



[PSYCHIC VIBRATIONS ROBERT SHEAFFER

Sheaffer's "Psychic Vibrations" column has appeared in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER for more than thirty years; its highlights have now been published as a book (Create Space, 2011). Sheaffer blogs at www.BadUFOs.com, and his website is www.debunker.com.

Between a Beer Joint and a Highway Warning Sign: The 'Classic' Cash-Landrum Case Unravels

I have always felt that the famous Cash-Landrum case of December 29, 1980, was perhaps the most puzzling and vexing UFO case on record. If the events actually occurred as reported, then no prosaic explanation was possible. On the other hand, there was no solid independent evidence to substantiate the witnesses' claims despite years of searching. As the skeptical Fortean Peter Brookesmith wrote, "To ufologists, the case is perhaps the most baffling and frustrating of modern times, for what started with solid evidence for a notoriously elusive phenomenon petered out in a maze of dead ends, denials, and perhaps even official deviousness" (<http://goo.gl/iWUpb4>).

This is a very complex case and space does not permit it to be fully described here. As summarized on About.com in its "Best UFO Case Files," while the witnesses were driving about at 9:00 PM near Houston, Texas:

They soon encountered a diamond-shaped UFO hanging over the road ahead. The two adults, Betty and Vickie, first thought that they were seeing a helicopter or airplane. [Colby, Vickie's seven-year-old grandson, was also in the car.] There were several airfields not too far from them. But this object was not like a helicopter, plane, or anything else they had seen before. The large, menacing UFO would from time to time shoot reddish-orange flames toward the asphalt road below.



Betty, though frightened, was somewhat fascinated by the other-worldly looking object. She was now out of her car, and watching the UFO as it hovered above and ahead of them. Suddenly, the skies were full of helicopters. Betty remarked: "They seemed to rush in from all directions ... it seemed like they were trying to encircle the thing."

Flames from the object were supposedly strong enough to make the car body too hot to touch. Reportedly, severe health effects began almost immediately, especially for Betty Cash. According to a Wikipedia entry:

That night, they all experienced similar symptoms, though Cash to a greater degree. All suffered from nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, generalized weakness, a burning sensation

in their eyes, and feeling as though they'd suffered sunburns.

Over the next few days, Cash's symptoms worsened, with many large, painful blisters forming on her skin. When taken to a hospital emergency room on January 3, 1981, [Jerome] Clark writes, Cash "could not walk, and had lost large patches of skin and clumps of hair. She was released after 12 days, though her condition was not much better, and she later returned to the hospital for another 15 days." (<http://goo.gl/iWUpb4>)

This has given rise to the common belief that the witnesses were exposed to some sort of "radiation" and suffered its ill effects. However, on closer examination this does not hold up. Brad Sparks, certainly no UFO debunker, wrote in 1999 that "it does NOT ap-

pear that the Cash-Landrum symptoms were due to ionizing radiation or 'radiation sickness' for the reasons listed below. I reviewed this case for APRO [Aerial Phenomena Research Organization] in the early 80's but was not able to publish the results of my analysis for various reasons. Radiation oncologist and APRO consultant Dr. Richard Niemtow reviewed my findings and agreed that the symptoms did not match those expected for ionizing radiation syndrome" (<http://goo.gl/j5fXU1>). Skeptic Gary Posner, MD, looked at the reported symptoms and came to the same conclusion. If radiation were involved, according to Posner, the reported symptoms would have indicated a fatal dose. Since both women lived many years after the incident—and Colby is still living—nobody received a fatal dose of radiation, and the reported symptoms, if correct, must be caused by something other than radiation (also see his letter on page 16 of the April 1983 MUFON Journal, <http://goo.gl/CpwGph>). However, there is no independent confirmation of these symptoms.

This case has received extensive media attention, on *That's Incredible* (ABC-TV), *UFO Cover-up Live*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, *Sightings*, and *UFO Hunters*, to name just a few. The principal investigator of the case has always been John F. Schuessler, a well-known MUFON director, also affiliated with several other UFO organizations. He wrote a book *The Cash-Landrum UFO Incident*.

Curt Collins is a UFO researcher who for the past year or so has been gathering as much information as possible on the Cash-Landrum case. He has shared this information on his blog at blueblurrylines.blogspot.com. Collins was a "contributing editor" helping the late, great James Moseley put out

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Vickie Landrum (left) and Betty Cash

his semi-legendary newsletter *Saucer Smear*.

Collins titled his blog dated November 12, 2013, "The Cash-Landrum Incident: The Suppressed Case Files." Collins wrote:

The physical evidence in the Cash-Landrum UFO incident is much of what makes it such a compelling and enduring case. Another key factor is the reputation and expertise of the case's chief investigator John F. Schuessler who had the difficult jobs of seeking evidence, promoting the case and protecting the witnesses. The medical records have been long protected by Schuessler, citing the privacy of the witnesses as reason for withholding them. What is less widely known, is that there was other

case evidence that Schuessler chose not to share. (<http://goo.gl/ekhBeJ>)

After the women went to the Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin to file a complaint, the Texas Department of Health's (TDH) Bureau of Radiation Control did an investigation into the matter. Collins writes:

The TDH report revealed that there was no residual radiation found along the road, but they were not dismissing the case. They made an important offer: they were interested in continuing the investigation, starting with their doctors examining the medical records. There is no documentation of it in the TDH files, but Schuessler refused or ignored the State's offer to help the witnesses.

Claimed physical traces from the incident seem to be among the strongest pieces of evidence supporting the case. Collins writes, “When discussing the case, Schuessler told how the witnesses were able to return to the precise location, and that the scene contained some identifiable, distinct features”:

- “It is interesting to note, that although neither Vickie or Betty had been back to the site since the incident, they both were able to take us to nearly the exact same location. The separate site visits verify the location of the incident for us.”—*The Cash-Landrum UFO Incident*, page 54.
- “They were able to point out a spot on the road that indicated that it had been heated to an extreme level of heating. It was burned, and it was very clear to the naked eye.”—*Unsolved Mysteries* (NBC), February 6, 1991.
- “We had a very large flying machine that came over the road that actually left marks on the road, so you know where it was exactly.”—*Sightings* (Sci-Fi Channel TV Series): “Physical Effects,” July 31, 1992.

There are, alas, no photographs or other evidence to show us these supposed UFO marks on the road. One wonders why.

In the newly revealed document, Collins notes that Texas Department of Health investigator Charles Russ Meyer wrote:

I then asked Mr. Schuessler if he had pin-pointed the location of the sighting [*sic*]. Mr. Schuessler stated that due to the late hour and the ladies’ emotional state they could only state that they believed they saw the object on the straight portion of FR 1485 between a beer joint and some kind of highway warning sign.

In other words, neither Cash, nor Landrum, nor Schuessler had any idea where this incident actually took place!

This is confirmed in a second previously unseen document that Collins found: Alan Hendry’s 1981 report on the case for the Fund for UFO Research. Hendry wrote, “Flames intermittently ‘whooshed’ down towards the road; later examination showed no marks on the pavement.” Collins remarks:

The Meyer report documenting that Schuessler and the witnesses not knowing the precise sighting location does answer some troubling questions. Now we can understand why there are no photographs of a scorched road or trees, and why soil/pavement samples were never presented as evidence. The claim that the sighting location was found and investigated was the foundation of his case. If this claim was false or inaccurate, the entire case is tainted. It raises other questions about how evidence was presented and just how much of it can be verified.

In other words, it appears that Schuessler simply made up the claim to have identified, and investigated, the sighting location, and found evidence there.

There is also the puzzling question of why the proponents of this case remain so utterly opposed to releasing any of Betty’s medical records, even after her death, and especially after so much anecdotal data about her alleged medical conditions has already been discussed publicly. Why? You cannot simultaneously cite alleged medical symptoms as proof of a UFO encounter while refusing to release the medical records that might confirm or refute the claim. As long as the medical records remain private, anecdotal accounts of what they contain are worthless.

These claims of harmful effects led Cash and Landrum to file for \$20 million in damages against the U.S. government in 1981. They were represented pro bono by UFO lawyer Peter Gersten, who attracted much attention in 2012 by his announced plan to leap from Bell Rock in Sedona, Arizona, at the moment of the winter solstice

Mayan apocalypse (but fortunately he had second thoughts and is still alive). A U.S. District Court judge dismissed the suit in 1986 on the grounds that U.S. government involvement had not been demonstrated. It ought to be quite straightforward to trace a fleet of twenty-three Chinook helicopters flying over the United States. Much effort has been expended to trace such helicopters to no avail.

While we were discussing this case via email, Gary Posner, MD, wrote:

I recall a photo being shown [on the April 1, 1982, edition of ABC-TV’s *That’s Incredible*] of Betty’s arms, with discrete, round, sunburn-type rashes that immediately caused me to suspect that she had created them by covering her arms with a garment containing circular cutouts and then exposing herself to sunlight (or a sunlamp).

There is no way that such discrete, round patterns could be produced by radiation from a distant object. What Posner is suggesting is that, like religious zealots of yore who fabricated their own symptoms of “stigmata,” Betty Cash created the discrete, round “radiation burn” patterns on her arms to be able to display impressive symptoms to her doctors.

Medical science has a term for this kind of behavior, Münchausen syndrome, which is a psychiatric factitious disorder wherein those affected feign disease, illness, or psychological trauma to draw attention, sympathy, or reassurance to themselves. While not terribly common, it is far from rare. And assuming that Betty Cash’s medical records contains the term “Münchausen syndrome” or words to that effect, which seems likely, we now understand why the promoters of the Cash-Landrum case adamantly refuse to let anyone see her medical records. It would destroy all vestiges of credibility that this case ever had. ■