Fireballs Over Puerto Rico: UFOs or Military Devices?

by Lucy Guzmán de Pla

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Late 1997 and early 1998 represented a period of considerable activity in Puerto Rico: The U.S. Navy was conducting maneuvers as a prelude to operations in the Middle East, while floating missiles washed up on the beaches of Loíza, Yabucoa and Humacao. If tests were being conducted 200 miles off shore, why would these missiles wash up on beaches? An armed forces communique distributed to the media simply stated that the missiles were harmless and that "currents" had caused them to drift toward the island.

Simultaneously, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was preparing its Coquí II Project and the launching of 11 rockets from February 12 to April 9th from the former U.S. military base at Camp Tortuguero. This project was met with strong opposition by the *Comité Contra los Experimentos Ambientales*, the mayor and municipal assembly of Vega Baja, and other ecological, civic and religious organizations protesting the absence of information on the project. They were fearful of a repeat of the events which transpired in 1992, as well as of the fact that the boosters would release into the atmosphere a chemical compound known as "bromo-trifluoro-methane", whose use is forbidden by international treaties due to its devastating effect upon the ozone layer.

NASA assured local residents, protesters and environmentalists that there was nothing to fear. However, a NASA official acknowledged that bromo-trifluoro-methane had indeed been used in 1992, but insisted that this time, aluminum trimethrol (TMA) would be employed, stating: "The reason for which we have chosen TMA is precisely because it has not been recognized as a harmful chemical."

The project's goal was the evaluation of the electrical properties and turbulence of the upper atmosphere. Five of the twelve rockets launched five kilograms of TMA into the atmosphere while the remaining six contained instrumentation necessary to carry out the project.

According to Mr. Maximo Cerame Vivas, scientific advisor to the Economic Development Administration, TMA would oxidize and turn luminous once in space, enabling it to be visible from the ground and that scientists would determine the impact of atmospheric turbulence upon communication satellites in orbit. After 20 minutes had elapsed, the TMA would break down into carbon dioxide, water vapor, aluminum oxide and other substances in the upper atmosphere without having any harmful effects on the lower atmosphere or on Earth itself.

There were also reports of mysterious fireballs on the island during this same time period. One of these cases was that of Mr. Antonio (Tony) Sánchez, who experienced a possible CE2K with evidence. The case produced secondary effects on witnesses, researchers and also produced electrical effects in the Sánchez home. The event's characteristics led me to dig a little deeper into the case and share it with you, our faithful readers.

<u>The Sánchez Family's Experience</u>

It all started on Sunday, March 22, 1998. Mr. Sánchez's family was enjoying a peaceful domestic day in his home in San Juan, Puerto Rico's Ocean Park neighborhood. Suddenly, at around 11:30 P.M., Mr. Sánchez, along with his wife, son and dog, heard a loud sound which lasted "approximately 5 minutes." They gave it little significance, until another even louder sound split the air 5 minutes later, originating from the Sanchez's backyard. Mrs. Jose Trudel, Sánchez's wife, began screaming; the two-year old child cried and the family dog hid and refused to emerge. Heading towards the gate that led to the back yard, Mr. Sánchez went to find the source of the noise, since his wife claimed having seen a flash of light in originating in the same area.

Upon reaching the gate, Sánchez was startled to see a ball of fire measuring some 3 feet in diameter--deep red in color--which gave off rays or sparks from its middle. He was unable to see through the brightness, which was accompanied by a sort of steam similar to highly-illuminated water vapor. According to Sánchez testimony, the ball resembled a slowly-descending sphere that remained suspended in the air for some 8 seconds before suddenly disappearing, leaving nothing behind but what appeared to be water vapor.

Shortly after, red and white lights made themselves visible on the home's walls. The lights rose gradually *[sic]* but the family was unable to ascertain its provenance. A few minutes later, the Sánchez's heard the sound of a low flying aircraft. By the sound, the elder Sánchez thought it sounded like a military airplane, stating that his ability at distinguishing aircraft noises came from having worked at the local international airport.

On Monday, March 23, Sánchez noticed strange dark marks on the screen of his T.V. set, also noticing that whenever came close to the gate leading to the backyard, a strange itch would invade his body; dizziness would soon follow, along with a pressure on his chest. The entire area seemed bathed in heat. Beginning to worry, he decided to place a call to the F.B.I.. An agent flatly told them that "they" had nothing to do with such matters and advised him to contact the local police headquarters. Sánchez had little luck there, either. A police officer (identified as Agent Quiñones) advised him to place a call to Channel 11. In doing so, Sánchez managed to speak to reporter Susan Soltero, who agreed to visit his home along with reporter Margarita Aponte and a cameraman. Soltero conducted an interview, produced a video for Channel 11's news broadcast, and advised Mr. Sánchez to contact Dr. Andrew Alvarez, an anthropologist and freelance UFO researcher. On Tuesday, March 24, both men managed to speak about the matter and agreed on an appointment for Friday, March 27.

<u>Sánchez's Neighbor Suffers Physical Effects</u>

Luis Carrido, Sánchez's next door neighbor, was curious about the events and decided to investigate. When he showed up, Sánchez was on the phone, so Carrido decided to enter the backyard on his own, where he spent approximately 15 minutes. He entered then entered the house and told Sánchez that he was leaving since he was feeling dizzy and fatigued.

Two hours later, Carrido was taken to San Pablo hospital in the town of Bayamon, complaining of fever, an itching sensation throughout his body, dizziness, general discomfort and red blotches all over his skin. The blotches felt like air bubbles inside his skin, and were hard to the touch. He was placed on an I.V. by a physician and subsequent tests performed could find nothing wrong with him.

Carrido received a telephone call while in the hospital: an alleged "secret agent" asked him to refrain from making any comments on the case and what had transpired there. Even more curious was the fact that Sánchez also received a similar call with a the same indication. Even more curious is the fact that the attending physician at San Pablo hospital also received a phone call (according to Sánchez), and that he was replaced by "a very strange doctor" who followed up on Carrido's progress.

Tuesday, March 24th: Carrido was surprised at the change in care givers. A "very strange" doctor entered the room, did not utter a word at the patient, gave orders for a medication to be injected into the IV, and promptly left.

Wednesday, March 25th: Carrido was told that he "had to leave the hospital". The patient explains that the "strange doctor" must have put some kind of antidote into the IV, since all his symptoms had vanished.
A few days later, Carrido returned to the hospital to request a copy of his medical record and the names of the attending physicians. He was told that patient records were erased every two days from the computer and that his request could not be met.

The EPA Investigates

At the request of Dr. Andrew Alvarez, a team from the Environmental Protection Agency visited the Sánchez home twice. During their initial visit, says Sánchez, they turned up wearing what appeared to be space suits. They unloaded their equipment, which consisted of: two Geiger counters, one with a wide area sensor, the other with a narrow area sensor; two Hand-held flame ionization detectors; one photo ionization air monitor. All of them wore EPA badges on their outfits.
The team headed for the backyard and concentrated their investigation on the site where the fireball had first been seen. They consulted among themselves, took soil samples, interviewed both Sánchez and Carrido, and when they were done, they took off their uniforms, threw them in a bag and gave it to Sánchez to dispose of, advising him that:
1. No radiation had been found on the site.
2. No abnormal contamination had been detected.
3. That there was something strange there, but they had no idea what it was.
4. He should avoid going into the backyard for the time being.

After approximately a week and a half, Sánchez still did not have a reply from them and decided to call them in hopes of getting one. The phone call resulted in a second visit.
The day that the EPA team returned, Drs. Andrew Alvarez and Edwin Velázquez--who investigated the Sánchez case--happened to be present at the residence. A special agent also visited the house and proceeded to interview the EPA team and the scientist accompanying them, after which he left. The EPA team then told Sánchez that he would have the results of their research "within a week and a half." As of June 1998, Sánchez still does not know what occurred in his own backyard and if his family can once again make use of their property without fear of any hidden hazards, or if the fireball may cause secondary effects upon them down the line.

Drs. Alvarez and Velázquez Research the Case

When Alvarez and Velázques reached the Sánchez home, reporter Margarita Aponte was also on the scene. The latter wanted to interview them, but they were

unable to contribute much since their own efforts had not yet begun and they still knew very little. They unloaded their equipment, spoke to witnesses, and visited the site of the curious events.

They found no traces of:

1. Radiation
2. Gentian-wave [sic] anomalies
3. Electromagnetic field anomalies

They obtained samples of:

1. Soil
2. A metal fragment
3. An oily substance

Photographs taken:

1. A television set that presented electromagnetic anomalies. Slides were taken of the T.V. set while it was off.
2. Even while off, the T.V. set presented spots which increased and diminished in size and had a silvery, spherical appearance.
3. The site in which the events took place.

Remarks:

1. Surrounding leaves presented small nests or spiderwebs "apparently" made by small insects. This did not draw their attention.
2. The surrounding foliage appeared withered and had experienced changes in color.
3. Fungi were growing on the plants.
4. An oily substance was found on the leaves.
5. The family dog, which had formerly enjoyed going to the backyard, refused to approach the area.
6. T.V. set presented spots which increased and diminished in size and had a silvery, spherical appearance
7. After 4 days, the leaves of the surrounding plants became elongated.

Provisional Results Based on the Evidence

1. The slide photos taken of the T.V., to the researcher's surprise, presented what appeared to be perfect, highly detailed human silhouettes. Sánchez claims one of them resembles "an indian."
2. The strange oily substance was taken to Masa Laboratories in Bayamón where it was analyzed by one Dr. Colón. The test shows that it is a NASA "patented" oil for use in aeronautical devices.

Note: The oil sample was sent to another laboratory and results are still being expected. The slides are still expecting analysis and the investigation is ongoing.

The Researchers Suffer Physical Effects

Friday, March 27: while Alvarez and Velázquez conducted their field research, they were stricken by an overpowering itchiness. This led them to finish their work and interview one final witness before leaving.

Saturday, March 28: Alvarez still felt the itchy sensation and was also debilitated.

Sunday, March 29: Alvarez became aware of something strange on his skin.

Monday, March 30: Three welts appeared on Alvarez's back and thighs, resembling boils. Concerned by this, the researcher phoned both Velázquez and Sánchez to see if they had experienced any symptoms. They had not.
When the researchers returned to the Sánchez home, Channel 11 reporter Susan Soltero was on hand to conduct a follow-up report. She interviewed Alvarez and videotaped the boils on his body.
While the researchers where on site, a putative "Secret Service Agent" calling himself Mr.Smith phoned Sánchez. Speaking in perfect English and in an authoritative tone, he ordered Sánchez to remain quiet and to stop all media exposure, since "they" were already in control of the situation. Sánchez expressed the fear that the situation might be of an otherworldly nature; the "agent" told him not to worry, since "nothing" existed outside this world. When a phone call was placed to the phone number given by the alleged agent, they discovered it belonged to a Federal Government Agency located in the Bronx, New York. The agency appears to have no connection whatsoever to the Secret Service and of course, there was no Mr. Smith working there.
Other Witnesses to the Incident:
1. Luisa de la Torre -- saw the same fireball at the same place, date and time.
2. Tita Mercado -- while visiting some friends in Ocean Park, she became aware of luminous spheres that appeared to be burning with fire. She claims that the spheres had points and seem to originate from the Barrio Obrero district, flying over their heads and into the sea, hovering above the reefs from one side to another, changing places two or three times.
3. Anonymous Friend of Tita Mercado -- A friend of Ms. Mercado whose name is being kept confidential told her that the night before the event he noticed a van with enormous floodlights aimed at the water on the road that comes from Canóvanas and links up with the 65th Infantry Highway. Allegedly, the van operators pulled Ms. Mercado's friend over, advised him to remain silent about what he had seen, and made a tape recording of his voice before letting him go.
4. Mrs. Garcia -- claims to live in the Ocean Park area and says that the balls of light are quite common. At night, she says, she has seen beautiful lights that change colors, acquire saucer-shapes, appear to have floodlights, fly along the beaches and enter and exit the sea.

Similar Cases on the Island During this Period
1. Federico Alvarez (no relation), President of the UFOSCIPR Organization (a local group devoted to UFO research) reported that on the evening of February 22, 1998, cases similar to the Sánchez event were reported in the town of Jayuya's Monte Puntita. He investigated the case and took soil samples which were sent to a lab. The lab results show that the soil was contaminated with lithium and titanium. Giant ferns had been split in half and a path of burnt vegetation could be clearly seen.
2. Dr. Andrew Alvarez was reminded of May 5, 1997 case in which some witnesses saw a fireball descend. A fire erupted on the mountainside. Alvarez investigated the case but found no evidence whatsoever.
3. On January 12, 1998, the Noti-Uno radio station reported that fifteen people had seen a fireball hovering over Americo Miranda Avenue and Barrio Obrero for about 45 minutes, before it disappeared toward the Fort Buchanan area. The news media later reported that a weather balloon had crashed. However, the weather bureau had nothing to say in this regard.

4. On January 12, 1998, Marina Molina Maldonado phoned "Noti-Uno" to say that in the early morning hours, residents of Arecibo's Barrio Candelaria had witnessed the passage of an enormous blue fireball which caused power failures, triggered alarm systems and even caused clocks to tremble *[sic]*. Mrs. Molina, her teenaged sons and several neighbors witnessed the unidentified flying object, indicating that the object "resembled the sun". However, an environmental group from that city indicated that it was probably a military experiment which could cause harm to the Tortugueros Nature Preserve.

Conclusion

The Sánchez case remains open, since no clear explanation for the events at this location has been reached.

Dr. Alvarez tends to believe, despite the lack of solid evidence on which to base his conclusion, that what happened at the Sánchez home was apparently terrestrial in origin and may be linked to U.S. Navy operations being conducted off the Puerto Rican coast during that time period.

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