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Reported and Edited by Linda Moulton Howe

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Updated - Part 2: RAF Bentwaters Feedback, Another Military Eyewitness Speaks for First Time

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"The light in Rendlesham Forest had a dome quality to it ... a strange light ... probably about the size of a football field."
- Richard Bertolino, former RAF Bentwaters Airman 1st Class



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Updated: September 17, 2009, comments from former RAF Bentwaters Deputy Base Commander Charles I. Halt: "I definitely was not out in the forest with Capt. Mike Verano [on December 26, 1980]. I only knew he was out the next day because several others told me. ...Ray Gulyas (E-4 or E-5, Buck Sgt. or Staff Sgt.) ... somewhere I've seen pictures he took of the 'landing site' the morning after [of] the first event."

See below: January 2, 1981, Statement by Fred A. "Skip" Buran, 81st Security Police Squadron, RAF Bentwaters, About December 26, 1980, Light Phenomena in Rendlesham Forest

Earthfiles, news category.

Return to Part 1

Original Report: September 15, 2009 Spring Hill, Florida - In August 2009, I reported a series of Earthfiles and a *Coast to Coast AM* radio broadcast about the UFO phenomena at the British RAF Bentwaters, Woodbridge and Rendlesham Forest in December 1980. Since then, I have received more military eyewitness accounts – some from people who have never talked before.

One is Richard Bertolino, now 48-years-old living in Spring Hill, Florida. He left the Air Force in May 1981, traveled and worked around the world and now drives over-the-road trucks throughout the United States. Richard entered the American Air Force in 1979 immediately out of high school. He was given a choice about where he would like to be stationed and he chose RAF Bentwaters in England because his father had been stationed there during World War II. Richard Bertolino did basic and security training at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas, and arrived at RAF Bentwaters in October 1979. Between October 1979 and December 1980, the only spooky subject that Richard ever heard discussed at RAF Bentwaters was "East Gate Charlie" – a legendary ghost that haunted the East Gate of RAF Woodbridge. The legend was that since World War II, soldiers working security at the East Gate had periodically seen dark, humanoid shadows walking in the fog at night.



RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge became a joint U. S. Air Force and Royal Air Force complex by 1958 with the big, thick Rendlesham Forest in between.



Aerial image of the runway at RAF Woodbridge surrounded by the thick Rendlesham Forest.

The Christmas holiday in December 1980 had been normal and uneventful for Airman 1st Class Richard Bertolino until a little after midnight in the early morning of December 26th. Richard was on duty in Post Security 4 at RAF Bentwaters. He was in an Alert Response Team for the Weapons Storage Area that everyone there knew contained nuclear bombs, even though the United States had an agreement with Great Britain not to have nuclear bombs there.

What unfolded for Airman Bertolino and his security colleague, Sgt. Hall, would come to be known as the First Night of the RAF Bentwaters and Rendlesham Forest UFO mystery. Today, thirty years later, former Airman Bertolino now provides eyewitness testimony that one of the men who went into the Rendlesham Forest to identify mysterious, fiery lights, did in fact sketch a triangle-shaped craft encountered on the forest floor. That man was Staff Sergeant James W. Penniston, who sat next to Airman Bertolino on the bus later near sunup when they went to drop off weapons at the end of their security shifts. Sgt. Penniston showed Airman Bertolino his drawing of the triangle-shaped craft of unknown origin.

Interview:

Richard Bertolino, former USAF Airman 1st Class, Alert Response Team Weapons Storage Area, RAF Bentwaters in December 1980, Spring Hill, Florida: "About 1 AM when we were going into the Weapons Storage Area to do a security check on the perimeter, we had to stop and get clearance from the WSA tower. We were sitting there calling the tower and Sergeant Fitzhughe was up in the tower.



Above: Approaching highly secure Weapons Storage Area tower and bunkers at RAF Bentwaters. **Below:** Razor wire and double fence lines guard the WSA at RAF Bentwaters. Images © 2002 by Tim Egercic.





 $R {\sf AF} \ {\sf Bentwaters} \ {\sf Weapons} \ {\sf Storage} \ {\sf Area} \ ({\sf WSA}) \ {\sf Victor} \ {\sf Alert}$



RAF Bentwaters view of Weapons Storage Area from Victor Alert tower. Image by RAF Bentwaters History.

As we called up to Fitzhughe, I'll never forget. We were sitting there and I was leaning forward on the dash. Sgt. Hall was driving. He had his arms and chest up on the steering wheel also looking up (at the WSA tower). We saw what appeared to be a very bright, falling star. It had a blue-green luminescence and a sparkling tail to it.

We were both like 'Whoaa!' and we called up to the tower and asked Fitz if he saw it. When he replied, 'Negative,' both Sgt. Hall and I looked at each other and said, 'Wow, that was close!' And that was the immediate feeling that we got from what we saw – that the falling light came down close to us.

WHATEVER IT WAS THAT WAS SPARKLING BLUE-GREEN COMING DOWN OUT OF THE SKY WAS COMING DOWN VERY CLOSE TO WHERE YOU WERE AT THAT MOMENT NEAR THE WEAPONS STORAGE AREA AT RAF BENTWATERS?

Correct. It looked like it was falling between the two bases (RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge).

SO, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

We do our perimeter check. We come out of the perimeter and all of a sudden on the radio, someone starts yelling, 'There's a UFO out here!' At that time, it registered to me and Sgt. Hall that there probably *was* a UFO out there. Security 6 got the call to go out there. That was Sgt. Penniston.

SGT. JAMES PENNISTON.

Yes. He went out there, and we went to a place called Bunker Hill because we knew it was the highest point that we could get to on base. It's just basically a hill in a flight zone with a bunker on top of it for airbase ground defense.



Bunker Hill post at RAF Bentwaters. Image © 2002 by Tim Egercic.

BECAUSE YOU AND SGT. HALL WANTED TO LOOK FOR THE UFO?

Correct. When we got up there, we could not quite see a long distance over trees, but one thing I'll never forget, we saw a luminescent glow. Sgt. Penniston (over the radio) was saying, 'The woods are all lit up! The woods are all lit up!' In that glow – I don't know

how to describe it – it's not like a light that continually traveled. It didn't have that property of a flashlight or a light bulb that illuminated an area. The light in Rendlesham Forest had a dome quality to it – like it lit a certain area and that was it. It was a strange light.

SO, YOU WERE LOOKING AT WHAT APPEARED TO BE HALF OF A SPHERE OF LIGHT OUT IN THE WOODS YOU COULD SEE.

Correct. Probably about the size of a football field.

THAT BIG?

Yes, that big. It wasn't an object. It was just light.

WHEN YOU AND SGT. HALL SAW THE ENORMOUS DOME OF LIGHT THE SIZE OF A FOOTBALL FIELD, WHAT DID YOU SAY TO EACH OTHER?

(laughs) I think probably some choice words. I think 'Holy ...' was the lead into it.

ARE YOU ON RADIO SO THAT YOU CAN HEAR WHAT SGT. PENNISTON IS REPORTING?

Yes, he is not even out there yet. They were in the process of going out there when I remember Jim Penniston saying, 'Yeah, the woods are all lit up!' And at about that time, he was saying he saw a blue and orange beacon-type light.

The security patrol came back and said (on radio), 'Well, be advised that it could be a downed aircraft.' So, they (Penniston and John Burroughs and Cabansag) were told to go investigate. I'm pretty sure without the downed aircraft part, we probably could not have gone out there because it was off base (in civilian land). So, they started going out there and that was probably about the time we started going up Bunker Hill and we started seeing that dome of light. All of a sudden, Jim comes back on the radio and says the bright light went out. He goes, 'It's dark out here.' I can't say word for word what happened at that time, but he said, 'The orange and blue beacon lights are still there.'

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The people that I know were out there for sure were Master Sergeant J. D. Chandler, (on-duty flight chief for both bases) who was at the edge of the Rendlesham woods because he gathered everyone's weapons. He didn't want security going out there (on civilian property) with their weapons. Sgt. Chandler stayed in his jeep. Airman 1st Class Cabansag, Airman 1st Class Longero and Staff Sergeant Penniston were the people that I heard for sure over radios out there.

Light Moves Rapidly from Front to Behind Sgt. Penniston

COULD YOU HEAR SGT. PENNISTON TALKING WITH OTHERS ON THE RADIO?

I hear him and he was taking control and he was doing all the transmissions to Security Control. As they were going into the woods, I'll never forget the one transmission that first made my hair stand up and it still does to this day. You could hear a little heavy breathing as he was walking through the woods. He (Penniston) is breathing a little heavily and says, 'Security Control, the object is about 150 feet in front of us.' And then it was just a matter of a couple of seconds and he (Penniston) comes back on the radio and his breathing is a little heavier and he asks, 'Security, do you copy that the object is behind us now?' And that's one I'll never forget!

We relayed some of the transmissions from Bunker Hill until Penniston left Cabansag behind to do that (radio relay). We had a great triangulation being on the hill to them in the Rendlesham woods to the object and to Security Control.

HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THAT RADIO TRANSMISSION FROM SGT. PENNISTON OF THE OBJECT BEING 150 FEET IN FRONT OF THEM AND THEN BEHIND, ALL WITHIN WHAT APPEARED TO BE SECONDS IN THE RADIO TRANSMISSION?

From what he (Penniston) told me, it just glided through the woods with no noise whatsoever.

Pretty soon they came back and we had radio silence. I still don't know how that happened because from what I understand, they still had their same radios, but we could

no longer pick up transmissions after we had been out there for about 45 minutes to an hour

AS IF THERE WERE MAGNETIC INTERFERENCE?

Magnetic interference or ...

THEY POSSIBLY MOVED TO DIFFERENT CHANNELS?

Correct. I was excited! I was trying to listen to every word of it. And we wanted Security Control to let us out in the woods where the light was. But they wouldn't.

SO, YOU WEREN'T ALLOWED TO GO OUT INTO THE WOODS?

Not while I was on duty, but the next morning when we got off duty, other people and I headed out there right away and that was really something in itself right there.

Security Control Called for "Radio Silence"

WE'LL GET TO THAT IN A MOMENT. LET'S STAY WITH WHERE WE ARE ON BUNKER HILL. WHEN YOU SUDDENLY CANNOT HEAR SGT. PENNISTON, DO YOU CONTACT ANY KIND OF COMMUNICATION OFFICER AND SAY, 'WE'VE LOST RADIO CONTACT'?

No, they called for radio silence.

WHO CALLED FOR RADIO SILENCE?

Security Control.

WHY WOULD SECURITY CONTROL CALL FOR RADIO SILENCE?

Usually when you have radio silence, it's because someone is in a situation and they don't want anyone talking over each other. But like I said, we could no longer hear anything after a little while. [<u>Editor's Note:</u> John Burroughs says that more recently he talked with former 81st Security Police Squadron Shift Commander Lt. Fred "Skip" Buran who confirmed the reason for that radio silence request was because Security Control lost contact with Staff Sgt. Jim Penniston and Airman John Burroughs for about 45 minutes, which is consistent with Jim Penniston's recall that he could not account for 45 minutes when he and John were near the black, glassy, triangular craft on the Rendlesham Forest ground the night of December 26, 1980.]

THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN SOMEWHERE AROUND 1 TO 2 AM ON DECEMBER 26, 1980?

I think that's the correct timeline. [<u>Editor's Note:</u> But Richard Bertolino is too early with his timeline. John Burroughs and Edward Cabansag wrote in both their reports about the events of December 26, 1980, that their first sighting of the light phenomena in Rendlesham Forest was 3 AM.]

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT WITH YOU AND SGT. HALL?

We try to go about the rest of our evening doing our regular patrols. Every so often we had to do security checks.

SO, YOU LEFT BUNKER HILL.

Correct.

YOU'RE IN A JEEP?

We were in a pickup truck, a 3-pack (3 people in front seat).

DID YOU KEEP TRYING TO LISTEN ON THE RADIO TO SEE IF YOU COULD PICK UP SGT. PENNISTON AGAIN?

Oh, yes. We had the radio in the truck and each of us also had a side Motorola radio. We kept switching between them – I believe there were three or four channels on it and never could hear anything else.

THAT WAS UNUSUAL?

Absolutely!

Technology Was "So Far Advanced Over Ours"

"Jim Penniston said that if anyone had shot at that craft, 'there probably would have been only a pair of smoking boots sitting there."

The next thing I know, we get picked up from our patrol duty by the relieving – we were C Flight. Morning Flight was A or B Flight. They were coming on duty and they would drive around in a bus and drop off and pick up the different posts. Now, I don't remember if it was when we went to turn in our weapons or if we were headed back to the dorm, but I sat right next to Jim Penniston. We were talking about it (the lights). You could tell that he was shook up - that something happened to him.

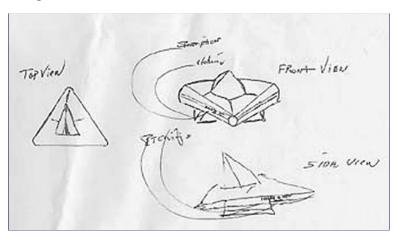
WHAT IN THE WORLD HAPPENED OUT THERE THAT THEY CALLED FOR RADIO SILENCE? DID YOU ASK HIM THAT?

As a matter of fact, I did. I was excited about the whole situation. And Jim says to me that it was a good thing they could not take their weapons out there because he was afraid that he or someone else might have shot at this thing when they first approached it because it was so different, just so different that they didn't know how to react to it. Jim Penniston said that if anyone had shot at that craft, 'there probably would have been only a pair of smoking boots sitting there.'

MEANING THAT IT WOULD BE SO POWERFUL IN ITS REACTION THAT IF THERE HAD BEEN A HUMAN SHOOTING AT IT, THE HUMAN WOULD HAVE BEEN DISINTEGRATED?

I think he meant that they were so far above us that it's not even funny. You know, their technology was so far advanced over ours that a bullet would be a joke.

Richard Bertolino Sees Sgt. Penniston's Sketch of Triangle UFO After Rendlesham Forest Events



I was asking Jim what happened and he was describing some of the situation and he pulled out this little notebook that he used to write incidents in like if he was called to an incident, he always kept notes. Jim was known to always keep notes.

Well, he pulls out the notebook and he diagrams what he saw out there. It was kind of diamond-shape with tripod legs. And he explained that it was not like any metal he had ever seen.

I'm really getting into this, but when we were going to turn in our weapons there were people there wearing Izod shirts, khaki-style pants, military haircut with glasses that took Cabansag, Longero and Penniston away for questioning, for de-briefing. Whoever they were, they had the authority to take these guys off and debrief them. [Editor's Note: Both Jim Penniston and John Burroughs disagree with Bertolino's description here about men waiting for them. Jim Penniston says that both he and John were asked by Master Sergeant J. D. Chandler, who was on-duty flight chief for RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge, to be debriefed by Lieutenant Fred A. Buran, 81st Security Police Squadron, the most senior officer and the shift commander in Central Security Control (CSC) at RAF Bentwaters.]

I think one thing that drove me nuts from that day forward was – here are guys that, we

put our lives on the line for each other. We would fight side-by-side and die with each other if we had to. But these guys wouldn't talk about it anymore.

THOSE THREE COLLEAGUES OF YOURS WOULD NOT TALK WITH YOU ANYMORE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN THE RENDLESHAM FOREST?

They wouldn't talk about it at all. I almost felt like – I don't know, I felt kind of betrayed because they wouldn't even talk to me about it anymore.

YOU ARE SHUT OUT?

I don't know that I would call myself shut out. They shut *in*. We all still got along, but any time it would be brought up, they just could not talk about it anymore. What was said to them to clam them up so tight, I have no idea. But I would like to talk with Jim (Penniston) about that one of these years.

Col. Charles Halt: "Extraterrestrial In Origin"

WHEN YOU HEARD COL. CHARLES HALT IN MY INTERVIEW WITH HIM THAT WAS BROADCAST ON *COAST* THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 27TH, WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO HEARING YOUR FORMER DEPUTY BASE COMMANDER AT RAF BENTWATERS SAYING THAT THE LIGHTS AND THE MACHINE HE ENCOUNTERED IN THE RENDLESHAM FOREST ON THE 28TH OF DECEMBER WERE 'EXTRATERRESTRIAL IN ORIGIN/'

I thought it was great that he had the gumption to come forward. I saw what happened to three people I was friends with that wouldn't even talk about it anymore. So, their power to shut people up is pretty strong.

I WONDER WHO THE 'THEY' ARE?

As far as my vision into this situation, it was military. What part of the military? At the time of the situation, I guess they were OSI (Office of Special Investigations). That's what I thought.

WELL, YOU DO KNOW THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE WORKING FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY AND DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY WHO WEAR UNIFORMS IN VARIOUS MILITARY POSITIONS, BUT THEY ACTUALLY REPORT TO AND GET THEIR CHECKS FROM DIA OR NSA.

And at that time, if you had said NSA, I would have said, 'Is that a division of NASA?'

YOU DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY IN 1980?

No, I did not.

RAF Bentwaters Had Nuclear Weapons in the WSA



RAF Bentwaters "hot row" allegedly where nuclear bombs were kept in underground bunkers in December 1980. The WSA was reported to be the target of one or more light beams from the unidentified aerial lights on December 28, 1980. Image by RAF Bentwaters History.

DID YOU KNOW WHEN YOU WERE AT RAF BENTWATERS THAT THERE WERE NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE WEAPONS STORAGE AREA?

(laughs) Yes!

I THINK EVERYBODY DID.

I know, and it was so funny because they even had public maps of the two bases. On the RAF Woodbridge base, it actually said 'Non-Nuclear Weapons Storage Area.' And on RAF Bentwaters (laughs), it had 'Weapons Storage Area' with the double fence, the concertina razor wire, the bright lights (laughs).

RICHARD, WHAT WAS YOUR THOUGHT WHEN YOU REALIZED IT HAD TAKEN COL. HALT 30 YEARS TO SAY WHAT YOU ALL THOUGHT BACK THEN – THAT THIS WAS EXTRATERRESTRIAL IN ORIGIN?

It still took him a helluva a lot of nerve for him (Col. Halt) to do that, even after all these years. I applaud the man.

WHY SHOULDN'T THE TRUTH ALWAYS BE THE FIRST LINE OF EXPLANATION?

Well, I'm sure he has a military pension that he has to worry about and that would have been a big concern for him, I'm sure. They can make things miserable for him. I mean, his pension could suddenly stop coming – 'Oh, it's a paper error.' You know, they – whoever They are – They have the power. I hate to say it that way like a conspiratorialist, but it's true!

DID YOU EVER TALK WITH DEPUTY BASE COMMANDER COL. HALT?

No, I didn't. I did see him out in the woods that morning (December 26, 1980). But the person I talked to out in the woods in the morning was Captain Mike Verano. At that time, we were talking about it with everyone that was on duty that night. I was the one with a car so we decided we would all go back, get out of uniform and go out to the woods where the incident happened.

Investigation of Tripod Holes, Radiation and Broken Tree Branches

I can't remember everyone who went with me, but I remember my immediate supervisor, Sgt. Donny Dillard – he went with me and one or two other people. As soon as we get out there, we see some security police vehicles. No British police whatsoever. It was my understanding that the night before, they showed up because we had to call them to let them know something was going on in the woods because we were in the woods. And Sgt. Chandler said to me that two bobbies pull up, asked what was going on. He tried to explain to the bobbies what was going on and they said, 'Have a good night,' and drove off! (laughs)

Capt. Verano was out there and he sees us coming out and he goes, 'Come here, boys! Come here and look at this!' And he showed us a triangular pattern in the ground where three circles were. The thing that got me the most about it was that where these things (3 circles) went into the ground, there were no pine needles. They went straight down to dirt in circles – where the tripod went down, the part that touched the ground, there were no pine needles under it, cut out almost circular like you used a coffee can and cut the circles out of the ground. [Editor's Note: Another discrepancy with other testimony that at least one tripod pattern had triangle-shaped depressions into the ground and not circles.]

Capt. Verano took a Geiger counter and it would start ticking as you went to the center of the triangular pattern with it.

WHAT DID HE SAY THAT AMOUNT OF RADIATION WAS?

He said, 'Don't worry, it's just a little above normal."

NOTHING WAS DETECTED WHERE THE BARE CIRCLES WERE?

Not that I remember. What stood out was how clean each circle was in the ground. I would say they were approximately plate size, so that would be nine or ten inches across. And each clean circle in the pine needles seemed to be about 4.5 feet apart roughly.

HOW DEEP WERE THOSE CIRCULAR IMPRESSIONS?

Down to the soil at least 1 to 3 inches thick through pine needles and other debris. It looked like the circles were cut out like a cookie cutter.

DID CAPT. VERANO TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS OF ALL THREE CIRCLES?

He was out there taking pictures of everything and Geiger counter readings. He was being real thorough and he was really excited, too. [Editor's Note: Col. Charles Halt emailed that Ray Gulyas (E-4 or E-5, Buck Sergeant or Staff Sergeant) was at the tripod site on December 26, 1980, because "Somewhere I've seen pictures he took of the 'landing site' the morning after [of] the first event.]"

DID HE MAKE ANY SAMPLES OF THE SOIL WHERE THE THREE CIRCLES WERE?

I do not know that.

WAS THERE ANY DAMAGE TO THE SURROUNDING TREES OR GRASS WHERE THE TRIANGULAR PATTERN WAS?

I did notice some broken limbs up high in a couple of trees. I think the thing that stood out to me the most was the fact that there were no animals out there that morning.

NOT EVEN BIRDS?

Not even birds.

SO WAS IT UNUSUALLY QUIET?

It was extremely quiet. I know when we crested out of Rendlesham woods there, I noticed there was a farm there and every cow was huddled in a corner. I have never seen a scared cow, but those cows were frightened of something.

I found out later that there were actually a couple of other spots where it supposedly landed, but I never did see those.

SO, MAYBE THREE SITES IN ALL WHERE THERE WAS THE SAME KIND OF TRIANGULAR PATTERN OF CIRCLES?

That's as I understand, yes. I think the craziest part of the whole thing was that morning, the void of animals, and to see those cows huddle in the corner. I had never known about the fire lights that Col. Halt was talking about where they thought the farm house was on fire. To see those cows in the corner like that! It was one of the most bizarre thing I've ever seen."

January 2, 1981 Statement by Fred A. Buran

81st Security Police Squadron Shift Commander, RAF Bentwaters About December 26, 1980, Light Phenomena in Rendlesham Forest

	Bldg 679, RAF Bentwaters
	2 Jan 1981 (Place)
	(Date)
Fred A. Buran	
I,	, hereby state that
00	has identified himself to me Security Police. Other-Specify)
ces due to the time lapse involved at time of the occurrence. At approximate thing 679, Central Security Control sighted some strange lights in the weak of the side of the sight of the weak of the side of the s	and the fact that I was not taking notes at the tely 0300 hrs, 26 December 1980, I was on duty I, then I was notified that AIC Durroughs had coded area east of the runway at RAF Woodbridg t AIC Burroughs was joined by SSgt Penniston uniston also reported the strange lights. I curity Controller, to attempt to ascertain frog ghts could be marker lights of some kind, to d never seen lights of this color or nature in s red, blue, white, and orange. Sion to investigate. After he had been joined dlar, and turned his weapon over to him, I iston had previously informed me that the lights from the road east of the runway. This inston, Burroughs, and Cabansag) as they enter t very close to the lights, and at one point definite mechanical object. Due to the colors the fact that they may have been approaching a ed SSgt Coffey to check with the tower to see
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Also see: Earthfiles Parts 1 - 6, beginning July 17, 2009.

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More Information:

For further information about the worldwide UFO phenomena, please see ${\bf Earthfiles}$ Archive (partial list below) and my books, An Alien Harvest and the 2-volume Glimpses of Other Realities in the Earthfiles Shop.

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- 08/30/2009 Part 7: UFOs and the National Security State with Historian Richard M. Dolan
- 08/27/2009 Part 4: 1980 Bentwaters Lights Were They Time Travelers?
 08/27/2009 Part 5: USAF Col. Charles I. Halt (Ret.) Says 1980 RAF Bentwaters Lights and Craft Were "Extraterrestrial In Origin"

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• 04/22/2009 — Part 5: High Strangeness Files about EBENs
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