

One document describes Mills' duties this way: "Performs a series of precision angular measurements to establish an accurate heading of Minuteman missiles...Loads the onboard guidance and control computer with essential launch and targeting information using preprogrammed tapes."

Mills' performance reviews are impressive. In one, covering the period 1 March 1978 to 28 February 1979, Mills' superiors had rated his performance in the most favorable terms. The reporting officer, a 2nd Lieutenant—whom I must not identify—concluded the performance review by writing: "Airman Mills performs his duties in an outstanding manner...SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENT: Airman Mills would make an excellent Combat Targeting Team Chief."

This recommendation for promotion and assignment was approved. By the summer of 1980, Mills was a Staff Sergeant and being evaluated for further promotion. As a part of his review for the period 19 January 1980 to 14 August 1980, various superiors had commented upon his performance and evaluated his potential. While I have been asked to withhold the identities of those persons, their comments are noteworthy.

A sergeant wrote, "Sgt Mills' adaptability to stressful situations and maturity have made him a tremendous asset to the [missile targeting] branch as well as to the [missile] wing. He continually strives for excellence in all facets of duty performance. This is exemplified by having 100 percents on paper work audits on 15 [missile launch] sites without any errors. Recommend promotion as soon as possible."

A major wrote, "Sgt Mills is a highly qualified Team Chief whose extensive system knowledge and dedication makes him a very valuable asset. His efforts during the SAC worldwide readiness exercise "Global Shield" were particularly noteworthy and greatly enhanced the wing's ability to place 100% of assigned missiles in alert for simulated execution. Promote [him]."

In short, John W. Mills III was hard-working, an expert in his field, and highly-rated by his superiors. Even so, he was not prepared for what he experienced one night while working in Ellsworth AFB's missile fields. In many ways, it would change his life forever.

During two taped interviews, combined here, Mills told me,

I was an Airman 1st Class at the time, part of a two-man Combat Targeting Team. A week, maybe two, after Christmas 1978, I was dispatched out to the Delta missile field, to do a targeting alignment procedure called RMAD (Reference Mirror Azimuth Alignment), which measures earth movement—whether the site has moved or not—so that the targeting would be accurate. My team chief was on Christmas leave so I was paired with a temporary chief, 2nd Lt. ----- . We were on-site at Delta-3. It was about 6 to 6:30 at night, pitch black, one of those cold winter nights in South Dakota.

The RMAD procedure is very sensitive to vibration. Our guard, who was topside, suddenly started banging on the ladder. We were screaming, 'No, no, no! Don't ever do that! Now we have to reshoot the set!' But he kept banging on the ladder and started screaming at

us. He said, 'You've got to get up here now! Either you come up or I'm coming down!' Well, the cops were never allowed below grade.

So, my team chief and I went up the ladder, really frustrated. We were screaming at this kid. He said, 'You tell me what's going on here!' It was then that I noticed this low-frequency hum. I don't know what it was—I've never heard anything quite like it. It wasn't like a hum from machinery. It was coming from everywhere. It was loud! You could feel it on your skin. It permeated everything—you could feel it inside you. You could feel it in your teeth. It was like a microwave except it wasn't heating you up. You could feel it vibrating off the [Launch Facility's] access hatch. The truck [parked next to the access hatch] vibrated. You could feel that reflecting onto you.

We asked the kid, 'When did this start?' He said, 'Five minutes ago.' He told us he had already called the Flight Security Controller and reported the hum. He thought the [missile site's] diesel generator was breaking down and had reported it. According to procedure, the FSC should have called the crew in the [Delta Flight launch] capsule and then they would have called us. But that didn't happen for some reason. Instead, the cop was apparently told to contact us directly. That's when he started banging on the ladder. So, we went upstairs, really angry about the RMAD being ruined. Then we heard the hum too. We thought there had to be a logical explanation. At first, we agreed with the cop that something had gone wrong with the generator.

Then suddenly the kid starts freaking out. He was going nuts! He said, 'Look up!' We looked up. All I saw was black. He said, 'Look to the East.' We did. We saw stars. He said, 'Look to the North.' We did. We saw stars. He said, 'Look to the West.' We did. We saw the light from [the town of] Wall. He says, 'Look to the South.' More stars. Then he said, 'Now look up!' We did. No stars. Nothing, just black. We said, 'It's just clouds.'

By now, we're ready to kill this kid. He said, 'Follow me.' We walked to the north side of the site and went up to the gate. You could hardly hear yourself think, because of the hum. Then we saw it. There was a straight-edge in space. On one side, there were stars, on the other side, it was black. That floored us! But again, we were trying to be logical, you know, maybe some idiot parked a barrage balloon above the site. Looking back, I was thinking really stupid things, trying to explain this thing we were seeing.

But we weren't scared. We were just puzzled. We went out of the gate. Now that we're talking about all of this, it occurs to me that we couldn't hear the hum once we opened the gate and walked off-site. It wasn't outside the site, at least it wasn't as loud. I seem to recall hearing my boots crunching through the snow once we were outside. And I think I was talking to Lt. ----- and the guard. Huh, it just dawned on me that I had forgotten that until now. But on the site itself, you couldn't hear yourself walking through the snow, and you could barely hear each other talking—all you heard was the hum.

Anyway, [once we were outside the gate], we walked along the edge of this dark thing to its end. There was a corner, where the edge turned and went another direction. It wasn't 90-degrees, it was maybe 60- to 70-degrees. But it was a hard corner. So we turned left and followed that edge. By now, we were about 80-feet west of the entry road. Well, we kept walking and followed that edge to the end, which was back over the site.

Of course, by now, we knew it wasn't a cloud, but you could not see what it was! We turned at that corner and walked, maybe a hundred feet, until that edge turned a corner. I do remember walking to the north side [of the site], and exiting the gate, then heading west, south, east and returning to the gate to get back in. Anyway, the object was not a triangle. It looked like it was four-sided, like a parallelogram or a rhombus [which is diamond-shaped]. But you couldn't tell how high it was.

So, we went back on the site and closed the gate. By then, the noise was deafening. Still, we weren't scared, just perplexed and maybe apprehensive. We had heard rumors about UFOs, and we had heard that people had been discharged for reporting them. I began to wonder if it was some kind of SAC exercise. If it was, we were in trouble. You are not allowed to go off-site, and we had walked out the gate. So, I was concerned we would get in trouble.

As I listened to Mills' account, it seemed to me that his thoughts and behavior that night were strangely inappropriate for the situation at hand. While his attempt to comprehend the object in familiar terms is perhaps understandable, his relative lack of fear struck me as bizarre. Given the looming, even menacing presence of the dark shape hovering overhead, and the increasingly oppressive humming sound, one would think that he would have been far more concerned, if not completely terrified. And yet—although the guard was apparently very frightened—Mills and his Combat Targeting Team partner were basically going about their business in a relatively calm and orderly manner.

Over the years I had read about various close-proximity sighting cases during which one or more witnesses had inexplicably reacted to the presence of the UFO in a strangely calm, almost nonchalant manner—as if some sort of mental-conditioning field was present, capable of suppressing emotions such as fear. But I had never personally interviewed such a witness before.

One will recall the statements of former Minuteman launch officer Bob Salas, regarding the missile shutdown incidents at Malmstrom AFB in March 1967. Salas told me, “[I later interviewed] a person who was out in the field working to put the Echo Flight missiles back on line. His statement was that he had been called topside by a security guard shortly after he began to go through his targeting and alignment procedures. Once outside, he saw a round orange glowing object hovering ‘not far out’ at about 30 degrees from the horizon, which was witnessed by the security guard as well. He stated that he did hear a low-level hum, and could definitely feel the energy field [emanating] from the object, but did not feel threatened by it. He then went back down to continue his procedure—which seemed odd to me, in light of what he just saw. You would think he would have been terrified, but he said he wasn't.”

The similarities between this witness' experience and the one reported by Mills are striking. In any case, I mentioned to Mills my incredulity over his apparent nonchalance during the incident. He replied,

This may seem strange but we figured, well, this thing is not hurting us, so we walked back to the personnel access hatch [to go down into the missile silo]. As I was about to descend the ladder, the lights went out. The topside lights, and the lights downstairs. Then the truck quit. We always let the engine run in winter, the whole time we were working, so we could leave the site when we were finished. The Air Force-issued batteries were terrible. We always had the guard run the truck for 15 minutes, turn it off for 15 minutes, and then run it again, the whole time we were on site. When the truck suddenly died, the guard tried to call the LCF on his radio. It didn't work.

We got flashlights from the truck and they worked. We figured the back-up generator would kick-in and get the lights back on, but that didn't happen. There are tertiary batteries down in the Launcher Equipment Room, if the generator doesn't work, to keep the site up, but the site was dark. By now, we were more than perplexed. We were freaking out. But not because of the object—we figured we were going to be in trouble for having a site drop-off alert while we were on it. We tried to start everything back up but couldn't, so we went back upstairs.

When we got back outside, the humming had stopped. But the object, whatever it was, was still above us. Then—I don't know how much later, five minutes, thirty minutes, I don't know—the lights came back on. The generator started cranking. That's when I noticed that the object was gone, and you could see the stars overhead. We never saw it leave.

We went back downstairs. The site was down. As far as I could tell, it was a G&C (Guidance and Control) No-Go. I got my control monitor and cable set and began a [missile] start-up procedure. That's when the [LCF] called. They were screaming at us. They said, 'What did you guys do?!' We told them, 'We didn't do anything, the site just lost power.' We didn't mention the object. We told them that we would get the site back on line, and we had to finish our RMAD. By now, Job Control had called and they were screaming at us. We were long overdue to leave the site and proceed to the next one, to do the RMAD on that one, so we figured they were upset about that. But Job Control said, bring the site up, finish your RMAD, but as soon as you're finished, we want you back on base.

We went, 'Uh oh.' We began getting our story straight right then: We didn't see anything, we didn't know anything. The site just lost power. So we went back to the base. On the way, we told the cop, 'This is how we're going to play it—we didn't see anything...' and so on. He said, 'Okay. I understand.' When he called the FSC to report the hum, he'd said that he thought the generator was acting up. He hadn't seen the object overhead yet, so he never mentioned it, thank God!

There were two other targeting teams out that night, at Echo Flight. Lt. ----- headed up one of them. I forget the name of the officer on the third team. They had been called in too and we all got back to base around the same time. We talked with the other teams, before we were debriefed. We found out that Lt. -----'s team had the same problem we did. They were doing RMADs over at Echo Flight. They told us that they saw something [directly above their site] and what they described was very similar to our something. They had an identical experience. Their lights went out, their site went off alert. The third team saw something too.

Now, after we dropped-off our equipment, we went back to the [missile maintenance] hanger. The entire building was full of people. There were colonels—we didn't have a general on the base at that time—but the missile Wing Commander was Ralph Spraker. He was there. Colonel Stone, the Deputy Commander of Maintenance was there. My commander, Fenimore, he was there. [The targeting teams] were all divided and conquered. They separated the enlisted men from the officers, they put us in separate rooms and they told us to fill out a report—an official inquiry—of what went on. That way, you can't get your story straight, unless you already got it straight [before you arrived]. I filled out the report, about what we didn't see. I gave my statement, my team chief gave his, and I guess the cop gave his.

So, for the record, we didn't see anything. But [I later learned that] Lt. ----- and his team told the truth. They said they saw something, and heard something. They said they didn't know what it was, but they admitted that something [unusual] had happened. His team was told, 'Keep your mouths shut.' They signed a national security agreement—agreeing not to talk about the incident. So, they signed their statements and went about their business. But Lt. ----- got passed over for captain. He was in the reserves. Ordinarily, if reserve officers did well, they would be promoted. But ----- was passed over. He had an absolutely splendid record. Nobody had a bad word to say about him. But he was history.

The [third] team—they were new and I didn't even know their names—they also admitted that they saw something, I don't know, maybe it was just lights in the sky, but they were bragging about it. Well, they were gone. Twenty-four hours later, they were gone [from Ellsworth]. We never saw them again. We didn't know what happened to them.

Me, I kept my mouth shut and got my career and retired. [My temporary team chief] is still on active duty. The last I heard, he was a full colonel. We kept our mouths shut. We made it, the other teams didn't.

I asked Mills if OSI had been involved in the debriefings. He said, "No, I never saw anybody in suits. (OSI agents are alleged to dress in civilian clothes when debriefing UFO sighting witnesses.) I talked to Colonel Stone. He questioned [our team] separately and together. Our stories were similar, but different enough to be believable. That was the last duty I had with Lt. ----- . I was assigned to the [missile

maintenance] shop for about a week and then re-assigned to my normal duties. So, I went about my business. That was in December 1978, or January 1979.”

Mills continued, “But later, after this had settled down, these two officers approached me—they were former Combat Targeting officers—who told me that all of Echo Flight had gone down that night, and part of Delta [Flight] went down, even Delta-1, which was the squadron command post for the 66th [Strategic Missile Squadron].

At first, I thought that the two officers were probing—to see if I would change my story—but after awhile I decided they were just curious. We were just shooting the breeze, you know? They said, ‘So, your site went off alert. You think that’s bad? We lost 12 or 13 missiles that night.’ I was stunned. I said, ‘You’re kidding! I was only aware of three.’ They said, ‘Oh no, all of Echo and two or three in Delta went down, plus D-1.’ By the way, the two missile crew who were at D-1, they told the truth [during the debriefing] and they disappeared too.”

I then asked Mills whether the officers who told him about the missile shut-downs had mentioned that UFOs were involved. “No, that terminology was never used. Never once did I hear that term, even during the debriefing. We talked about ‘anomalies’, you know, we asked each other, ‘Did you have any unknown anomalies?’ Later on, we were trying to explain to a bunch of pencil-pushers how a three-tier power system with commercial, diesel back-up, and batteries [at each of the missile sites] could completely fail all at once, and then become functional again. You know, I said, ‘I’m trained on this system, and I can’t figure out how a you can have a simultaneous failure on all three systems, and then have them all magically reappear.”

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