, and yet we had this completely positive 'ident.' It was about 10° off to the left and it went down the left hand side as we passed. We went within seven miles of it and never saw a thing. Any doubts that we had about these things having solid middles well...that confirmed it, that sold us at that stage."

Second pilot S.S. added:—

"We took off again and about two hours later we

passed the same spot, we returned on the same track, the skipper had turned the Radar on just to see if anything was there and we got these very strong returns (Blips) at about twenty miles away, about 5° up from our position. You can get this information ref. distance and inclination from the airborne Radar.

"The returns appeared stationary and we closed with them as we flew along. We came down their Port side and passed about six or seven miles away from them. They were very strong returns, and if they had been aircraft we probably would have seen 'nav' lights as it was a very clear night. They could have been military for they don't always carry 'nav' lights, but they were very strong returns and it is surprising that we didn't see anything."

ANOTHER TELEPORTATION IN BRAZIL

ACCORDING to *O Dia* of July 22, 1976, a 33-year-old man named Sidney Walker, married and father of a family, residing at rua Azevedo Sodré 97, Bairro Gradim, São Gonçalo, near Rio de Janeiro, stepped out of the house at 7.00 p.m. on June 14 to go to buy a packet of cigarettes at the nearby café-bar Itaúna, on the Praça (Square) Evaristo Ricamar in the suburb of Bairro Gradim. He came up to the counter and asked his friend the manager, Vasco de Freitas, for the cigarettes, and was duly served. Then he set out for his home again along the rua Washington Luís. He had left home wearing just the clothes on his back and, in his pockets, barely more than enough loose change to pay for the cigarettes.

It seems however that the café-owner noted that he had made a mistake over the change, for he hastened out after Sidney Walker and, arriving at the entrance to the café, he stood there watching the retreating form of his friend. And to his amazement he saw a UFO, and from it a beam of light directed down upon Sidney.

The café-owner was terrified by the sight, for he had already read about cases in which people had disappeared under precisely similar circumstances. So he rushed after Sidney calling to him to turn back, but almost immediately found himself "nailed to the spot" by a strange force, so that he was totally unable to move. All he could do was to stand there and watch as Sidney Walker turned out of sight into the Avenida Dr. Gradim. And it was evidently on that street that he vanished from the realm of men, though how this happened was only to be explained much later.

Sidney's family sat up until far into the night, waiting for him, and at last set out to look for him. The first place they visited was the Café-Bar Itaúna, where they found the proprietor, Vasco de Freitas, in a nervous, edgy state, and tight-lipped. For he was afraid to reveal what he had seen, and so confined himself simply to saying that Sidney Walker had indeed been there and bought a packet of cigarettes. "I haven't seen him since then. But why, what's the matter, has something happened?" he asked.

When they told him that Sidney had not returned home, the café proprietor was more worried than ever: he was terrified, still keeping to himself the awful secret that he dared not divulge. So, he simply continued to maintain that the missing man had been in his café, had bought a packet of cigarettes, and that was that.

The local police station was informed of Sidney's disappearance but all their efforts to locate him were unsuccessful. On learning this, his mother, Dona Lidia da Cunha Walker, had a stroke and was rushed to hospital. Sidney's brother, Edson, who is in the Brazilian Army, next tried to see

I am much indebted to Dr. Walter Buhler of the Brazilian Society for the Investigation of UFOs (SBEDV), Rio de Janeiro, for sending a collection of news reports covering a fresh case of teleportation in that country. These I have translated and two are summarized here to give as up-to-date a picture of the case as possible.

GORDON CREIGHTON

whether the Army could do anything about finding Sidney.

The days passed, and all attempts had proved fruitless. So Edson put an advert in the missing persons column in the newspaper *O Dia*, and it duly appeared on June 27. It read as follows:

SIDNEY WALKER, aged 33, married, of rua Azevedo Sodré 97, Bairro Gradim, Saõ Goncalo, has been missing since June 14 when he left his home saying he was going to buy cigarettes. He was wearing "Lee" denims, a long-sleeved striped pullover with polo collar, and black shoes.

Meanwhile other investigatory bodies, as well as the Police and Army, were also engaged in the search, but all in vain. Sidney's father, Ildefonso Walker, was plunged into despair, and the mother was still in hospital. Sidney's wife, Lidia, their son Adriano and the rest of the family were all distraught and anxious.

Finally . . . A letter

Written on July 8 and posted on the 12th, the letter reached them on the 14th. It was addressed to Sidney's mother, Dona Lidia da Cunha Walker. Brother Edson opened it and it read as follows:

Natal. Rio Grande do Norte,
July 8, 1976.

Dear Mother:

As I write these lines I am longing to see all the family again. Mum, I am up here in the North. Don't be worried about me, because I am O.K., thanks to God. How is dear little Adriano, and how is Lidia, how are they all? And is Dad well? And how is Grandma? I think a lot about her. And about Lidia, and Adriano, and brother Edson. Is Adriano still going to kindergarten? God bless you, Adriano, and make you happy. My son, one day you will understand all this and you will forgive your Dad. Lidia, keep up the payments to the Union, because it's very important for Adriano. I've got my union card with me, but you can do the necessary. Dad, look after all my tools carefully, won't you, because perhaps I'll