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Scranton Sunday Times Writers

A week has passed since three Carbondale teenagers and several anonymous phone callers reported seeing a mysterious glowing object fall from the skies into a small silt pond behind Russell Park, but even though police have written off the entire episode as a massive hoax, doubts continue to exist.

The problem is that a good many people simply refuse to believe that the railroad lantern a scuba diver retrieved from the pond Monday afternoon was all there was to the incident. Despite what appears to be conclusive proof that the whole thing was a hoax and despite reassurances to that effect by Carbondale Mayor A.J. Kaufman and acting Police Chief Francis Dottle, this Uppervalley community is still buzzing with speculation.

This speculation ranges from outright accusations that whatever fell in the pond was retrieved by authorities in a veil of secrecy, to claims that whatever it was is still in the pond buried under silt.

One reason for the doubts is a long line of unanswered questions and quite a few contradictions.

A review of the whole affair might start with the original sightings. Carbondale Police received an anonymous phone call shortly after 7 p.m. Nov. 9 that a glowing object had approached Carbondale in an easterly path over Salem Mountain and had either crashed or landed in a silt pond behind Russell Park. The caller refused to identify himself because, he explained, he didn't want anyone to think him a crackpot. Police did not immediately act on the call.

When the three teenagers, all of whom live in a housing development in the Russell Park area, reported a similar sighting, Police responded. Patrolman John Barbaro and special Patrolman Joseph Jacobina went to the scene. They witnessed something glowing in the pond. Despite official claims to the contrary, The Sunday Times confirmed that a police officer did fire four times at the object with his .38 caliber revolver. At a press conference Monday, the official version was that youngsters had set off firecrackers in the area. However, the police officer who did the shooting admitted to The Sunday Times last Sunday afternoon that he had fired at the object which he believed, at the time, to be the product of a hoax.

As police were witnessing the mysterious glow in the water on the night of Nov. 9, two other witnesses gave accounts of the episode. Describing what he saw, a 19-year-old Russell Park employe told investigators approximately 15 minutes had elapsed between the time of splashdown and time he arrived at the pond. In his own words, this is what he told investigators:

"The glow seemed to get dim, then less intense, then brighter. I'd say it took around five minutes to complete the cycle. It pulsed very slowly. You could just about see it at its lowest point."

A volunteer fireman who arrived at the scene later told a similar

story. Asked Wednesday if what he saw on Sunday might have been a railroad lantern, he replied, "No." He added that he couldn't believe what he had seen last Sunday was the same thing a scuba diver pulled out of the pond Monday.

Police on Sunday attempted to retrieve the object with a net attached to a long wooden pole, but were not successful in that effort.

This is one of the points that has caused some doubt. Considering that police officers were in a boat immediately above the glowing object and considering the fact that the lantern retrieved Monday afternoon was in about six or seven feet of water, the question being asked is why they were unable to retrieve it at the outset.

One version is that when they attempted to retrieve it, the light went out. This version was carried a step further with the explanation that silt on the bottom of the pond had been disturbed and covered the object.

Another version, however, is that it was too heavy for authorities to retrieve with the net. Robert Barry, a UFO investigator from Collingswood, N.J., told The Times Monday morning that authorities had told him early Sunday morning they felt there was a larger object beneath or attached to the object they had attempted to net. He said he also was told they had been unable to move the object.

But perhaps the most authoritative account yet given anyone was a statement given The Sunday Times Wednesday by a police officer who was in the boat early last Sunday morning when the first attempt was made to retrieve the object.

The officer, whose identity is being withheld because he was giving his account "off the record," was asked if he was convinced the lantern retrieved Monday was the same thing he had seen glowing in the water in the early hours of Sunday morning. His answer: "Off the record, no."

He said what he saw did not move, but it did "pulse." He also said he felt a lantern, such as that recovered by the scuba diver, would have given off a straighter beam and in a smaller diameter than what he witnessed.

The police officer said the only way he would believe that what he saw Sunday morning was the same thing taken from the water Monday was if a similar light were placed in the water and gave him the same impression.

So, there are several eyewitness accounts, including that of a police officer, which openly dispute the theory that a lantern, such as that taken from the water, could be what they saw in the early hours of last Sunday.

There are a few other points which have yet to be explained. On Tuesday The Sunday Times was told by a security guard who works for a detective agency that he also had doubts. He said he first went to the scene Sunday and was still wearing his uniform which resembles a police uniform.

He said that after he parked his car he was walking through the

traffic jam on his way to the pond when a woman in a car asked him what was going on. He said she mistook him for a police officer and that the only thing he was able to tell her were a few sketchy facts he had gotten from a relative.

The woman at this point told him she and her daughter-in-law had been driving along the Scranton-Carbondale Highway en route to Carbondale Saturday night between 7 and 7:30 p.m. and that they had both witnessed something in the sky in the direction of the WCDL Radio tower. The tower is located on Salem Mountain. The woman said the object was "cone shaped" and "glowing" and was moving in the direction of Carbondale. She said it was visible for only a few brief moments.

Another point along this line is that there were alleged sightings Saturday evening in Wayne County of a glowing object moving in an easterly direction toward the vicinity of Carbondale.

Another point: There was a very slight radiation reading taken on a geiger counter by those in the boat on the pond early Sunday morning. Monday afternoon, the same individuals in the boat Sunday morning put out in a boat to assist the scuba diver. Over one point another geiger counter reading was taken. Shortly thereafter, the scuba diver retrieved the railroad lantern. The geiger counter was placed near

where the scuba diver retrieved the lantern was at least five feet away from where the geiger counter registered a slight radiation reading. Along this same line of thought, The Sunday Times learned during the past week that a request was made either late Saturday night or early Sunday morning to a city hospital for a radiation container.

Much of the speculation centers around whether a lantern such as the one found in the pond Monday could have stayed lighted for as much as nine hours. A Carbondale merchant who sells such lights says no. He said there is "no way" such a lantern could stay lighted that long under water without some type of protective enclosure.

Another point concerns other sightings in the area. Two workers at the Dundaff Mountain strip mine operation observed a white light in the sky Thursday night. It was southeast of Dundaff Mountain on the other side of Carbondale. This would put the light in an area between Salem Mountain and the mountain east of Archbald. One of the workers, a 56-year-old Carbondale resident, said he and his companion saw the light moving, stop, and then disappear.

To top things off, city police received calls Tuesday night that another object had been seen in the Salem Mountain area. An eyewitness to this sighting told The Sunday Times that he at first thought the object was a flare fired by a plane gun. A check with the Carbondale National Guard armory revealed that no such guns have been missing from area armories and that such guns are nearly impossible to obtain. Also, on the flare

theory, if such a flare were fired from a flare gun, it would take an expert to remove the parachute centered in the flare between the two explosive charges.

Still another point adds to the confusion is the scuba diver who pulled the lantern from the pond Monday afternoon. His name is Mark Stamey and he resides in Skaneateles, near Syracuse, N.Y. On Wednesday The Sunday Times spoke with his wife. She said her husband was a member of the New York State Divers Association, but when asked why her husband was in Carbondale or who called him, if anyone, she declined comment. Douglas Dains, the UFO researcher from Binghamton, N.Y., who is associated with Dr. Allen Enek of Northwestern University, said The Sunday Times he had not contacted the diver. Acting Police Chief Dottle said he didn't call the diver either. He said Mr. Stamey "just happened to be there."

The fact that a diver from Syracuse just happened to be here in Carbondale on Monday afternoon with his equipment and the fact that scuba divers who were in town from the Wallenpaupers Scuba Club were refused permission to enter the pond and the fact that Scranton has a police scuba diving team which was not called just tends to produce more doubts.

Probably the one thing that could clear up the mystery would be a complete draining of the pond. But John Baumann, owner of the property where the pond is located, told The Sunday Times during the past week there are no plans to do so at this time.

On a final note, it was learned that at least one of the witnesses who saw the object Saturday night refuses to accept the hoax theory.

Perhaps the best speculation is from Mr. Dains, the UFO expert, who said he is not quite ready to write off the matter on a lantern theory. He said two possibilities exist: Either it was an elaborate planned hoax or it was the type of meteorite or satellite.

What's the answer? It will be the judge.