

## POST-SOVIET UFOLOGY: A VIEW FROM INSIDE

During the many years, before "perestroika", information on Soviet UFO sightings was for Western researchers a real gem, because of the high barriers that it had to overcome on its way to the West. These were the barriers of the dead silence of mass-media and the witnesses themselves, as well as the problems of translating and sending abroad unauthorized materials. Some Soviet amateur ufological groups began contacts with their Western colleagues as early as the 60-s, but these contacts remained for decades rather cautious. One could receive with gratitude free copies of American, English, or French UFO books and journals, but he would have thought twice before sending in return any description of a UFO sighting that had not been published in the "central press".

Of course, the feeble streamlet of the Soviet UFO data that did reach Western ufological organizations and periodicals<sup>1</sup> contained both reliable and not so reliable reports, being a usual mixture of obvious IFOs and quasi-UFOs with UFOs in the strict sense of the term. This was fully explainable and did not raise much discontent on the part of Western ufologists. After all, everyone understood that these data were obtained with difficulty in a totalitarian state, being another "and valuable" confirmation that flying saucers under socialism do not differ significantly from their democratic counterparts. And thank goodness for that.

Beginning from 1986, this streamlet turned, however, into a real flood. It became possible for Soviet citizens in general, and for Soviet ufologists in particular, to go abroad by invitations of their foreign friends and colleagues (although the exit visas were not abolished until the disintegration of the USSR), which resulted in considerable expansion of the data exchange. Mutual visits and participation of ufologists from the C.I.S. in international ufological conferences are no longer something extraordinary. Even the secret UFO reports, collected by the Ministry of Defense of the former USSR, are getting open in the atmosphere of the new-found freedom.<sup>2</sup> This is in fact quite a new situation that can influence very much the world ufology. And it surely requires a correct evaluation.

Such an evaluation is the more needed since at the present time two opposite viewpoints on the situation "over-enthusiastic and over-sceptic ones" have become widespread. Over-enthusiasts believe that declassified Soviet UFO data will solve the UFO problem and will prove the ET hypothesis; over-sceptics are certain that the Soviet UFO files contain only rubbish which is not worthy of serious analysis, and on the whole that cunning Russians are simply trying to earn the longed-for dollars, foisting on credulous Western ufologists fairy tales instead of real information. "In fact, given today's economic crisis in Russia, " exclaims the science writer James Oberg, " thousands of people of all classes, but particularly from the military services, are desperately seeking " or deliberately creating " anything that can sell to Western buyers with bucks. UFO files are one of the few exportable raw materials with a market in the West..."<sup>3</sup>

Is this a sound approach to the UFO reports from the former Soviet Union? The Soviet government, though not democratically elected, was neither more stupid, nor more clever than other "democratic" governments. It could not, of course, ignore the UFO phenomenon, since it does exist and cannot be fully reduced to misinterpretations of identifiable natural and technological phenomena by untrained observers. After all, the UFO problem is a practical one: a pilot in the sky encounters "flying saucers", let's say, more often than a scientist in his laboratory. As such, it cannot be thrown away even if the leading scientists are inclined to regard it as a piece of nonsense.

At the same time, it is (or seems to be) a practical problem of secondary importance since such encounters rarely lead to any real damage or other appreciable consequences. Therefore the Soviet government, deeply stuck in the arm race, conflicts in the "third world", economic difficulties, etc., simply was not able to pay "excessive" attention to the problem. The UFO reports were being collected and analyzed, but no real breakthrough could be achieved under such conditions.

"Independent ufologists" in the USSR (first of all, Dr. Y. A. Fomin, Dr. F. Y. Zigel, and their colleagues) also collected UFO data and tried to understand the realities that manifested themselves in them. Sometimes they even issued typewritten works (in a very limited number of copies, but avoiding the vigilant eye of Glavlit the Soviet censorship). There is in these works a lot of important information, as well as a good deal of "noise". Having no access to secret data about space and military tests, the researchers could, in a number of cases, mistake rocket launchings and atmospheric reentries for genuine UFOs. But it is sufficient to scrutinize the seven volumes of Dr. Zigel's collections of UFO reports, to understand that this ore is rich in metal. In fact, it can be noted that the intellectual and professional levels of the "underground" Soviet ufology were high, despite the hard conditions, under which these researchers worked.

In short, the "over-enthusiasts" seem to be somewhat too hasty in their conclusions. Most likely, there will be no startling revelations in the UFO files of the former Soviet military, although there certainly can be important information there on UFO sightings in the USSR, the statistical data, and the views of the Soviet establishment on the UFO phenomenon, as well as on Western investigations of the phenomenon. These data will probably expand existing UFO files, not transforming, however, our understanding of the phenomenon too radically.

But the "over-sceptics" are also wrong. In fact, this information is quite worthy of serious and unprejudiced analysis. In the 50-s, 60-s, and even in the 70-s the ufological "research field" in the USSR remained practically "clean", not contaminated by numerous sensational newspaper articles, so usual for the Western countries. Then a UFO observer in the Soviet Union rarely knew anything concrete about the established traits of the UFO appearance and behavior. At best, he knew that, according to the official point of view, UFOs did not exist; and if he made up his mind to send his report to a newspaper, a popular-scientific journal, an observatory, or directly to the Academy of Sciences, it meant he regarded the event as very unusual and worthy of complications. It concerned both "official" and "non-official" observers. The military pilots, for example, sometimes refrained from reporting their UFO encounters even when there existed an instruction "from the top" to do this: the consequences of following the instruction could not be foreseen.

J.Oberg rather arrogantly judges the post-Soviet ufology as if on behalf of the Western one. His criterion is simple: those who disagree with Mr. Oberg's opinion on the nature of some UFO (or rather "UFO") sightings are incompetent and must not be tolerated in the civilized society. "Serious UFOlogists will have to quarantine the obviously hopelessly infected UFO lore from Russia and disregard it all. <...> Every decade or two, the question can be reconsidered with a simple test: Do leading Russian UFOlogists still insist on the alien nature of the 1967 crescent UFOs and the 1977 "jellyfish" UFO? If so, slam the door on them again."<sup>4</sup>

Really and truly, having read such a passage, any Russian (and, just in case, Ukrainian) ufologist will hurry to swear that never in his life he believed in the alien nature of these damned "UFOs"! We Russians remember well what the word "quarantine" can mean and do not want to take risks. When such a prominent American ufologist does all he can to set us in the right way, it only remains to obediently follow his instructions. Thank you, Mr. Oberg, for our happy future!

To be on the safe side, I must confess that it seems to me quite plausible that the 1967 "crescents" were in fact missile warheads reentering the atmosphere after an incomplete circuit around the globe. Does it totally exclude the question of the crescent-shaped UFOs out of ufological consideration? Not necessarily. This question needs, to my mind, a more detailed examination.

As for the Petrozavodsk "jellyfish" phenomenon, it was certainly closely connected with the launching of the "Cosmos-955" satellite, but there were some important anomalous features as well. I hope to publish a paper discussing this phenomenon in some detail in a future issue of RB.

Is ufology in the states of the C.I.S. perfect? Of course, not. Not more than American or European ufology is. In some respects our ufology is even "less perfect", for the simple reason that it is just beginning to develop under the new conditions of freedom and market economy. As a result, it is not immune against the "illnesses", typical for such conditions. For a long time we struggled against quite different "illnesses", and the rapid process of "tabloidizing" of the UFO subject took many researchers by surprise.

Nonetheless, the general situation is not so bad. We have such serious specialists, engaged in ufological studies, as Dr. L. M. Gindilis (contrary to J.Oberg's opinion, the famous Gindilis Report<sup>5</sup> was neither sponsored, nor inspired by official structures), Dr. Yu.V.Platov, Dr. A.F.Pugach, Dr. M.Yu.Shevchenko, and many others. We also have (and this is extremely important) a considerable number of scientists, scholars and engineers who are not prejudiced against the UFO subject matter (as distinct from the majority of their Western colleagues) and are therefore ready to study it seriously and professionally. This can lead, in its turn, to achieving a very essential "intermediate aim" – assimilation of the UFO problem by science. The current difficulties of the everyday life in the C.I.S. may slow down this progress, but will hardly stop it. As is known, the human mind can display its creative abilities not only "owing to", but "in spite of" as well.

Contacts and collaboration between serious researchers from the Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe and America will certainly continue and develop. One of the instruments for such a collaboration is the recently-created Joint USA-CIS Aerial Anomaly Federation, headed by Dr. Richard F. Haines. It is engaged, in particular, in translating from Russian into English and distributing ufological materials from the C.I.S. Interested persons and organizations can contact the Federation at its USA office.<sup>6</sup> At least, you will have an opportunity to form your own opinion on the advantages and disadvantages of ufological studies in this part of the world.

## References

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Petrenko Yu.B. "Angel hair" with a difference! â€” *FSR*, 1973, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. III; UFO wave over Russia. â€” *FSR*, 1978, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 24; Rubtsov V. Scientists observe phenomenon over South Ural. â€” *FSR*, 1979, Vol. 25, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See: Gresh B. Soviet UFO Secrets. â€” *MUFON UFO Journal*, 1993, October, No. 306, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Oberg J. Soviet Saucers. â€” *OMNI*, 1994, April, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Oberg J. Op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Gindilis L.M., Men'kov D.A., Petrovskaya I.G. *Nabludeniya anomalnikh atmosfernih yavleniy v SSSR: Statisticheskiy analiz.* (UFO Sightings in the USSR: A Statistical Analysis.) Moscow, Institute of Space Research, 1979 (Preprint No. 473).

<sup>6</sup> JUSA-CISAAF, P.O.Box 880, Los Altos, CA 94023-0880, USA.

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