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UFO CASE ARTICLE

Missing Linke (skeptical)

Source: *Martin S. Kottmeyer, Magonia Supplement 48, Oct. 2003*

Summary: *Article on the Oscar Linke encounter in Hasselbach, Germany. Includes overview of the incident, references to other sources, and some (skeptical) analysis and comments.*

MISSING LINKE

Martin S. Kottmeyer

"THE MOST AMAZING Flying Saucer Story of All Time" was how the news dispatch introduced the case. Considering the date was 9 July 1952 this wasn't quite the hyperbole we would automatically assume it to be nowadays. The saucer mystery had only just celebrated its fifth birthday and landings by flying saucers were virtually unheard of. There had been stories of crashed saucers with dead bodies, and one or two telepathic contacts, but they were easily dismissed. The story of Oscar Linke and his daughter was different. It would nowadays be categorised as a close encounter of the third kind. In hindsight, it was a landmark case.

It was, for one thing, the earliest dated case in the Project Blue Book files to involve a landing and visible crew. It was also the first CE3K with wide media distribution. Linke and his daughter are the only close encounter witnesses to appear in 'The Flying Saucer Mystery', a brief film documentary by Telenews that was produced after the big saucer flap of 1952. It is the earliest known UFO documentary (available from Sinister Cinema).

The voiceover leads into the case by saying, "The first eyewitness report of a supposed Soviet guided missile tells of a saucer-shaped object." Describing Linke as a refugee mayor, they tout his account as "the most credible received". We are shown drawings of the saucer made by the mayor and his daughter - the two passengers outside it, and the surrounding scene. We are told how they stumbled upon this sight, how the girl's screaming startled the two figures, and how they climbed into the saucer and took off. "The disc rose with a humming noise until the thing was standing on the cylinder like a big mushroom." It was jet-propelled with red and green flames spurting out of the hull's innards along the spinning rim. After gaining some altitude, it moved off parallel to the ground. "It moved faster than any fighter plane he has seen and it made a terrible roaring sound."

Newspaper accounts offered more details. They described Oscar Linke as a 48-year-old ex-Mayor of Gleimerschausen who had escaped from the Russian Zone with his wife and 6 children. Linke swore out a formal affidavit before a judge in the company of West German officials.

He had been riding home with Gabriel on a motorcycle, but a tyre blew out leaving them to walk to the next town of Hasselbach. Gabriel pointed out what they first took to be young deer, but as they got within 50 yards it resolved itself into "two apparently human figures". They were clothed in a shimmering metallic substance and were bent down studying something on the ground. One had a flashing light on his chest. Thirty feet away from them was a 40 to 50 feet diameter object "like a huge oval warming pan". Along the rim were two rows of holes a foot in diameter and spaced a foot and a half apart. Out of the centre rose a black cylindrical conning tower ten feet high.

Gabriel called to her father during his study of the scene and this prompted the figure to rush to the object, clamber up the side, and disappear inside. The holes started to glow and the rim began to spin. The tower retracted down through the centre of the disc, raising the rim. "From the swirling effect of the glowing exhaust I got the impression the whole thing was spinning like a top," said Linke. Once airborne the cylinder retracted again to reappear on the upper half of the object. It made a whistling sound like a falling bomb, but not so loud. The object flew away in the direction of Stockheim, which was southwest of their location.

Others came forward to say they also saw the object. A shepherd named Georg Derbost, who was a mile and a half away, "thought a comet had bounced off the earth". A sawmill worker, unnamed, described it as a "low-flying comet". Linke examined the landing site and found a freshly made depression where earth had been driven down by the conning tower.

"I never heard the words 'flying saucer' until I escaped to West Berlin. When I saw the thing, first I thought it was a new Russian war machine. I was terrified, for the Soviets do not like one to know about their goings-on, and people are shut up for years in East Germany for knowing too much." was the tag line quote by Linke.

More details emerged years later when ufologists got hold of the initial foreign language accounts and made contact with Linke. They learned the encounter occurred roughly two years before the American press published it. Linke backdated it to 17 June 1950. He had been mayor at the time of the incident. In a new clipping from Nacht-Depesche, Linke had said of the two figures, "they were dressed in heavy garments, like people wear in polar regions." Those garments were made of a shimmering, metallic substance. Asked by ufologist Leon Davidson in 1958 if the figures were human or humanoid, Linke opened up the possibility they could have been another type of creature since their manner of locomotion "was a glide similar to that of bears". Besides the depression made by the conning tower, we learn that the cold airstream from the object flattened the grain in a neighbouring field. Linke confirmed all the pertinent points of earlier accounts and there was no confession it was a hoax.

When Ted Bloecher wrote up the case file for the November 1980 issue of

MUFON UFO Journal, his assessment was that the witness was credible, the story was internally consistent and the detailing, though unprecedented, was persuasively authentic. The information argued favourably for the reality of the experience. In the absence of new information to throw doubt on the case, Bloecher concluded, "this sighting should be included among the list of unexplained UFO reports."

Curiously, it isn't. It is rarely mentioned in the UFO literature and is routinely absent in works that aspire to comprehensiveness. It's not in David Jacobs' s The UFO Controversy in America or Curtis Peebles's Watch the Skies! It's not in evidence in catalogues like the Lorenzens' Flying Saucer Occupants or Richard Hall's Uninvited Guests or Jenny Randles's Alien Contacts and Abductions. It's not even in Jerry Clark's Strange review of "Close Encounters of the Third, Kind 1901-1959", though it includes some of the most obscure cases around. UFO encyclopedias never mention it. Probably the only readily accessible account is the one in the Hynek UFO Report (1977, pp. 203-6) and it amounts to a reprint of the Blue Book file with no analysis or comment.

Bloecher stands alone in his advocacy and interest for the Linke case. Yet, in an important sense, it warrants far more attention. If you look at the case simply from the standpoint of a ranking of its evidential features, it has to be one of the ten strongest close encounters of all time. We have here two primary witnesses, one of them a mayor and thus possessing a measure of status. There are several people corroborating the fact that something happened from a distance, one named. We have claims of extensive physical traces. A follow-up six years later has him sticking to his story. This easily outranks 99% of the entity cases on record as they are generally singly witnessed, without bystanders, and with no or trivial physical traces. On the surface it looks better than such notorious faves as The Interrupted Journey, Pascagoula, The Andreasson Affair, and Communion.

Those who argue that subtle congruencies across cases entail authenticity will also find the Linke case an impressively evidential one. J. Allen Hynek used to point to a trait called "escalation of hypothesis" which he felt was common in authentic cases. Linke and his daughter's initial mistake in thinking they were looking at deer and the subsequent shift is just such as example of escalation of strangeness. The detail about the entities gliding mentioned to Davidson in 1958 is especially surprising. Raymond Fowler points to exactly this trait of gliding as a detail arguing for the authenticity of Betty Andreasson's story. It is a subtle feature he found in several cases. Indeed there are a string of them: Charles Moody, 1975; Pascagoula, 1973; C.A.V.; Ririe, Idaho - 1967; Brands Flat, Virginia - 1965; Reinhold Schmidt, 1957. Linke's revelation has to be greeted as more striking if only because Andreasson had the benefit of potential exposure to highly visible cases like Pascagoula. Living overseas, Linke's borrowing from the Schmidt case seems less probable than Andreasson's borrowing from the UFO literature.

This should be ranked among the classics, but it never will. It won't because it proves the wrong theory about UFOs. As the Telenews documentary put it, it was meant to be proof of a Soviet guided missile. Newspapers thought so too: "It is hoped to answer the big question: Are Flying Saucers a secret new Russian invention?" The place of discovery, the Soviet zone, implicitly

answered the question with a Yes. The heavy polar garments worn by the crew obviously suggest the northern climes of Russia. Loren Gross, in his privately published, *UFOs: A History*, adds the observation that the description of Linke's craft was close to the description of the object in the 28 June 1952 Spitzbergen crash/retrieval story. It, too, involved a stationary centre cabin and a rotating rim with 46 jets on it. This craft was thought to be Russian since the chronometers and interior instrumentation had Russian symbols on them. Nobody suggested Linke's saucer came from outer space and, given the fact that it flew parallel to the earth instead of on a vertical trajectory, there was no reason to think otherwise.

Trying to fit this case into the extraterrestrial hypothesis presents a series of problems. First, there are no reports of 'greys' wearing polar garments. Second, contemporary alien craft don't display jet propulsion, don't shoot flames from a rotating rim, and don't make roaring or falling bomb sounds. Third, current cases never display retracting conning towers or show a mushroom aspect on take-off. Lastly, current alien craft have fewer straight lines and right angles than Linke's drawings show. Simply, it doesn't fit in with our current portrait.

To argue Linke's saucer was alien would be silly, but the Soviet interpretation is flatly impossible. The Soviet secret weapon theory probably hasn't had a defender in the past two decades, but if there were any stragglers the absence of relevant revelations out of Russia since the fall of the Berlin Wall should have sealed all hopes. And there lies the delightful paradox of the Linke case. It can't be real, but the methods of UFO study say it must be.

What this case proves more than anything else is how the UFO phenomenon has evolved and adapted to varying cultural environments. We tend to forget that the ETH was not always the favourite theory about flying saucers. Back in the forties and early fifties, the ETH wasn't even on the map. The Gallup polls of 1947 and 1950 didn't even bother to tally any supporters of the idea. Among those few who didn't view saucers as a joke, a hoax, or some form of mistake, the favoured idea was that they involved either American weapons under test (1947 - 15%; 1950 - 23%) or a Russian weapon (1947 - 1%; 1950 - 3%)

Sift through the reports of 1947 and there is nothing to disprove these notions and often much to support them; things like propellers, rocket exhaust, contrails, radio antennae, fins, and aerobatic stunts. When Keyhoe started pushing the ETH in 1950, he had to spend time discussing the pros and cons of the involvement of Soviets, Nazis, and possible secret projects by the military or industrialists in America. He was not instantly successful in converting people, and no solid consensus against secret weapon projects existed for two decades.

Linke's human crew was not unique among early close encounters. It is fairly easy to draw up a collection of reports that involved humans in saucers rather than alien creatures.

I selected these mainly from the sense they seemed clearly apart from both contactee accounts in their initial aspect and from creatures and dwarves encounters. They could be thought supportive of the secret projects idea, though admittedly ufologists often did not think that way.

The jet propulsion and remarkable speed is typical for the era. The profile of the Linke saucer with its straight lines seems faintly primitive and looks a bit like it was sawed out of the top of a submarine. This was true of other saucer drawings as well. They lack the sleek convexities that shaped later craft. The saucer in the 1949 movie serial Bruce Gentry shares this primitiveness. The Gentry saucer also has a stationary centre section like Spitzbergen and Linke. The retracting conning tower seems novel and it is conceivable Linke's case inspired the mushroom-like landing profile of the Harryhausen saucers for Earth vs. the Flying Saucers.

Linke's case seems well-adapted for its time - probably too well-adapted. By borrowing the jet-propelled rim from the Spitzbergen crash/retrieval, it probably hoped to be credible. What Linke could not foresee was that the Spitzbergen case was doomed to fall apart. Investigators have built up considerable evidence that the Spitzbergen case was a hoax. (see Braenne, Ole Jonny "Legend of the Spitzbergen Crash, International UFO Reporter, November/December 1992, pp. 14-20).

By corroborating details of Spitzbergen, it has undermined itself with the taint of plagiarism and sealed the case for it being a cultural construct. Taken altogether, it is too much a phenomenon of its age, embodying its beliefs, preconceptions, and errors. A case identical to Linke would be literally unimaginable in the 1990s. The look, the idea is out of fashion - mythically incorrect.

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