

APPENDIX B

ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS AND THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE

Two subjects vaguely associated with the study of UFOs received attention during the early 1970s. The first builds on the Biblical sightings discussed in chapter 4 and presents the theory that much of our present knowledge and civilization came from "ancient astronauts" who journeyed here to assist our developing planet. Erich von Daniken has written most extensively on the subject and his books have sold over 25 million copies. The second theorizes that some extraterrestrial force causes ships and planes to disappear over an area called the Bermuda (or Devil's) Triangle, bounded by Bermuda, Miami and Puerto Rico. Charles Berlitz is a well known author in this field and his writings will serve as the primary discussion point.

Space limitations prevent an extended look at either of these theses, and only one example from each case will be discussed. This is hardly the ideal method for examining these topics, since only a general flavor of the arguments can be gleaned, but the limits of this report dictate such constraints. This author accepts responsibility for the examples chosen, and recommends the cited publications to those who wish to learn more.

1. Ancient Astronauts

Erich von Daniken, a Swiss, is the main promoter of the view that Earth was visited in the past by beings from another world who helped advance our civilization. His book, Chariots of the Gods?, and subsequent works on the

same subject (Gold of the Gods, In Search of Ancient Gods), study various archeological findings and suggest that civilization at that time could not have produced such artifacts. The pyramids, drawings in South America, and the Mayan culture are examples of the areas he explores. The Piri Re'is map will serve here as an example of his theory.

Von Daniken claims that ancient maps belonging to Turkish Navy Admiral Piri (Piri Re'is) in the 1500's show the Mediterranean and Dead Seas, the coasts of North and South America and the contours of the Atlantic. An American cartographer found that when the maps were transferred to a modern globe, they were "absolutely accurate" and reproduced not only the contours of the continents, but the topography of the interiors as well. Specifically, mountain ranges in the Antarctic which were not mapped in modern times until the use of echo-sounding equipment, are shown in detail although they have been covered in ice for thousands of years.

The work of Charles Hapgood, who authored Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings (Chilton Books, 1966), is heavily relied upon by von Daniken, who concludes that the maps could only have been made from an aerial view of the planet, with the focal point above Cairo. This explains the distortion seen in the map, since the curvature of the Earth would alter the appearance of the continents to some extent. Von Daniken states:

How are we to explain that? Should we be satisfied with the legend that a god gave them [the maps] to a high priest? Or should we simply take no notice of them and pooh-pooh the 'miracle' because the maps do not fit into our mental world picture. Or should we boldly stir up a wasp's nest and claim that this cartography of our globe was carried out from a high-flying aircraft or from a spaceship? 131/

131/ von Daniken, Erich. Chariots of the Gods? New York, Bantam Books, 1970. p. 16.

He then allows that the maps are not originals and indeed are copies of copies. He comments that even if that is the case and the maps do date only from the 18th century, the facts are still unexplainable--an aerial view is needed. Two pictures of the Piri Re'is map are shown in the book. (von Daniken consistently discusses maps, plural, although only one is shown in the book and most other authors refer to it in the singular.)

An extensive challenge to most of von Daniken's hypothesis can be found in Some Trust in Chariots, a collection of essays by prominent scientists. 132/ Dr. A. D. Crown, University of Sydney, addressed the question of the Piri Re'is map. He first takes issue with the above quotation concerning the map being given to a priest by a god. He states the authorship of the map is well known, with Admiral Piri himself claiming that he had drawn it himself based on older works, including some by a sailor who made three voyages with Christopher Columbus.

No wonder the map is tolerably accurate; it is one of the copies of the cartography of the master explorer. . . . The data do not present a picture of anything but careful cartography of explorers who knew the coast of South America as far south as the Amazon, who had sailed eastwards into the Atlantic parallel to the Brazilian coast, but as yet, had not ventured to the south. That venture was to come in 1519, six years after Piri drew his map. 133/

The next point made by Crown is that the map referred to, and depicted in von Daniken's book, is only a fragment of the original map, showing West Africa, parts of the Indies and South America. With this in mind, he attacks the claim that Antarctica is shown on the map at all. By examining the map, Crown concludes

132/ Thiering, Barry and Edgar Castle, eds. Some Trust in Chariots: Sixteen Views on Erich von Daniken's Chariots of the Gods? Folkestone, England, Bailey Brothers and Swinfen, Ltd., 1972.

133/ Ibid., p. 28-29.

that the southernmost point on the map is Cape Sao Roque, approximately 5° south of the equator. "Thus, despite the claim of von Daniken, Antarctica, echo soundings or no, is not shown on the map."

Relating this to the "distortion" noted by von Daniken, Crown comments that since the map only extends to 5° south of the equator, there would be no distortion if the map were projected onto an azimuthal grid based on Cairo. Thus an aerial view is not necessary.

2. The Bermuda Triangle

In the past 30 years, a legend has grown up concerning the area bounded by Florida, Bermuda and Puerto Rico called the Bermuda Triangle, Devil's Triangle, Limbo of the Lost, and other such names (sometimes the area is expanded to cover a wider area than this). The legend tells of ships and planes that have disappeared while making routine trips through the Bermuda Triangle, with no SOS call or other sign of danger, and rescue teams do not recover any wreckage or bodies. In some cases, "ghost" ships are found in the middle of the triangle with no living beings aboard except a dog or cat. The sails are set, and dinner is waiting for the vanished crew to eat it. Investigators rule out tropical storms, although they suspect atmospheric aberrations and electromagnetic disturbances might be a cause. Some suspect a space/time warp may exist at that place on Earth and the missing ships and crews have moved into a different dimension. Others theorize that ancient astronauts left a power source or signal device to guide their own future ships back to this planet and these signals disrupt our navigation instruments and the human mind. The device probably does not operate continuously, therefore accounting for the fact that many ships and planes traverse the area without incident.

Many books have been written on the subject, as well as several rebuttals. For the purpose of this report, Charles Berlitz will serve as the author of record in support of the mystery, and Lawrence D. Kusche as the refuter. The one, single account that traditionally is used as the prime example of Bermuda Triangle treachery concerns the disappearance of five Navy bombers and a rescue plane in 1945. First, the Berlitz account.

On December 5, 1945, five Navy Grumman TBM-3 Avenger torpedo bombers took off from Fort Lauderdale Naval Air Station (NAS), on a routine training flight. Designated Flight 19, the five planes carried a total of 14 crew members (each plane was supposed to carry three crew members, but one man had not reported for duty); five officers plus nine enlisted men. They had enough fuel to fly one thousand miles, the temperature was 65 degrees with a moderate wind, and the sun was shining through scattered clouds. Flight time was scheduled for two hours, and the planes took off between 2 and 2:10 p.m., commanded by Lt. Charles Taylor.

At about 3:15 p.m., a radioman at NAS Tower received a message from Taylor reporting that they were in an emergency situation: "We seem to be off course. We cannot see land. . . . Everything is wrong. . . . We can't be sure of any direction--even the ocean doesn't look as it should." The radio operator instructed Taylor to fly due west, which should have brought them back over land, but Taylor stated he couldn't tell which direction was west.

At 3:30 the senior flight instructor (FI) at NAS picked up conversation between the planes wherein one of the student pilots stated that "I don't know where we are. We must have got lost after that last turn." The FI contacted Taylor and learned that both of Taylor's compasses were out and he thought he was over the Florida Keys. He was then advised to fly north, with the sun on the portside. Shortly thereafter Flight 19 radioed that they had passed over a small island with no other land in sight, indicating they were not over the

Keys after all. Radio contact became more difficult, and the planes apparently could not receive messages from NAS, although NAS could overhear their conversation, which alluded to fuel shortages, 75 mile-per-hour winds, and observations that all the gyros and magnetic compasses were "going crazy." Concern mounted and rescue craft were scrambled, including a Martin Mariner Flying Boat patrol plane with a crew of 13.

At 4:00 p.m. the NAS tower learned that Lt. Taylor had turned command over to a senior Marine Pilot, and the message was received that "We are not sure where we are. . . . We think we must be 225 miles northwest of the base. . . . We must have passed over Florida and we must be in the Gulf of Mexico." The flight leader then apparently turned 180 degrees, which would have brought them back over Florida if they had been in the Gulf, but apparently only sent them further out into the Atlantic. "Some report that the last words from Flight 19 were 'It looks like we are. . . . ' Although other listeners seem to remember more, such as "Entering white water. . . . We are completely lost. . . ." 134/ Sometime after 7 p.m., the Miami Naval Air Station picked up a faint "FT . . . FT . . . " which was part of the call letters of the Flight 19 planes. But this would have been two hours after the planes should have run out of fuel.

During this period a message was received from an officer aboard the Martin Mariner rescue plane that there were strong winds above 6,000 feet. This was the last message received from that plane. A merchant ship reported an explosion in the air about 7:30 p.m., "but if this explosion concerned the five Avengers, it would mean that they were still flying hours after their fuel reserves had been exhausted." 135/

134/ Berlitz, Charles. The Bermuda Triangle. New York, Avon Books, 1975. p. 29.

135/ Ibid., p. 30.

Search vessels combed 380,000 square miles of land and sea, including the Atlantic, Caribbean, parts of the Gulf of Mexico and the Florida mainland, with no results. A Naval Board of Inquiry was convened and Berlitz reports that "'Members of the Board of Inquiry were not able to make even a good guess as to what happened.' Another Board member rather dramatically commented: 'They vanished as if they had flown to Mars.'" 136/ In 1974, Art Ford, who reportedly had followed the case since 1945, revealed that Taylor had said "Don't come after me . . . they look like they are from outer space." Ford said the information came from a ham radio operator, and was later corroborated in part by information which the Navy had kept secret until 1974. The phrase "Don't come after me" was indeed part of the transcript of communication with Taylor.

In rebuttal to the standard account, Kusche reprints long excerpts from the Navy Inquiry Board during which actual transmissions to and from Flight 19 are repeated, and the activities of the radio operators and senior flight instructor are reviewed. One point that should be immediately brought out, since the 1974 "revelation" is often cited as proof of extraterrestrial involvement, is that the phrase "Don't come after me" does indeed occur in a transmission from Taylor, but it is response to the FI who was giving Taylor instructions as to which way to fly to get back to base. The FI told Taylor to fly north while he flew south to meet him, and Taylor replied "I know where I am now. I am at 2300 feet. Don't come after me." 137/

According to the Navy records cited by Kusche, Flight 19 was given weather conditions by NAS and told that although it was clear over Fort Lauderdale, the weather was deteriorating over the Bahamas. Interference was becoming more

136/ Ibid., p. 31-32.

137/ Kusche, Lawrence David. The Bermuda Triangle Mystery--Solved. New York, Harper & Row, 1975. p. 104.

pronounced at this time and Taylor was asked to switch to a less used frequency, but he refused apparently because he feared losing communication with his other planes. Thus contact was lost with NAS, although the tower could pick up transmissions between the planes themselves. Taylor ordered the flight to land in the water together once one of the planes got down to only 10 gallons of gas. The pilots seemed confused as to which direction would take them back to Florida, although Kusche states this was not because all the compasses were malfunctioning, but because they could not get their bearings. Only the commander's plane had lost its compasses.

The planes alternated flying east and west in an attempt to locate land, and made one excursion north to check if they were over the Gulf of Mexico. At approximately 6 p.m., Flight 19's position was calculated by NAS as north of the Bahamas and east of the Florida coast. By this time radio communication from NAS was lost, so the information could not be relayed to the flight. The last communication by any of the planes was 7:04. The fuel supply should have allowed them to remain aloft until 8:00 p.m., and radio communication was attempted until that time. (This directly contradicts the Berlitz account stating that the message heard by the Miami base at 7 p.m. would have occurred two hours after the fuel had been depleted.)

Kusche feels that Flight 19 was lost due to several factors, most importantly the failure of Taylor's compasses. Taylor had recently transferred to Ft. Lauderdale and was therefore not familiar with the geography of the area and could not determine his location by visual references. Other important factors were the refusal to change frequencies and the change in weather over the Bahamas. "Flight 19 was not a group of experienced veterans touching down on a calm sea in the middle of a sunny afternoon--it was one disoriented

instructor and four student pilots attempting to ditch at sea on a dark, stormy night. It was a hopeless situation." 138/ Kusche also states that many of the quotations attributed to the Flight 19 crew do not appear in the Board's records. Nor did Taylor turn command over to a Marine pilot.

Regarding the loss of the rescue plane, Kusche noted that according to the standard account, the Martin Mariner took off from base shortly after 4:25 p.m. In reality it did not leave until 7:27 p.m. and if it had continued on its assigned flight path would have been in the position where the reported explosion took place. The Navy logs state that the time of explosion was 7:50 p.m. which would coincide with the Martin Mariner being at the position where the explosion occurred. "Mariners were nicknamed 'flying gas tanks' because of the fumes that were often present, and a crewman sneaking a cigarette, or a spark from any source, could have caused the explosion." 139/ Also, contrary to the standard version, the Mariner was not the only search plane out at that time, and in fact was not even the first to take off.

In conclusion, Kusche states that the Navy Board was not at all baffled, and it listed 56 "facts" and 56 "opinions" leading to the conclusion that the planes had made forced landings in the sea, and that the weather conditions were not conducive to such a landing.

After examining many such mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle and finding that many of them had solutions for many years that were ignored by writers like Berlitz, Kusche concludes that "There is no theory that solves the mystery." It is no more logical to try to find a common cause of all the disappearances

138/ Ibid., p. 118.

139/ Ibid., p. 119.

in the Triangle than, for example, to try to find one cause for all automobile accidents in Arizona." 140/ After close examination, he states, one can find that weather conditions were far from clear in many of the cases, that search planes have not "combed the area" thoroughly since it is such a huge area to search, and that many of the mishaps occurred at night, thus giving the sea more time to dissipate any debris.

The Legend of the Bermuda Triangle is a manufactured mystery. It began because of careless research and was elaborated upon and perpetuated by writers who either purposely or unknowingly made use of misconceptions, faulty reasoning, and sensationalism. It was repeated so many times that it began to take on the aura of truth. 141/

140/ Ibid., p. 275.

141/ Ibid., p. 277.