

THE RENDLESHAM UFO INCIDENT: THE BRITISH ROSWELL?

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The Rendlesham case is the most famous UFO incident ever to have occurred in Britain and ranks as one of the best worldwide.

Many believe it is far more significant than the alleged UFO crash in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947, because, unlike Roswell *all the witnesses are still alive*. Not only that but there are official documents which confirms the reality of a UFO encounter.

I made a thorough investigation into the Rendlesham incident as part of research I conducted for a TV documentary I co-produced and co-directed called - Out of the Blue. This was aired on the SCI FI Channel in America in 2003. During this time, I interviewed many of the military witnesses involved and some of the top researchers, principally Georgina Bruni, whose book 'You Can't Tell the People' –was at the time the definitive investigation into the case and from which much of the information for this article is derived.

So, what did happen during those four remarkable days over Christmas 1980? Did a UFO really land in a US Air Force base in England? And did the US and British governments try to cover up the whole affair?

BACKGROUND TO THE RENDLESHAM UFO INCIDENT.

In 1980 the Cold War was still burning hot. The proceeding year had seen the invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union. Both the US and her NATO allies were in a state of heightened tension. During this period the British government led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had agreed to let the US increase its military presence in the UK. And unknown to most of the British public many of the big US Air Force bases contained stockpiles of nuclear weapons. One of these bases was the joint Royal Air Force /USAF air base at Woodbridge and Bentwaters located near the town of Ipswich in northeast England. Rendlesham Forest divided the two bases and it was here, in the late evening and early morning of December 26/27, that an extraordinary series of events began to unfold.

DID A UFO LAND IN RENDLESHAM FOREST?

Although many military and civilian witnesses reported UFO activity over the twin bases during the days between December 25 and 28, including the base deputy commander Col. Charles Halt, it is the testimony of the three men who initially went into Rendlesham forest to investigate reports of strange lights, that proves to be the most dramatic. Dramatic because not only did these men claim to have seen a landed UFO, but one stated he actually touched it. And there is even the more controversial possibility that he interacted with its occupants.

Staff Sergeant Jim Penniston, the on-duty flight chief for the Woodbridge base, was enjoying a midnight snack when he received a call from the security center telling him Airman First Class Cabansag was on his way to collect him. He was then instructed to meet up with two of the base's military police: Staff Sergeant Bud Stefens and Airman First Class John Burroughs. When they met, Stefens and Burroughs told him they had seen some strange lights over the forest and that there might be a problem. Thinking that the men may have seen a downed aircraft Penniston told Burroughs that they should go and investigate. Penniston was shocked when he heard Stefens insist that it couldn't have been a crash because he had already seen the strange light actually *land*.

Stefans had been so shaken by what he had seen that he refused to join the patrol and investigate. Penniston accompanied by Cabansaq and Burroughs then jumped into a vehicle and drove to the forest. There they saw a bright light shining through the trees. Due to difficult terrain, they abandoned their vehicle and proceeded on foot. As they approached the lights they began experiencing problems with their radios. (Electronic interference is commonly reported in the vicinity of UFOs.) Penniston then ordered Cabansag to stay back by the vehicle and act as a communications relay between them and the security control center. As they walked deeper into the forest Penniston noted with anxiety that all the animals and birds appeared to be in a frenzy. He also noted that radio communication with Cabansag, although still close by, had deteriorated. He ordered Burroughs to move back to the tree line and act as a relay. But Burroughs had now become so frightened he failed to acknowledge the order and resultantly all radio contact with the base was lost. The two men were now on their own.

When Penniston got to a distance of 50 meters he could make out a metallic type object, some kind of craft, but unlike any he had ever seen in his seven years in the air force. As he moved closer, he discovered that the air seemed to be charged with static electricity causing his hair to stand on end. As he closed to within 20 meters of the object, he noticed that the animals had scattered and the area was now completely quiet. As he got closer still, he could see the object in more detail. He described seeing a shiny black, triangular shaped craft, three meters in width and two high. The surface was smooth, almost glass like. He later said it was about the size of a tank. White light was emitting from both the top and bottom of the craft. Red and blue lights flashed alternatively on either side.

Penniston then took out a camera and began photographing the object. He shot the entire roll and then moved closer so he could circle around the back of it. He was amazed to see no visible means of propulsion, nor was there any signs of conventional manufacture. No seams or rivets.

By now, and in complete awe of what this object might be, he courageously placed his hands on its surface. He said it felt warm despite the freezing night of an English winter. Sliding his hand over the smooth exterior he discovered a series of embossed symbols, which he later drew. They were about three inches high and covered an area of about three feet in diameter. He said he could see no occupants but sensed there was some sort of life present inside.

After about 45 minutes the light from the craft began to intensify. Both men backed away adopting what they described as – ‘a defensive position’. The craft then silently lifted up and hovered about a meter off the ground. It then maneuvered very slowly and carefully through the trees before rising up to thirty meters where it hovered. Then in a blink of an eye it was gone.

He was absolutely certain it was under intelligent control.

“During the whole encounter”, Penniston states, “I noted what I saw in my logbook, which I still have. When the craft took off, I wrote - speed impossible. In that moment I knew the technology involved was far beyond anything we could engineer.

After returning to the base and reporting what they saw the men were debriefed and ordered never to discuss this with anyone. Realizing immediately that officials would try to white wash the incident Penniston and Burroughs decided to return to the landing site. They located it and found broken branches scattered everywhere. They also found three indentations in the ground where the UFO had been resting.

Knowing he would need some physical evidence of his remarkable encounter Penniston returned the following day to make plaster casts of the indentations.

When British Military Intelligence later investigated the site, they discovered radiation readings that were ten times higher than normal around these depressions. This was revealed after the British Ministry of Defense (MOD) released classified documents about the case in 2001. And only after Admiral Lord Hill Norton, the former British Chief of Defense Staff, had repeatedly applied pressure on them to do so.

Penniston was so shaken by his encounter that he, along with Burroughs, were granted a six-day leave.

Later he stated: “After that craft took off, I was in no doubt that we are part of a larger community beyond the confines of this planet.”

However, this was not the end of the Rendlesham incident. Another close encounter was to follow. This time involving the base deputy commander.

COL. HALT’S UFO ENCOUNTER

Had it not been for Col. Halt and, specifically, the famous memorandum he wrote in January 1981, the public would never have found out about the Rendlesham incident. The files would have remained moldering in a government archive along with many other classified UFO events.

The Halt memorandum, in which the base deputy commander, describes not only Penniston’s UFO encounter, but also his own, was written at the request of the British Base Commander, Squadron Leader Donald Moreland. The memorandum was written to the MOD and was supposed to remain top secret. However, through a curious twist of fate it later surfaced when an American organization called Citizens Against UFO Secrecy (CAUS) obtained it using the Freedom of Information Act in 1983.

The reason the memo is so important is it provides official confirmation that a UFO event did happen, despite official denials from both the USAF and the MOD.

Col. Halt was away from the base on Christmas day so he did not hear about the UFO landing in Rendlesham forest until December 26. On being

informed about the incident he summoned Airman First Class Cabansaq into his office and asked him to describe what had happened.

The following day Halt was attending a party when an officer informed him “the UFO is back.” He was then instructed to assemble a patrol to investigate the incident with the express aim of debunking it. The officers were worried the whole thing was getting out of hand.

With his team of men, he entered the forest and discovered that numerous personnel and vehicles were already there. Men were running all over the place as both trucks and lighting equipment were malfunctioning. He then took his patrol to the original landing site and shortly after spotted a glowing red object moving through the forest.

During the incident Halt activated a mini tape recorder so an audio record could be made. This tape was later released to the public. It makes for riveting listening. On it you can hear Halt and his men getting closer to the UFO. “There is no doubt about it, there is some type of strange flashing red light ahead.” One of his team states. Then another voice increasingly anxious says - “It’s coming this way. It’s definitely coming this way. Pieces of it are shooting off. *There is no doubt about it this is weird.*”

Halt described the object as circular, like a large winking eye. Later in the tape he states “He’s heading towards us now. Now we are observing what appears to be a beam coming down to the ground. This is unreal.”

The group then watched another object arrive at enormous speed, stop directly over them and again send a single beam of energy down to the ground.

The UFO then moved over the weapons storage area and continued firing beams of light into the bunkers. Col. Halt, confined by security oaths, has refused to confirm whether this area contained nuclear weapons. But it is now known that nukes were kept there as this was NATO’s largest Air Base in Europe and was the front-line defense against possible Soviet aggression.

Additionally, given that previously declassified documents revealing that UFOs have repeatedly targeted military installations containing nuclear weapons. And in some situations switched them off, rendering them un-launchable. Some researchers have speculated that what happened at Rendlesham was also an attempt to probe, or neutralise the nukes.

This tampering of nukes was something that had been done repeatedly by UFOs to both US and Soviet inter-continental ballistic missiles during the entire cold war period.

The memorandum that Halt sent to the MOD describes his encounter, the Penniston encounter the previous day, a description of the three indentations and the fact that the area had been checked and found to be radioactive.

After the memorandum was obtained by UFO researchers, Halt was reluctantly propelled into the public domain and has been the focus of much media attention ever since.

He later confided that at the time of the incident he didn't think the public were ready to know all the facts about the case. He stated that if the public were to be made fully aware of what happened during the Rendlesham Incident, it would completely change the way people look at reality and the nature of the universe.

Georgina Bruni, in her book describes meeting Prime minister Margaret Thatcher at a dinner and confronting her about what happened at Rendlesham. She states Thatcher refused to discuss it saying "you can't tell the people".

As a result of the Halt memorandum the British Ministry of Defense began their own investigation into the incident. This was confirmed when some of their secret files were released to Admiral, Lord Hill Norton in 2001.

Interestingly the files also reveal the involvement of Lt. General Charles A. Gabriel, who was then the supreme commander of USAF in Europe.

The files show that Gabriel arrived at the Woodbridge base shortly after the incident and was handed 'taped evidence'. Georgina Bruni speculates that this evidence would most likely have been photographs of the landed UFO and radar recordings.

Why would the supreme commander of the US Air Force in Europe visit the Woodbridge base shortly after the UFO incident unless it was directly connected to the close encounter?

COVER UP AND TRUTH DRUGS.

Naturally the last thing the military authorities wanted was for the story to enter the public domain. After the Halt memo was obtained by researchers this became impossible. A number of stories then appeared in the press. Most notably in the British tabloid – the News of the World, which ran a banner headline screaming: UFO lands in Suffolk. And that’s official.

The MOD responded with the usual denials and claimed that the event posed ‘no defense significance’. Lord Hill Norton, who in the 1970s was at the top of the British defense establishment, has for years been vocal in attacking the MOD’s position. He has stated that there are only two possibilities regarding Halt’s claims of the encounter. Either Halt and all the other witnesses were hallucinating or they actually saw what they claimed to have seen. In either case, since all the men were stationed on a base containing nuclear-armed aircraft, the situation *has to be of extreme defense significance*.

Norton has also later stated publically that he believes the evidence for the Rendlesham case points conclusively to an extraterrestrial intrusion.

Despite the unearthing of the Halt memo the US military did everything it could to ensure the story remained secret. When Penniston tried to recover the photographs, he took of the craft from the base photo lab he was told the film was fogged and useless. Penniston doubts this and believes his pictures were confiscated. Also, one of the three plaster casts he made of the landing site disappeared whilst being shipped by the military. He managed to keep the other two.

Long after the event, when he had moved back to America, he discovered a bug in his house. He also received threatening phone calls and discovered that his mail was frequently tampered with.

A far more sinister turn of events happened when Penniston was interviewed by the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) shortly after his encounter. AFOSI is a branch of military intelligence tasked with security issues within the US Air Force. The AFOSI agents asked Penniston if they could inject him with the “truth drug” Sodium Pentothal in order to help extract further information. He reluctantly agreed on the condition that after his interrogation they would leave him alone. He has since stated that this experience disturbed him so much that he subsequently suffered from nightmares and was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome.

In 1994 Penniston agreed to undergo hypnosis with a professional hypnotherapist as a way to deal with the trauma. The session was video taped and a transcript of the session ended up in the public domain. In this session

Penniston explains that the two AFOSI agents were replaced with an American from the State Department and someone from its British equivalent. They questioned him repeatedly about the structure of the craft and the details of the symbols he saw. They said to him that they knew exactly what he had seen and the only real issue was how to contain the story.

The most bizarre part of the regression deals with an alleged encounter he had with the occupants of the craft. Bruni has noted in her book that Penniston experienced 45 minutes of missing time when he was next to the craft.

It's important to note that missing time is commonly reported experience when people claim to have an alien abduction experience.

When the two men asked Penniston if there were any beings present, Penniston made reference to 'The Visitors'. When questioned about their identity he made the astonishing statement that they may have been time travelers from the future. "These were not extraterrestrial visitors but were", he claimed, "us from the future". He then went on to explain that the agenda of these time travelers was to collect genetic material. He stated that the Visitors had some kind of problem reproducing their species and would die out if they could not extract human genetic material. A similar scenario to the alleged agenda behind alien abduction.

This bizarre twist in the Rendlesham story could be interpreted in at least two different ways: Either Penniston did experience a period of missing time during which he had an interaction with the occupants of the craft as he claims. Or the AFOSI agents used the Sodium Pentothal and a technique known as narco-hypnosis to scramble his brain.

This method is widely known to introduce false memories through suggestion. By implanting the alien contact story into Penniston's subconscious he would later believe it was his own experience. When he later recounted the story, he would possibly damage the credibility of his original testimony.

Larry Warren, a military police security officer who worked on the base during the incident, also claims to have undergone this procedure. He is one of the key witnesses and one of the most controversial.

He was the first person to come forward with the story about UFO intrusion and claimed to have seen, not only the UFO landing, but also beings getting out of the craft. No other witnesses have made this claim.

Col. Halt explained to me that he thought much of Warren's story was false. He believes Warren was most likely the victim of the brain washing techniques used by the AFOFI. By implanting false memories into Warren, he would then unwittingly go around spreading disinformation and confusion. This would hopefully discredit the testimony of all the other witnesses including Halt.

Many details remain unanswered in this remarkable case. But it has been established beyond doubt that for four days over Christmas 1980 UFOs flew over this nuclear air base and one of them actually landed.

Inevitably skeptics have attacked these claims, but to date none have managed to present any credible counter theories that stand up to scrutiny.

One theory was the sightings were the result of a near by lighthouse beacon. Halt and Penniston dismiss this as utterly ridiculous. They are insulted that as trained military observers they would mistake objects flying in the sky for a lighthouse. And say how can a lighthouse beacon leave radioactive traces in the ground?

The evidence and the witness testimony all point to the fact that not only was the Rendlesham Incident Britain's most famous UFO incident; it is also one of the best UFO cases ever reported in the history of this subject.

For more details of this case watch my documentary Out of the Blue in the Documentary section.