

RUNNING CODE: THE NIGHT THE ALIEN DIED

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By Richard H. Hall

PROLOGUE. This article originally was drafted as a sample chapter for a proposed book on the 1978 McGuire AFB case. It was hoped that a publishing contract with an advance on royalties would enable me to tie up some important loose ends in my investigation. These included a planned face-to-face meeting with another primary witness living in a distant state and acquiring additional documentation. Despite two promising prospects, no contract was ever obtained.

Although I am well aware that investigation is far from complete, it seemed important to report for the record what I have found out so far. Having met the primary witness on numerous occasions and corresponded with him over many years, I have a full picture of his family background and professional career. Today he has a Masters Degree in Human Relations and a B.S. in Business and Management, both from major universities.

He has cooperated fully, answered all questions, and provided important details as well as leads to additional information. On one occasion when he lived in Virginia, I met with him and his wife and colleagues at their home. On another occasion, Len Stringfield (who requested my help in his investigation and introduced me to the witness) arranged for him to meet with my brother, Bill, and Bruce Maccabee. Later, the witness agreed to the taking of a formal legal deposition which was witnessed by, among others, Don Berliner and Rob Swiatek of the Fund for UFO Research.

This Prologue is necessary in order to make it clear that the witness is a known quantity. At this point there is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that the report is authentic, and since it literally represents a case of corpus delicti it is of first order importance. The fact that several of the officers involved have denied to other investigators having any knowledge of the incident is not surprising at all under the circumstances. I have long since come to the conclusion that this case is so important and held in such complete secrecy that it will take a thorough Congressional investigation to pry loose the full story.

Here, then, is the story of the incident that literally changed the life of a conscientious young air policeman who was carrying on a family tradition of police service, and who later was subjected to repeated threats and intimidation for talking about the experience to Len Stringfield and me. This report was prepared with his direct input and based on descriptive details that he provided in writing at my request.

As night wore on into morning, Sgt. Jeff Morse and his Air Force security police partner, Sgt. Mark Larimer, were patrolling their assigned area on the grounds of McGuire AFB, New Jersey, an important Military Airlift Command base that housed combat aircraft and nuclear weapons. As members of the 418th Security Police Squadron, they were responsible for base security and law enforcement.

What started out as a routine--almost boring--11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. shift assignment gradually took on nightmarish qualities as time passed, and began to resemble something out of the Twilight Zone. By about 1:00 a.m. they had checked the offbase housing areas and the main base, performed some building checks, and were settling in for a peaceful evening. Everything seemed in order. Morse could afford a little time to reflect on how well his chosen career was developing.

Several of his family members had been in law enforcement work, so Morse was carrying on a family tradition. He had been assigned to McGuire for OJT (on-the-job-training) in police work for just over a year, since graduating from Air Force law enforcement school at Lackland AFB, Texas. He had also undergone combat training at Camp Bullis Training Center in San Antonio. The assignment at McGuire was for three years. At age 18, He considered it a privilege to be guarding such an important base.

The night of January 18, 1978, was crisp and clear, the air very cold, windy and dry. The stars were sparkling brightly. A gibbous moon hung in the sky, due to set about 8:00 a.m. The military patrol car, a sedan, had a balky heater, so Morse fiddled with it trying to get it adjusted.

Although he often worked alone, on this night he had a partner from the security police side, Mark Larimer. Morse, whose assignment was general law enforcement, was showing him the ropes about that side of Air Force police work, which was similar to civilian police work but included base security work as well.

The law enforcement and security police wore identical uniforms and insignia. Both were "Blue Berets," Air Force police with formal schooling. They had SECRET clearances and were authorized to carry arms and to make arrests. Their boss, the commander of the security police squadron, was the Air Force equivalent of an Army provost marshal: "chief cop." The main responsibility of the security police was to guard airplanes and nuclear weapons against possible foreign agents or saboteurs.

The radio linking the patrol car with the desk sergeant on duty in the command post was quiet, as it normally was at that time of night in mid-winter. Not much was happening, so Morse decided to show Larimer the procedures involved in guarding base entry points such as the numbered gates. Some time after 1:00 a.m. he radioed into the command post offering to relieve the gate guards for food and rest room breaks.

The desk sergeant checked the logs, then dispatched Morse and Larimer to Gate #5 on the rear side of the base, the one gate in that area near the fence line adjoining Fort Dix. Gate #5 was a little-used gate in a very dark, remote area of the base, a miserable assignment for any self-respecting cop to guard. The guy on duty no doubt would welcome a break.

As they were en route to the gate, the radio suddenly crackled alive. Morse and Larimer heard a tense voice admonish them that sightings of unusual lights in the sky flying in formation had started coming in from scattered locations; that they should be on the alert for anything out of the ordinary. At first they treated the information as a joke, until they stopped the patrol car and got out to look up at the sky to see for themselves what was going on.

High in the sky formations of odd looking bluish-green lights were cavorting over the base. At first Morse and Larimer were shocked by the sight, wondering what they were looking at. It was an intriguing spectacle. They were single lights, not the familiar running lights of aircraft. And they were performing some pretty amazing aerobatics.

The objects continued to fly back and forth, changing formation several times, passing over the base and then turning back for another fly-by. Morse counted 12 distinct objects in a formation headed south to north, and then apparently the same formation of 12 objects returning on a north to south pass. The high level of aerial activity at this time of night, including the formation flights, was totally unprecedented for any type of aircraft they knew about.

Morse noted that the first formation was of two parallel lines of objects, with the individual objects staggered in line. Then two arrow-shaped formations were visible at different angles. The final formation was arrayed in a crescent shape, until the objects abruptly dispersed and flew off in different directions. What sort of aerial "fireworks" were these? After a while they stopped watching the repetitive flights and went back to work, but the sightings continued for a long period of time.

Morse's friend, Bill Cleninger, another sergeant of equal rank, had been assigned dispatch duty as desk sergeant that night. On the radio he sounded somewhat upset, confused, and very excited by the sightings. Part of his responsibility was to prioritize events for response and to issue follow-up assignments, while keeping superior officers informed of what was going on if something out of the ordinary occurred. Right now he had his hands full as the UFO reports continued to pour in, confirmed by personnel in the base control tower.

At approximately 0330 hours, Morse heard the sirens of civilian police vehicles **running code** (sirens wailing and lights flashing) on the roadway outside the perimeter of the base fence line. In the distance he could see a New Jersey State Police car passing by on Wrightstown-Cookstown Road in hot pursuit, heading in the direction of Fort Dix Army base. Fort Dix bordered on the south-southeast fence line of McGuire AFB, and security personnel of the two bases shared a radio channel to coordinate law enforcement activities.

Following the state police car was a Fort Dix military police patrol, also **running "Code 3,"** lights and sirens. Morse thought this was rather unusual since the Fort Dix MPs ordinarily never left their areas. He speculated that they must have taken a break at the nearby 7-11 store or Ernie's pizza parlor just outside of Gate #1.

At first he and Larimer thought the police activity outside the base could have been something routine, perhaps pursuit of a speeding car from some off-base incident. Fort Dix, as an open base, often attracted traffic violators who sought refuge there while trying to elude pursuit. But then the dispatcher informed

him that the New Jersey State Police were attempting to gain entry to the air base at Gate #5, near the secluded rear runway adjoining Fort Dix.

Sgt. Cleninger instructed them to proceed to Gate #5 to assist the state trooper. As they approached the gate, they heard Cleninger communicating on another frequency with the Fort Dix Army dispatcher. Both were talking very excitedly, and trying to speak with an Army MP patrol that was in hot pursuit of something nearby and, apparently, in the process of making contact with the "violators." Then there was something about a shooting.

Arriving at the gate, Morse allowed the state trooper to enter the base, asked him the nature of his mission. The officer replied that he and the Army MP patrol had been chasing an unidentified low-flying object that, whatever it was, was headed in the direction of the southeast fence line. The MP had radioed a description to his base: an oval object giving off a bluish green glow. A sense of urgency and near panic set in when the transmission from the MP was abruptly cut off. They didn't know exactly where he was or what was going on.

Sgt. Cleninger, meanwhile, informed Morse by radio that he was now in contact with the Fort Dix dispatcher by telephone. He instructed Morse to call him on the phone at the gate so he could relay what he had just been told. Over the telephone line, Cleninger told Morse that radio contact had been regained with the Army MP, and it was learned that he had had a close encounter with the unidentified object, and apparently with one of its occupants as well.

The MP said that the object was hovering very close to his vehicle, and that out of nowhere a "thing" (in his words), a being of some sort, had suddenly appeared directly in front of his vehicle. It was about four feet tall, grayish brown in color, with a proportionally large head, long arms, and a slender body. Badly frightened, the MP had panicked and fired five rounds from his .45 caliber pistol into the creature, and one upwards into the object hovering above him.

The object responded by accelerating straight up into the night sky, apparently abandoning the wounded creature. High overhead the object had rejoined the other eleven blue-green objects which were moving slowly, sort of hovering in position. In fact, Morse and his partner had seen a single object joining in with the larger group of objects at high altitude, but they had not seen where it came from.

The frantic MP said that the wounded being had fled toward the McGuire fence line, but they had lost track of it there. Following orders, Morse led the state trooper to the inactive runway near the fence line where they used their headlights and spotlights to search for anything out of the ordinary. This area was only used by the Air National Guard. Several F-4 fighter jets were parked on the flight line, and several munitions storage areas were nearby.

Morse inquired of the desk sergeant, asking what exactly they were looking for. The answer startled him: "Whoever or whatever the MP shot." Since it had fled toward the McGuire fence line, it may have entered the base, he was told. So they were looking for an injured someone or something.

It was getting very late, and the state trooper and Morse drove their separate vehicles along at a crawl, windows down, getting colder and colder, their spotlights searching through the darkness. The state

trooper was getting impatient, saying that he was too busy to be playing games and that after they made a pass at searching the fence line and runway he intended to wrap it up. Seeing nothing unusual near the fence line they next headed for the area of the taxiway leading to the active runway.

By now they could see Army personnel on the other side of the fence line using spotlights to search there. There seemed to be a lot of discussion, and a group forming near a particular area of the fence line where the inactive runway made a sharp right turn in an easterly direction. Perhaps they had found the mysterious person or thing, and the thought crossed Morse's mind that after all this trouble they were going to miss out on it.

All of a sudden the two vehicles abruptly braked to a stop, as their headlights revealed a motionless figure lying prone on the cold concrete in the middle of the inactive runway, about 50 feet directly in front of them. There was no sign of how it got over or through the fence. They sat awestruck for a few seconds, then Morse grabbed his microphone and quickly informed the desk sergeant about their discovery.

"What does it look like?," Sgt. Cleninger asked. "It's about 4 feet in length, grayish brown in color, with a fat head and long arms," Morse replied, struggling to come to grips with what he was looking at.

Morse and the trooper got out of their vehicles and were about to approach the body, noticing a pungent, ammonia-like stench in the air. As the trooper and the two security police stood side by side gaping at the body, they asked each other simultaneously, "What the hell is that thing?"

By now it was obvious to Morse that Cleninger, back at security police headquarters, was taking instructions from higher authorities and passing their orders on to him. Before they had ventured much closer to the body, he was instructed to escort the

New Jersey state policeman off the base and to set up an entry control point (ECP).

The trooper protested, but this was now standard military police business: a body had been found on the base within their jurisdiction. All civilians must now leave the area. The point where it lay on the old runway was a crime scene, and it was Morse's duty to secure the area while senior officers and investigators marshaled their forces and made their way to the site.

He retrieved several poles and lengths of rope from the trunk of the patrol car and began to set up a perimeter, instructing his partner, Larimer, to escort the trooper off the base. While setting up the rope standards Morse was joined by two additional security patrols that began to set up a perimeter to the northern side of the controlled area around the "crime scene."

About this time the radio traffic became very intense, almost frantic, and they were ordered to switch to a "secure" channel. To Morse, the channel didn't sound secure. Usually, a secure channel provided a one-to-one link between the investigating officers and the desk sergeant, but in this case it seemed to him that everyone and their grandmother were on the channel all trying to talk at once.

Morse's duty was to relay information to the desk sergeant on what was happening in general, who was

showing up at the ECP, and who was asking permission to enter the secure area. Authorized officials had to be separated from curiosity seekers trying to gain entry. But due to the chaotic communications, he had difficulty getting in a word at all.

Individuals who were authorized to enter the controlled area were given a mathematical clearance code by the desk sergeant, assigned by protocol, and acknowledged by a simple sign language between officials and the policeman at the ECP. The code could be as simple as the security policeman holding up three fingers and awaiting a correct response of five fingers by the person requesting entry, to equal the number eight.

This system allowed important personnel to gain faster access than would the cumbersome procedure of checking all IDs and asking for verification of their authorization to enter the area. For security reasons, however, the code would only remain valid for about 30 minutes maximum. It would be continuously changed or upgraded according to the level of security prevailing.

Within 30 minutes of their finding the body, Morse saw a group of about a dozen security police that he first took to be law enforcement "augmentees" arrive in a step van and take charge of the investigation, but that didn't make any sense. The new arrivals did not look or act like augmentees at all, whose normal role would be to back up the regulars. They would have arrived one by one, not in an organized group, and would have been assigned to the perimeter while the regulars conducted the investigation. Furthermore, they were armed with M-16 rifles and grenade launchers. They weren't the recognizable professional investigators of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI) either.

In the Air Force police "augmenteed" system, law enforcement police cross-trained on the security police side at times. On this fateful night, Mark Larimer was cross-training as an "augmenteed" for regular law enforcement. Law enforcement personnel also conducted investigations, but in the event of a felony or major crime would be pre-empted by the OSI. Organization charts and procedural matters like these would take on new importance to Jeff Morse later on, while trying to understand what he observed that night.

Although the armament of the newly arrived security police might not have been unusual if the senior officers thought some kind of serious base incursion was threatened, heavy weapons were kept in an armory and would not have been readily accessible on such short notice. Morse was armed only with a .38 revolver. On the radio he heard the special group referred to as the "recovery team." He had never encountered them before.

Manning his ECP some distance away, Morse watched as senior officers and emergency personnel arrived on the scene and the recovery team went through a seemingly well-rehearsed procedure. Morse also noticed that they were all senior enlisted men, wearing the chevrons of rank but no patches or insignia that would identify their unit. He wondered what was going on, but was primarily occupied in performing his assigned duty and didn't give that much thought to it at the time.

In the next 24 to 48 hours the "strangeness" level increased, as a number of peculiar events transpired. Only then did Morse began to piece together in his own mind that he must have been involved in something of a truly extraordinary nature. All he knew at the moment was that the body did not appear

to be human, but even that did not fully register at first. From 50-75 feet away the body appeared slimy, almost snakelike in texture. Then there was the stench.

The thought occurred that maybe it was one of the homeless persons known to live in the nearby woods. But if so, why all the high level of response? As he stood guard on the perimeter, he saw the base commander, the security police squadron commander, and the OSI commander at the scene. They apparently knew all about the "recovery team," because they watched without interfering as it performed its functions.

EPILOGUE. By morning, Morse and Latham had watched from slightly different perspectives as base clinic personnel sprayed the body with something from a backpack, and the "recovery team" crated it, and forklifted the crate onto an Air Force cargo plane that had arrived from Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio. After the plane took off, the other personnel dispersed.

The air police on the scene were debriefed, sworn to secrecy, and shortly afterwards shipped to various bases around the world. Morse was transferred to Guam. Before departure, however, he was subjected to intimidating interrogation at Wright-Patterson AFB by a quartet of men in civilian clothes. While stationed on Guam, shortly before his enlistment was up, Morse heard Len Stringfield talking on Armed Forces Radio about his studies and contacted him. This eventually led to several episodes of threats and intimidation over the years, and when Morse attempted to apply for a position in a Federal law enforcement agency, he found that he was blackballed

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