

# A LANDING AT VARZI IN NORTHERN ITALY

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*(Translation from Italian)*

**V**ARZI, a small town in the Province of Pavia, lies due south of Milano at about 44° 55' N. 9° 10' E, and an altitude of 416 m., on the northern bank of a small river called the Staffora and in the middle of a shallow and fairly open valley. The landscape is typically hilly, with cultivations alternating with areas of woodland and frequent scattered farmsteads.

The area where the sighting occurred is on the opposite bank of the river to the town, and is the northeastward-facing side of a low hill sloping gently down towards the stream. The road cuts horizontally through the flank of the hill, separating the field, upstream, from the property of the eyewitnesses, whose house is located at a distance of some 150 m. as the crow flies. From their house one can range visually over the entire slope of the hill without encountering obstacles of any sort. The road is at about 15 degrees to the horizon at the observation site (the terrace of the house).

## Description of the Phenomenon

The persistent, angry, and prolonged barking of his dogs awakened Mario Claretto at about 5.50 a.m. on Sunday, June 5, 1983. Aged 56, he resides at Cà Bianca di Varzi, amid the green meadows of the Staffora Valley.

He glanced out from the terrace to see what had thrown his animals into such excitement, and, to his surprise, there was something shining on the hill, immediately above the tall alfalfa, and distant about 160 metres in a straight line from his house and about ten metres from the road. Observing more attentively, he noticed that it was a sort of orange-coloured "headlight" or "lamp", which formed part of a sort of dome with a flattened top. But there was also something else. The "something" was not stationary. It was slowly rotating in an anti-clockwise direction, showing now an orange-coloured section, in which was the "headlight", now a section bright as silver or like the colour of tinfoil, and then, finally, a dark segment. What could it possibly be?

Mario Claretto did not stop to ask himself the question, at least not straight away. He awakened his wife, Velia Bono, aged 57, so that she too might see that "spectacular and extraordinary something". His spouse was not long in giving her impression: "It

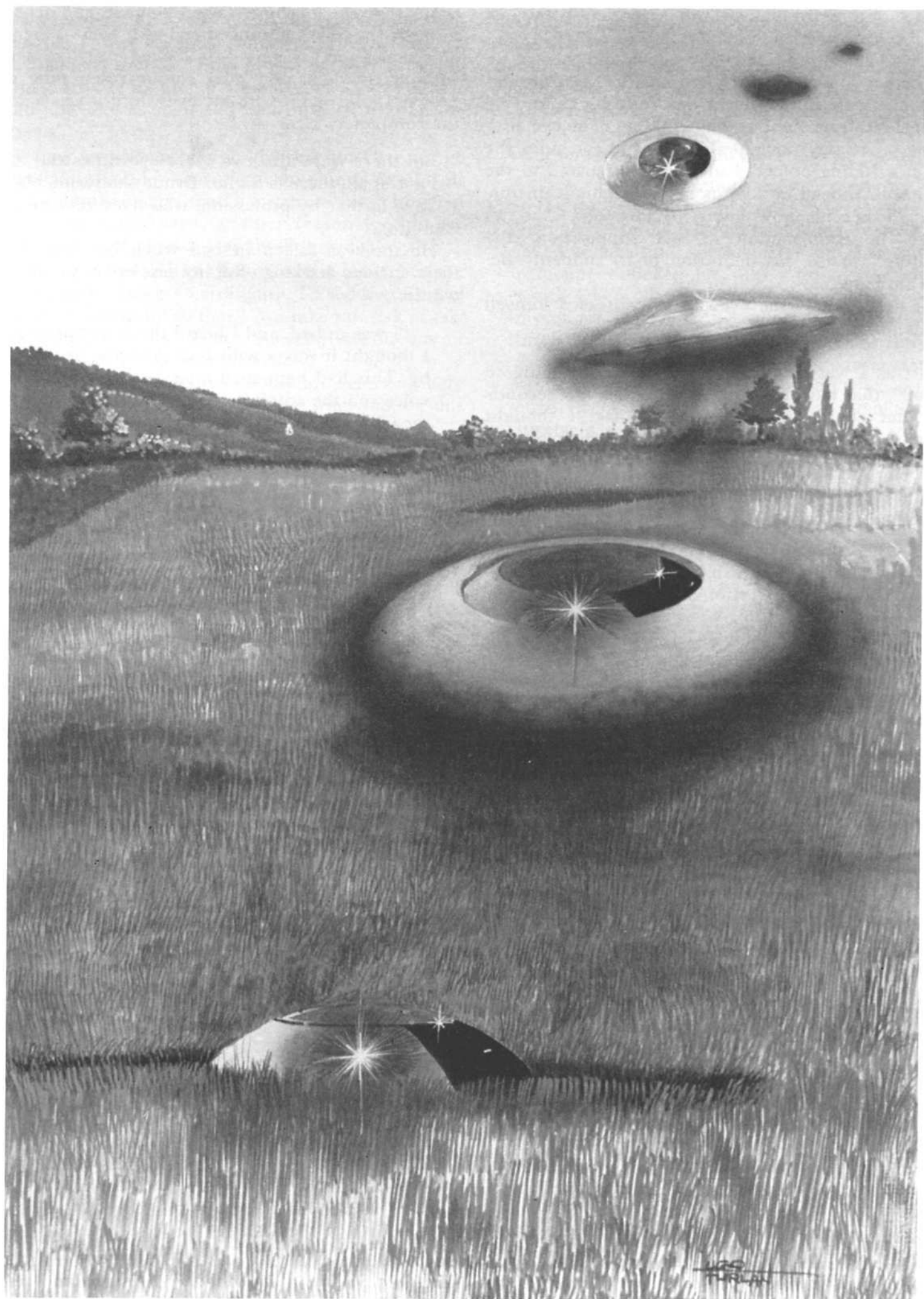
looks exactly like tinfoil", and then, when she saw the orange part of the dark part, she added: "Maybe it's all caused by the sunshine?" But her husband's words: "Can't you see that it is rotating . . . it's a lamp! . . . and the Sun isn't visible yet over the hills!" failed to arouse enough curiosity in her to keep her from going back to bed. On the other hand, Mario's own desire to know had given way before his current domestic chores, at least for the time being. Some guests were due to be arriving later. It was necessary to do the cooking and prepare the mayonnaise. So he went down into the kitchen and devoted himself to this task, taking up position in front of the window through which he had an excellent view of the spot where the "thing" was.

So, in between one egg and another, between a whipping and a tasting, he kept glancing out from the window where that sort of dome, always in the same position, continued to be clearly visible.

It was only later that Mario Claretto decided to do a better check-up. "I'm going to take a look now. I'll go up there slowly", he said to himself. (The eyewitness suffers from heart trouble, as we shall mention later.) There was no trace of fear or apprehension in him, neither was there excessive curiosity. He was already down in the courtyard, and therefore just about to start out, when he saw somebody, coming from the vineyard on the hillside to the right of the house and going straight towards that strange "thing".

"It must certainly have been a man from the countryside," said Claretto — "I knew that from the way he walked. In some newspapers it was stated that he was in all probability a holiday visitor from Milano who had rented accommodation right here in Cà Bianca, not far from the house of the former mayor of Varzi, Professor Carlo Azzaretti. But country folk have a very particular way of putting down their feet between furrows and ditches. And that man moved just like someone used to the fields. I should also add that the man was wearing a blue shirt with vertical white stripes." The fact of the matter is that this unknown person (still not identified) was heading, as stated, precisely towards the "thing", and even got close to it, a

**Fig. 1 Successive stages as the Varzi "object" took off. (Reconstruction by artist UGO FURLAN.)**





distance of a metre or two from it, hidden in the last stretch by the very high alfalfa.

Mario Claretto saw the man vanish and then in no time he saw him reappear. And now he was running like a madman, obviously in headlong flight, and he disappeared from sight in the twinkling of an eye after getting on to the road. At this point in the story the idea of a "flying object" had already occurred to the eyewitness. Indeed he told us he had thought instinctively: "I bet it's now going to take off". And, as though in confirmation of his supposition, the "machine" (to use his definition of it) suddenly became animated.

But here is how the eyewitness expressed himself on this point:—

"Just as I was saying to myself 'now it's going to take off', that machine rose up slowly, a few seconds after that chap's frantic escape. In fact I thought maybe they had ignited a gas or something of that sort to make the man leave, and that this was what had terrified him, but this of course is just my theory. And so I was now able to see the lower part of the object, which the long alfalfa had prevented me from seeing. The under-part was indeed flat, but shaped like a slightly upturned dish, or slightly like a chandelier, or, again, like a sort of silver-coloured or silver tin foil-coloured spinning-top. However, the object had no sooner risen, than what had seemed to all appearances to be a control-cabin, that is to say the cupola-shaped upper part with the flattened top, which I had been observing just above the surface of the alfalfa field for about an hour, re-entered into, or was swallowed up by it, 'just like the action of a bellows'. The machine did not rise vertically, but covered some metres grazing the ground, at a height of one or two metres.

"When the cupola went down, a vapour or a mist, or a smoke, came out (but maybe it's a mistake to express it that way). It seemed almost to be a powder, or, better, something midway between smoke and dust, brown or brick-coloured, but bright, but dull. All this without any sound and without any displacement of air. In fact, the alfalfa did not move in the slightest. That sort of 'mist' prevented me from making out the form of the object, and the whole thing had now assumed the characteristic shape, and even the colour, of a Havana cigar. ("Now I understand", said the eyewitness later, "why they also call them 'flying cigars'").

"After having travelled some few metres, grazing the ground, still very, very slowly, the machine rose vertically, and, reaching a height of 20-30 metres above the hill, it halted for a few seconds, giving the impression of almost turning back. Meanwhile, that sort of 'gas' had vanished rapidly, so that I could now see the object again. "The cupola at once came out, spinning anti-clockwise as before, and still with that sort of orange "lamp". No sooner was the cupola out

again, than the machine started to move, and departed towards the SSW, gaining speed as it went. When the object had gained height, it looked just like a pear without its stalk, and of a colour resembling dark brown. I followed it with my eyes until it was a dot in the completely clear sky."

But there were also two other eyewitnesses.

First of all, there is Signor Bruno Stafforini, born in 1923, a farmer by profession, who lives very near the Claretts.

He too was asleep in bed when his dogs began their furious barking. But let us listen to his own words:

"I was in bed, and I heard the dogs barking, and I thought it was a wild boar hanging around near by. This had happened once before. Then I heard voices on the adjoining balcony of the room where the Claretts sleep. I went down into the courtyard, as I also had to feed the chickens and the other animals. Well now, the dog that was on the chain was barking so fiercely that he had almost torn himself loose. He seemed to be rabid, while the other dog, which I always leave loose, kept dashing out in the direction of the hill opposite our house and then stopping at one certain spot, barking furiously, and turning around and coming straight back to near my feet, and this he did several times. It got to such a pitch that I threatened the dogs with my stick to make them stop barking, but it was useless.

"Mario Claretto spoke to me from his kitchen window and told me to look over towards the hill, at Signor Tornari's field, for there was something abnormal there. But to me it looked like a piece of tinfoil glittering and moving to and fro and so frightening the dogs.

"How could one imagine that later I would see a flying object rise up from that spot! Never! Then, at about 7.00 o'clock Mario called my attention to a tall, thin individual, who was running like a madman towards the highway. Some four or five seconds later, my neighbour shouted: "Look, Bruno! Look! It's taking off!" And so I saw it too . . ."

As we have chosen to give a synthesis of the eyewitnesses' statements, we break off Stafforini's account at this point to make it known that in substance he fully confirms the description given by Mario Claretto. We would, however, point out that our enquiries have established, in the meantime, that this second witness did not watch the "object" for long, not even when it rose up into the air, being engaged as he was in attending to various jobs. Claretto on the other hand actually did observe it for approximately over an hour, with only insignificant breaks. Consequently he is to be regarded as the principal eyewitness. Likewise it is clear that, although the dogs still did not stop barking, Stafforini did not decide to go and remove

that glittering "tinfoil" as he had told Claretto several times that it was his intention to do. In this connection, Stafforini told us: "I didn't go up there, but I told Mario Claretto to go up there himself, and that I would join him as soon as I had finished feeding the chickens".

So now we ask ourselves: why did not Claretto go immediately to see what was happening? Well, this witness simply asserts that, apart from his "chore" of making the mayonnaise, another reason for his not having gone out at once was the following:—

"I am a person who is affected with a heart ailment. Consequently, being a cardiopath, I need a couple of hours of 'running-in' so that I can take the risk of taking an up-hill walk. That's another reason why I didn't go up there at once to look."

As regards the third witness, we are referring here of course to Signor Mario Claretto's wife who, on this point, made the following statement:

"It would have been around 7.00 a.m., and, although still in bed, I was awake. Hearing my husband shouting to Stafforini that something was taking off, I went out on to the balcony and so I too was able to see this round thing, stationary at first, and then moving. What a sensation I felt! What a beautiful thing!

What colours! Before I die, anyway, I've seen something that I had never believed in when I heard folk talking about such things. Having once seen such an object, I can never again say that I don't believe in those things we call 'flying saucers' or 'UFOs' ..."

### Claretto's and Stafforini's Feelings at the Time

As regards the sensations experienced by Mario Claretto, this is what he told us:

"I wasn't in the least bit frightened. Instead, I enjoyed a beautiful spectacle. When that machine rose up, it looked just like a flying saucer. The word 'UFO' didn't come into my mind. I said to myself: "It'll be a flying saucer." And that sort of brick-coloured mist or vapour was a marvellous thing. Seeing that it has been erroneously stated in some newspapers that my wife and I were frightened, I repeat that what we saw was a real and true spectacle, a magnificent thing, incredible and spectacular, especially for its colours. When I talk of an orange 'head-light', I am certainly mistaken, because to describe that colour perfectly would be impossible. I was happy to observe that orange colour as the cupola was rotating, though, as I repeat, it was a colour that I have never seen before.



Fig. 2 Arrow indicates landing site on hillside.



Fig. 3 Antonio Chiumiento with Mario Claretto (right).

The 'head-light' did not dazzle; there wasn't any light going towards the meadow. The spectacle lay just in that! It was the colours themselves: the 'orange' wasn't *orange*, the 'brown' wasn't *brown*, and so on. When, reading the newspapers, I found articles that talked about the 'flying saucers', or, as they say, the 'UFOs', I always confined myself to reading just the main part, just the headlines, the gist, because the news didn't interest me. To tell you the truth, my wife and I were absolute disbelievers in those things, and in fact we aren't interested in Science Fiction. But — now that we have seen such a strange machine as that, why, now we do believe that the 'flying saucers' truly do exist! I confess that both of us, before we die, would like to see again so marvellous a spectacle, observe once more something in the existence of which we had never believed before. We shall certainly give everything far more attention in future."

As for Signor Stafforini, when he saw the object gaining altitude, he thought at first that it must absolutely be the Portobello balloon! At any rate, he told us that it looked like an apple with these colours: silver, red, and black. "In my opinion", he told us, *inter*

*alia*, "It was something that was sending and receiving messages, and photographing. But in fact I wasn't scared by the sight of it."

To sum up, it seems that only the two dogs (though no doubt a treatise on its own would have to be written for that other party, the unknown man who ran away!) behaved in a fashion that would indicate that they were frightened or that, at any rate, there was something upsetting them and enraging them.

### The Behaviour of the Dogs

It should not be forgotten that the dog that was on a chain was so enraged that it almost broke it, while the other dog, which was free, kept running to a distance of about 80 metres where it then stopped and started barking in the direction of the field of alfalfa where the 'object' was, and would then come straight back to near its owner's feet, and this it did several times. And while all that was going on there was not the slightest sound heard from the 'object'.

"The dog *Spiro* — the one that was not tied up", Signor Claretto told us, "does not merely bark when he realizes that somebody is out on the road, but he



also runs right out there. But, on the morning in question, he did not behave like that at all, and this clearly shows that he was afraid of something. It should also be added that the dogs did not cease to be very agitated and to keep up their barking until that object departed from the hill."

### The Traces

For a while Mario Claretto spoke to nobody about the affair. Then he decided to mention it to his son-in-law, Signor G.C., who had come to spend the weekend in the country with them. The son-in-law displayed anger because he had not been awakened, for he is passionately interested in 'certain things', and he at once went up to the field himself to investigate.

According to what we have been told by the Claretto's, who have never been up there themselves to look, the son-in-law declared that, at the spot where the unknown "object" was said to have landed, the alfalfa appeared to be crushed, and all around there was a substance resembling "mist" or "ashes". Furthermore, the examination of the traces served to confirm that the "thing" must not have been so very big: the eyewitnesses had estimated its diameter at 5 metres at the most.

We should mention that the present report is the result of two exhaustive enquiries conducted by us on June 11, 1983, and July 2, 1983.

In the first of these probes, we had the effective collaboration of the investigators A. Micela and M. Nebbia of the Torino (Turin) Branch of C.U.N., and of P. Toselli, an investigator from nearby Alessandria. Subsequently, by telephone, we received further useful information on the case from Roberto Balbi, of the Genoa Branch of C.U.N., who himself went to Varzi to make additional enquiries. On June 13, 1983, investigator Massimo Nebbia of Torino conducted an interview by telephone with the son-in-law, Signor G.C., residing at Robecco sul Naviglio, Province of Milano, who provided certain particulars regarding the episode. The details secured from Signor G.C. are as follows. (Full details about Signor G.C. himself are in our files):—

"Signor G.C. got out of bed at around 8.00-8.30 a.m., and is said to have been informed that a "black, yellow, and silver-coloured object" had landed in the field opposite the house. Since he is himself quite interested in these things (we must however emphasise that he never used either of the terms "UFO" or 'flying saucer, and that, though he may have read a few books, he speaks in general merely of 'these things') — he says that he went to the field to see whether the object that his wife's parents had seen had left any marks. Arrived at the field, he saw a circular area some 2-3 metres in diameter in which the alfalfa appeared bent — bent and not flattened — (this explanation was

given on our request) in the direction of the road, i.e. towards the valley. The location of this circular area was at about ten metres from the road and in his opinion, there was little likelihood that it could have been caused by anyone trampling on the alfalfa. During his visit to the site his wife was also present. The circular mark had no other particular features, and he makes no reference to the whitish substance which his mother-in-law said had been seen inside the circle."

### Publication of the Affair in the Newspapers

Signor Claretto has told us: "I would not have wanted to say anything to the journalists about the episode, but on that Sunday in question the son-in-law of my landlord was also among our guests. After listening to the account of the sighting given to my relatives, the landlord's son-in-law requested my permission for him to talk about it with one of his cousins, a certain Franco Draghi, who works as a journalist on the newspaper *La Provincia Pavese*, and I consented. I and my wife and the Stafforinis were very hesitant about agreeing to requests to meet journalists. The fact is, we were afraid they would think we were mad. But after hearing that hundreds of other people had seen a strange thing in the sky on the following day, we finally decided to consent, and this is how the report of what we had seen was published in both the local and the national press."

### Lost Evidence

The terrain (— just outside Varzi, along the provincial highway leading to Nivione, and at Cà Bianca to be precise) where the three eyewitnesses say the mysterious "machine" landed, is planted with alfalfa as a hay-crop. Unfortunately the alfalfa was cut the very next day after the sighting, which is to say five days before our first investigation on the site, and in the whole field the remains of the alfalfa seemed very dry. The whole area in question, and especially the spot picked out in accordance with Signor Claretto's direct indications, presented no noteworthy features.

### The Two Mysterious Individuals

Farmer Tornari, "guilty" of having cut the alfalfa on which the traces (presumed) of the unwanted 'object' would have remained, informed several people, including the press, of a fact that would deepen still further the mystery of the possible UFO.

This is what he told the Claretto's: "Two days after the landing, that is to say, on the Tuesday morning, even before the report had been published in the newspapers, I was turning over the alfalfa, already dry, that I had cut the day before, when I saw a car

with an Alessandria number-plate approaching from the Piedmont direction (the borders of the Province of Piedmont lie not far off, to the West) and stop near my field. Two individuals in white overalls got out of it and took readings with some strange instruments pointed towards the spot where the mysterious object had touched down. As soon as I got near them, they departed in haste without saying a word."

### The Mysterious Deaths of the Hens

In order to give just about everything regarding the case in question, we also report the following matter, but not before we have made it clear that we refrain from expressing any opinion of our own regarding these statements.

The Claretos have told us: "A couple of days after the episode (of the UFO), we found our broody hen dead, without managing to discover why. We found the eggs on which she had been sitting lying all around her, but not under her. What has left us not a little perturbed is the fact that her head was completely white, whereas usually the head gets redder when the bird dies. Furthermore, one of our neigh-

bours in our building complained to us that, precisely during those same days, two of her hens had also died without any apparent reason."

### The Investigations by the Carabinieri

As soon as the news of the landing had spread through the town, the Carabinieri (Gendarmerie) arrived. Marshal of Carabinieri Giovanni Peroncini gathered statements from the witnesses and sent a detailed report on the episode to Captain Bevacque, Commandant of Carabinieri at Voghera, under which jurisdiction Varzi lies. There are no grounds for doubting the good faith of the eyewitnesses. All three, according to the Carabinieri Marshal, enjoy excellent "psychic equilibrium". Consequently, in this official's opinion, there is absolutely no question of their being visionaries or fanatics. Moreover, we are in a position to know that the Carabinieri are also looking for a fourth eyewitness, namely the person who, after having been close to the "object", was actually seen escaping by the Claretos and by Stafforini, but, at least up to the present moment, their search has yielded no positive results.



Fig. 4 Antonio Chiumiento (left) interviewing farmer Bruno Stafforini.



## Conclusions

The three eyewitnesses appeared to us to be entirely sincere about the sighting. We would point out that Claretto — who is pensioned owing to ill-health — he formerly managed a restaurant in Magenta — has to wear spectacles for close vision; but he sees things very well at a distance. (On this point we did some tests with him that yielded positive results.) We would recall too that the Claretos have declared repeatedly that never before in their lives had they seen such an “object”, with those indescribable colours. All three, when duly interrogated by the writer of this report in the course of his investigation, appeared very sensible folk and they never contradicted themselves on the more important details of the alleged “event”. It is a great pity that nobody has managed to identify that unknown fourth man, who would surely have so many other things to tell us! (This is how “proofs” are withheld from Science!)

However, as the Claretos have said: *“That morning has changed our entire lives. Before that, we didn’t believe in those machines or flying saucers called UFOs. Nor, after it, do we now ‘believe’. We don’t ‘believe’. We now KNOW that they exist!”*

In our view, it is not necessary to be physicists or meteorologists or aeronautical engineers, etc., to feel fully entitled to *laugh* — in the truest sense of the word ‘laugh’ — when we read the views of a bee-keeping expert about the Varzi sighting, as published in some of the newspapers! Here is his opinion, maintained by him with the utmost conviction:—

*“The shining object seen by Signor and Signora Claretto and by the farmer Stafforini was nothing more than a huge swarm of bees that, seeking a cool place, had alighted during the night of Saturday to Sunday on the alfalfa field of farmer Tornari. Next morning, warmed by the rays of the Sun, the bees flew away buzzing as is their habit.”*

### NOTE

After reading this report on our investigations, some doubt might be felt regarding the possible dimensions of the “object” — particularly its *height*.

Claretto did in fact tell us that the lower part of the “thing” was concealed by the alfalfa. So we consulted an agricultural syndicate to ascertain the maximum height to which this crop can grow. And we have learnt that, in certain conditions, it can reach (and even surpass, though not greatly) the height of *one metre*. This entirely confirms what the three witnesses had told us about the height of that alfalfa crop at the time. In fact they said it was *more than a metre*.

Should anyone be wondering what became of the cupola of the machine when it was “retracted”, in con-

nection with this question of the possible height of the craft, we would say that nobody can reject the possibility that it was a retractable dome (as some types of telescope are retractable.)\*

### \*NOTE BY EDITOR, FSR

Signor Chiumiento appears not to know that there are several clear cases on record in the UFO literature indicating that retractable types of craft exist. One of the best known is perhaps that of the machine seen by the German town-mayor Herr Linke and his daughter in the forest near Hasselbach, Meiningen, in the spring of 1952, shortly before their escape from East Germany. The particular type of craft in question stood on a sort of stem or shaft. When the machine took off, they saw how the saucer itself seemed to “climb up its central shaft”, the stem below being retracted upwards and eventually emerging on the top.

As regards that fourth eyewitness whom the Claretos and Stafforini saw running away from the UFO at Varzi, we may take it as pretty certain that the Italian authorities (and maybe other “interested parties” also?) will have seen to it that *he* is never traced by the C.U.N. investigators!

Alfalfa is the name usually given in the USA and various other parts of the world to the type of cattle-fodder widely known in Europe as *lucerne*.



The Varzi landing



# PART ONE: ENCOUNTER AT TALAVERA: MYSTERY OF THE VANISHING BULLETS AND CARTRIDGE CASES

*Juan José Benítez*

*(Translation from Spanish. G.C.)*

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Although our UFO reports come from almost every area of the globe, we are constantly being taken to task because (although we possess no staff, no offices, and no permanent archives) we are unable to supply readers with fresh follow-up stories about all these weird happenings, 99% of which are never referred to again by anybody! This time, as it so happens, we have a remarkable follow-up on a Spanish occurrence of eight years ago, and we therefore make no apology for reprinting our original story by way of an introduction to the new material.

— EDITOR

THIS case occurred in the early hours of November 12, 1976, on the Spanish Air Force Base at Talavera La Real, close to the Spanish-Portuguese frontier. It is simply staggering.

The fact that the three witnesses were obliged to remain at the Base, doing their military service, until a short while ago, made it necessary for us to keep quiet about the affair. I am now making the details of it available for the first time, having secured them myself from the three airmen concerned.

On the morning in question — at about 1.45 a.m. — José María Trejo and Juan Carrizosa Luján were on sentry duty in the so-called “fuel stock zone” of the Talavera Air Force Base and Jet Aircraft School, which lies a few kilometres from Badajoz. Each of them was in his sentry-box, some 60 metres apart, when they heard strange noises.

“At first it sounded like typical radio interference. Then, all of a sudden, in the total darkness of the night, the noise changed to a sort of acute, penetrating whistle . . . so piercing that it hurt our ears . . .”

Their initial surprise had by now given way, as was only natural, to concern: there might be an intruder in the fuel stock zone. It might be an attempt to commit sabotage. But the penetrating whistle continued for only five minutes. Then all was quiet again.

Then they heard a strange noise again, near José Trejo's sentry-box. José called to Juan Carrizosa to come over and help him to search the area. Both men were equipped with the standard rifle, the quick-firing Z-62, and the prescribed amount of ammunition.

Once more there was silence for five minutes, and then the whistle came again. “We thought we would go mad with it, it was so sharp, so penetrating. It seemed our ear drums were going to be ruptured.”

The noise went on for a further five minutes or so. Then, silence again. But this time, as the whistling ended, they saw a light high overhead in the sky, like

a flare. It lit up a wide area beneath, over towards Badajoz. It lasted for only fifteen or twenty seconds and then vanished.

A few minutes later, while the men were still getting over their astonishment, they were joined by a third sentry, José Hidalgo, with one of the Air Base's Alsatian (German Shepherd) guard-dogs. It was Hidalgo's job to make a constant tour, visiting all the sentry-posts. He asked if they had seen the brilliant glow and they confirmed that they had.

Near the two sentry-posts there is a small hut (which I saw myself later when I visited the Base). The guards and a corporal sleep there. Trejo and Carrizosa went over to the hut and sounded the alarm. The support guards were soon on the spot, under Corporal Pavón, who decided that a general search of the area should now be made. So the three soldiers, Trejo, Carrizosa and José Hidalgo, set out for the fuel stockpile. It was a totally dark, pitch-black night. They had gone about 300 metres, hugging the adobe wall that surrounds the Base, on the other side of which lies the main road to Badajoz. All was silent round about them.

## A “whirlwind”

The dog-handler was talking about the possibility of an intruder. The dog himself, however, was absolutely quiet. These dogs are trained for their job, and the men drew confidence from the dog's apparent calm. Suddenly, however, just as they were approaching a new sentry-box that was under construction, they experienced a sort of “whirlwind”. So they loaded their rifles. And stood peering into the darkness and listening.

As Trejo explained later to me in his account of the affair, the “whirlwind” — or whatever it may have been — was localized in one spot.