



The Levelland Sightings Of 1957 by Antonio F. Rullán

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Analysis of the Evidence and Evaluation of the Ball Lightning Hypothesis



Map of the Levelland area (Courtesy Larry Hatch Map Collection)

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Introduction by Mark Cashman

The following document is the most comprehensive study of the famous Levelland vehicle interference case ever performed, and took two years to complete. It has undergone peer review through CUFOS and by some members of Project 1947. Tony Rullán has kindly allowed me to reproduce this as part of my site. I hope you will find it as interesting and thought-provoking as I have.

(CUFOS), Jan Aldrich, and Loren Gross. Mark Rodeghier and CUFOS provided me with copies of their extensive file on the Levelland case and all the declassified material from the Air Force Blue Book study of the case. Jan Aldrich provided voluminous amounts of news-clippings from the Southwest for November of 1957 that provided perspective on the case and details not found anywhere else. Loren Gross provided his great research summary on Levelland in his November 1957 books. I also am indebted to Wendy Connors who provided support and took time to review the final draft. I also want to thank Newell Wright and A.J. Fowler who gave their time and attention to discuss and review this case 42 years after their experiences. All errors or faulty logic in this paper are my own.

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1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to re-evaluate the sightings that took place in Levelland, Texas 42 years ago with the benefit of declassified Air Force files, updated knowledge of ball lightning, full review of all the literature on this case, and personal interviews with a two of the participants. While this case has been documented in numerous UFO books, a thorough analysis of the witnesses, their claims, the investigators, and the pros and cons of the ball lighting explanation has not been done. Moreover, the story and claims differ depending on which book or newspaper is read. Thus, there was a need to determine the most reliable sources and the most likely description of events from the night of November 2-3, 1957. The study evaluates the likelihood that ball lightning was the cause for these sightings and summarizes the reasons for rejecting or accepting that hypothesis. The key issues brought up by the pro-UFO and pro-ball lightning investigators are summarized and discussed.

2 Summary of Levelland Case

In 1957, between the late evening hours of November 2 and the early morning hours of the 3rd, seven independent witnesses near Levelland, Texas saw an oval shaped ball of light approach their vehicles causing their engines to stop and headlights to shut. The sightings took place in a 2.5 hour period (from 10:50 PM until 1:15 AM) and was limited to a 10 mile radius area West, North and East of Levelland. The events lasted from a few seconds to no more than 5 minutes. Once the ball of light left the scene, all witnesses were able to start their automobile engines and their headlights went back to normal operation.

Most witnesses were scared about the incident and eventually called the Levelland Police Department to report the incident. While descriptions of the sighting varied amongst all witnesses, there was a general consensus that some lighted object was stopping cars and trucks around Levelland. On the early morning of November 3, there were other witnesses who saw lights in night sky and flashes of light. While these sightings added to the confusion and emotion of the evening, they will not be considered in this study. The Levelland Sightings are defined in this study as only those seven reports where a bright ball of light was within 500 feet of the witness' vehicle and led to engine and headlights failure.

On November 4, 1957, the incident at Levelland was reported in most of the newspapers across the US. Newspapers were dumbfounded as to the nature of the mysterious ball of light and gave it different names: mysterious object/thing, flying egg, whatnick, and eggnick. Many newspapers quoted Representative J.T. Rutherford from Odessa, Texas who wanted to know whether the sightings were the result of an American experiment and sent a telegram to Air Force officials in Washington asking for answers. It was not until Nov. 5, 1957, that the idea that an extraterrestrial craft caused the Levelland sightings gained publicity in the newspapers. Most of the newspaper quoted James A. Lee (a NICAP member from Abilene, TX) as the key proponent of this idea. On Nov. 15, 1957, the Air Force issued a summary report concluding that the incident was a rare form of lighting called ball lightning. The Air Force solution to this puzzling case was so controversial that the Air Force had to discuss the case in a US Congressional briefing on the UFO program on July 15, 1960. While the case was solved as far as Blue Book was concerned, for many UFO organizations (NICAP, APRO, CSI) the case was not closed but instead represented one of the best-documented cases of a UFO.

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