

CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE THIRD KIND IN ITALY

Near landing at Santa Maria del Tempio in 1974

Renzo Cabassi

This contribution is the report, taken from a taped interview with the witnesses, of an event claimed to have taken place at a small village near Casale Monferrato (Piedmont), Italy. Our contributor conducted the investigation for the Comitato Nazionale Indipendente per lo Studio dei Fenomeni Aerei Anomali (CNIFAA) of Via Rizzoli 4 sc.B, 40125 Bologna, Italy, on April 20, 1974. Prepared by Charles Bowen from a translation by Francisco Izzo of CNIFAA.

ON THE NIGHT of April 15/16, 1974, Carla and Mauro Bellingeri, husband and wife, each aged 26, were driving home after a happy evening spent in the nearby village Cascina dei Rossi where there had been a festival in homage to the local patron saint. It had been a very pleasant evening in every sense; folk had eaten, drunk (normally) and danced.

It was 0.50 hrs (local time) and therefore April 16 when, about 400 metres from his home in the village of Santa Maria del Tempio (strada Frassineto 15/A) Mauro Bellingeri checked his watch; it had been only three or four minutes since they left Cascina dei Rossi and, in a minute or so, should reach their house.

The Bellingeris were talking of this and that when Mauro's attention was drawn to a bright object moving through the sky to the left. "Look at that!" he said to Carla.

The 'thing' was high in the sky and possessed of such an unusual motion that it forced itself upon their attention, so much so that Mauro found it difficult to concentrate on the road in front of him, especially when the object lost height in a rapid dive, seemingly vertically, to stop, without wavering, some 12-13 metres directly above their house.

Mauro ran the car straight into the entrance gate and drew up in the little square in front of their house. He got out to open up the garage door, while Carla remained seated in the car. Mauro next returned to the car and Carla got out to join him; together they watched the strange object, Carla standing at the right and her husband to the left, respectively, of the car. As will be seen from the report they make after the event, their attention was entirely concentrated on that very prominent part of the object which they described as the 'cockpit,' a feature that was bright, but not particularly so.

The object hung motionless in the air as they stared at it: at approximately 12-13 metres above the ground, soundless, and in level trim. It consisted of two clearcut portions: the first a sort of dome (the Bellingeris' 'cockpit'), bright inside and completely transparent, roughly hemispherical in shape (see Fig. 1); the second, a diametrical disc-

shaped ring surrounding the 'cockpit' at its base. The ring did not seem to be in one part with the 'cockpit.' Indeed it appeared detached from it, and carried lights like 'electric bulbs' of red, yellow and green which rotated clockwise and slowly in a horizontal plane (one circuit, it seems, in every 20 seconds). The coloured lights were arranged in alternate groupings, red-yellow-green-red-yellow-green, and so on, and Mauro, who has a good knowledge of electrical lighting, describes them as being anomalous, but he cannot specify if they were either part of the ring, or sources of light on which the ring (by way of a screen) was sliding. To him those lights recalled, both in power and effect, the strobe lights of police vehicles, giving the illusion of intermittence while in reality they revolve.

Under the ring Carla said she could see two 'protuberances' just beneath the 'cockpit,' but Mauro could neither confirm nor deny this.

The UFO reflected the light of some flood-lamps switched on at night in the nearby Torno building yard, which faces Bellingeri's house. On that holiday evening such illumination was more powerful than on other evenings, and it lit up the Bellingeri house too. Indeed it was Carla's personal view that this illumination could have attracted the object.

Occupants?

The Bellingeris stated that they could see three seemingly human shapes (they called them 'people' in the 'cockpit') arranged in a horizontal row in what was assumed to be the front of the dome. A lightly shaded zone surrounded the three darker silhouettes which seemed to make slight movements. The outermost [*not clear what is meant by that* - C.B.] silhouette, which seemed similar to the other two, was nearest to the witnesses. Accordingly it was very useful for a general description of the morphology of all three entities.

The entities appeared to have big greyish round helmets, completely opaque and, near the base (that is, at the point where one would expect the head to end, and the shoulders to begin) and corresponding with the presumed front of the head, there was

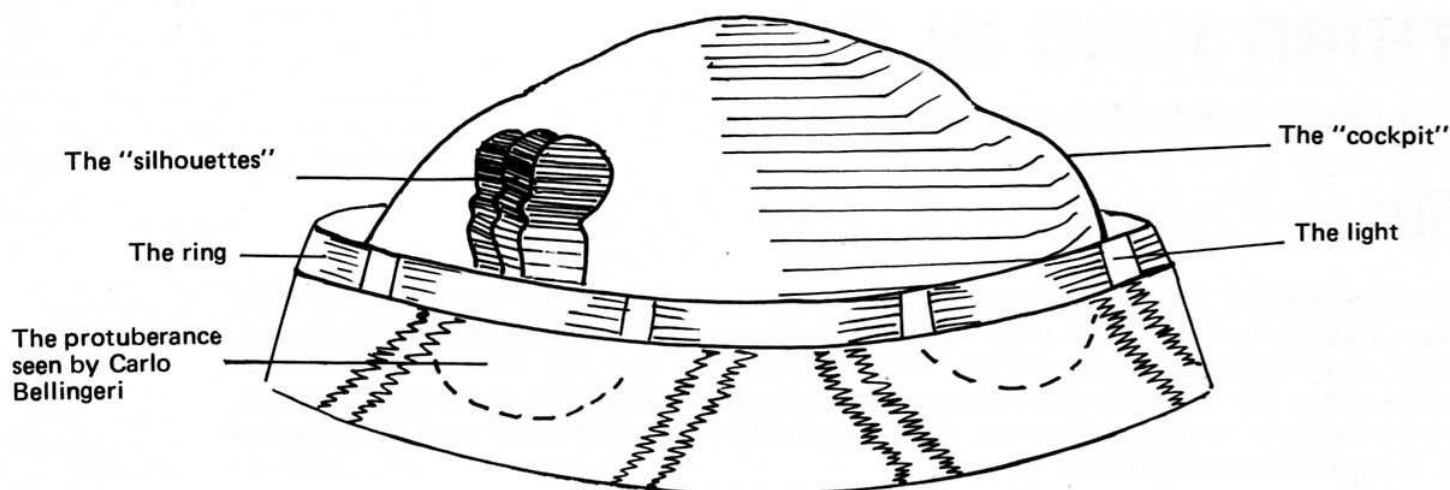


Fig. 1. Diagrammatic sketch of the object based on a drawing by the witnesses with additional details supplied by them

a protuberance similar to a sort of valve with a nozzle such as that used by frogmen.

Suddenly the outermost silhouette rotated its head in the direction of the Bellingeris, as if it desired to look at them, but it soon returned to its original position. Then all three silhouettes rotated to the right as if the base on which they were located had turned. At this point three or four jets blazed out beneath the UFO, and apparently in phase with a peculiar pulsating, 'whizzing' noise. The lights increased the speed of their rotation, and it seems there was also some connection between the sound and the rotation, as the rotation increased when the sound commenced. The noise was not unlike that made by a whirling sling; a kind of 'sound pulsation.'

Finally the object departed at the same altitude in a north-easterly direction, with the 'cockpit' lightly rotating 'rightwards' [*presumably anti-clockwise?*—C.B.] As it went the UFO passed low over the pebbly shore of the River Po, going in the direction of Valenza-Milan (Lombardy).

As the UFO began to depart, namely when the jets blazed and the strange sound was heard, Carla ran in a panic into the house, while Mauro remained where he was. He recalls: "I was forced to remain near the car by a great rush of air."

The witnesses

Mauro Bellingeri is an industrialist in a small way, in association with four other people in the SILCAM industry s.a.s., packing in wood. With an average education, he is polite, well-bred and rather shy. Before associating with SILCAM he worked as an electrician. He has no eyesight defects, or defects in his other sensory organs, and he seems to be a well-balanced individual. Carla Bellingeri, housewife, is the same age (26) as her husband, and is of similar character. Her maiden name was Fare. She seems

to have been the most frightened witness of the close encounter, and she passed a sleepless and troubled night after the event.

Location

The scene of the alleged event is in Piedmont, 51 km from Alessandria. It is a rather prosperous agricultural-industrial zone. Casale Monferrato, the district near which lies Santa Maria del Tempio, is an important garrison area. About 30 km from Casale there is the aerial command on Mortara which, in the autumn of 1973 was involved in a radar-UFO/radar-case. Mortara lies in line with the direction of the UFO when it departed after the Bellingeris' observation.

Other sightings

According to information reported in the newspapers *Il Monferrato* and *La Stampa* of April 20, 1974, and thanks to information I gathered during my field investigation, the object in question was seen also by other individuals like Signor Enrico Giaroli, an amateur astronomer, who did not want to release statements about it. Moreover, Mauro's sister-in-law, who lives in the same house as the main witnesses, stated that she heard the noise but did not see the object. One of her sons, a child of three, looked out of the window at about 10.00 p.m. (April 15) and immediately drew back in, shouting: "The ogre, the ogre!"

Of course, when the story of the Bellingeri sighting had been publicised in the press many people stated they had seen something, but the reliability of these individuals was not probed.

Commentary and results of investigation

The Bellingeris have not experienced any remarkable physiological or psychological effects, other than

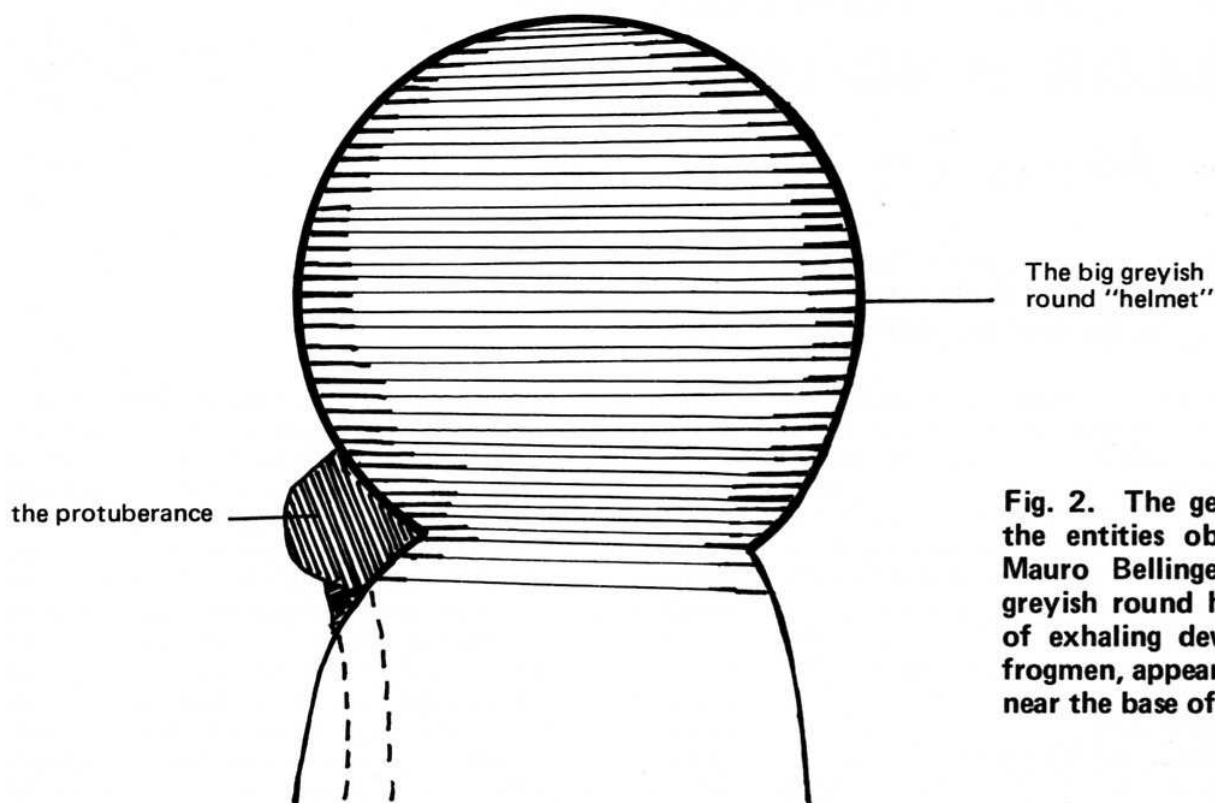


Fig. 2. The general form of one of the entities observed by Carla and Mauro Bellingeri. Besides the big, greyish round helmet, we see a sort of exhaling device as employed by frogmen, appearing as a protuberance near the base of the head.

understandable excitement before going to bed on the night of the incident. Carla had been scared by, and experienced a persistence of, the high-pitched noise emitted by the object on its departure but, on the other hand, she was not frightened by the unusual sighting itself.

One of their dogs, normally very sensitive to the passing of jet aircraft, evinced no symptoms of nervousness during the sighting.

It is difficult to state clearly the duration of the incident. Signor Bellingeri spoke during the interview of about two or three minutes in all.

A screening with the Geiger-Muller counter revealed no anomalous radioactivity, (1) on the ground in front of the house; (2) on the Bellingeris' car; (3) on the trees and the grass of the square [front garden—C.B.]; (4) on the clothes worn by both witnesses that evening. Two or three days after the event Mauro saw a number of spots and small bubbles on his car which he hadn't noticed at first. I suspect that these — especially those visible on the windscreen and the side windows — to be due to splashes of mud and so on, dried out under the hot sun.

Mauro Bellingeri's opinion about their strange experience is as follows: "I cannot pretend to understand it. It was certainly a 'disc' but I don't know who might have made it. If I had known more about this subject (UFOs) I would have gone into my house to fetch my camera. As it happened, however, I preferred to remain out there."

Said Carla: "I don't know what to say. There is a lot of talk about it in the village, but I don't know what to think." Under pressure from his colleagues in the firm Signor Bellingeri informed the press. Now

he says: "If I had known previously about the resultant bother and harassment (inquisitive persons, ridicule, and so on) I would certainly have kept quiet."

My experience as an investigator is that the witnesses were very polite, and concise in the telling of their unusual experience. They have not over-dramatised it in any way, particularly where they might have overdone the sensational aspect, for example, of the UFO's departure. Not surprisingly they give some importance to their experience, but that importance seemingly has no ulterior or personal motive. Instead there is only the wish to make the experience useful to others in the hope that the enigma of their observation may be clarified: note for example Mauro's statement "...but I don't know who might have made it."

My feeling as field investigator was much as that expressed by Dr. J.A. Hynek in his book *The UFO Experience* (Regnery, Chicago, 1972 — see page 15): "...I realised at length that the reporters were telling because they wanted me to *explain* their experience to them."

To close, I have to emphasise that for ten days after the Bellingeri sighting there were other sightings in the same area, but less interesting than the first. As a result of these, according to an agency despatch: "An investigation to ascertain, if possible, the nature of some of the unidentified flying objects sighted in the last few days in the suburbs of the town (Casale Monferrato) has been undertaken on behalf of the Carabinieri [an Italian military corps—C.B.] with the assistance of skilled personnel." (ANSA, INCRO, ZCZC N.388/1 of April 23, 1974.)

THE UFO INVESTIGATOR AS COUNSELLOR AND HEALER

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Mr. Musgrave is an American who lives in Canada. His contribution is the text of the formal paper which he presented at the CUFOS Conference at Lincolnwood, near Chicago, on April 30, 1976

UFO field investigators are more than scientific detectives. They also fulfill an important social function as counsellors, and in some cases as healers, in the sense of helping people to cope with extremely stressful and staggering experiences. Like it or not, it is a role that each conscientious field investigator is forced into by the nature of how people react to the UFO phenomenon. Because of this fact, more attention should be paid to this role when choosing and training investigators — without ignoring the importance of keeping to scientific method while carrying on UFO investigation.

By now it is commonplace that whatever may be behind the UFO phenomenon, UFO percipients have gone through a real experience which in general they try to describe as best they can. The intensity and genuineness of this experience has even been the main factor in convincing some sceptical investigators that the UFO phenomenon is both real and worthy of serious attention. For better or worse, our main source of information about the phenomenon (up to this point in time at least), is the UFO percipient. Because of this fact, attention has been paid to discover just how reliable and accurate such information is, and what kind of detective work brings out the most complete and accurate account of what was experienced and what really happened.

Attention has focused on the UFO percipient as a source of information. But at the field investigator level little attention has been paid to the UFO percipient as a person who has experienced something that potentially is the most traumatic and/or "meaningful" experience of life. In a growing number of cases I've investigated there appears to be almost a direct relationship between the "meaningfulness" of the experience to the person and the strangeness of the event. "Meaningful" UFO experiences make up a small percentage of UFO cases, but both stress and meaning are factors that play an important part in the UFO phenomenon. In addition to uncovering valuable data, attention must be paid to the well-being of the person who has experienced the phenomenon. Lack of attention to this on the part of some UFO investigators has meant that investigations sometimes have heightened the anxiety associated with a UFO event. It may even turn out that the investigators' role as healer or counsellor outweighs their role as data gatherers. UFO investigation has to be concerned about ethics as well as scientific method.

To my knowledge, no extensive quantitative study has been made on what motivates a UFO percipient to become a UFO reporter (or what motivates a person to become a UFO investigator for that matter). To UFO investigators what may be taking place is purely a matter of scientific inquiry. But the attempt to alleviate the stress associated with a very strange experience is a large factor, if not ultimately the only factor, that brings people to report their UFO experiences. This seems particularly true of UFO events of high strangeness (and, need it be said, of potentially high information). Some excellent field investigators' manuals are now available. In addition to the matters of technique and data gathering they deal with, future editions should pay attention to the methods of dealing with such stress as now exists, and on methods which at least avoid increasing stress, if they don't actually help alleviate it.

Not enough attention has been paid to the uniqueness of UFO research. It is the only area of scientific inquiry in the non-communist world in which the major contributions are being made by "amateurs" — it is truly a people's science (which explains in part the reluctance of academic institutions to accept it). The fact that UFO research is carried on by amateurs has been both its strength and weakness. Anyone can be a UFO investigator or UFO expert. One corollary of this is the unfortunate fact that there is little or no adequate training or supervision of field investigators other than on a local basis or by means of field investigators' manuals which are the best that can be done under present circumstances. This has contributed to the harm that can be and has been done by unthinking or unconcerned investigators. Regrettably I've come across more than one UFO sighting where investigators have increased already existing tensions, or even created tensions that didn't previously exist. A recent example centred on an occupant report that came from the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rockies during Autumn 1975. The main witness, a young woman, observed two silver-suited occupants standing on the platform of a disc-shaped object by the side of the road. She made the mistake of reporting her sighting to the local news media and was deluged by hundreds of sightseers and dozens of UFO investigators from all across North America. She was informed by some UFO investigators that she definitely saw a spaceship, that the occupants sometimes abduct people, and that UFOs often return to the same spot. The