

SETKA: A SECRET SOVIET UFO RESEARCH PROGRAM

DAWN OF THE SECRET PROGRAM

By Paul Stonehill & Philip Mantle

A sharp increase in UFO activity in 1977-1978 (especially, the Petrozavodsk Case) had forced appropriate departments within the USSR Academy of Sciences to agree to a research program for anomalous atmospheric phenomena. The code name for this program was SETKA-AN (*Akademii Nauk Set'*--Academy of Sciences Net, or AS-NET.)

The Soviet Ministry of Defense embarked on a similar program, dubbed SETKA-MO (*Ministerstva Oboroni Set'*).

Reportedly, it was the Military-Industrial Commission that had ordered this research. The powerful Military-Industrial Commission decided to create two UFO research centers, one in the USSR Academy of Sciences, the other in the USSR Defense Ministry. Both centers aided each other's research and exchanged information. But we are not completely certain; there have been reports from Russia that Yuri Andropov, the chairman of the KGB from 1967 to 1982, and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1982 to 1984, was extremely interested in the UFO phenomenon (specifically, in one case investigated by SETKA researchers). He had enough power to give impetus to the creation of the secret program.

And so, at the end of 1978, anomalous phenomena research in the USSR Academy of Sciences became the subject of a special scientific research program designated as SETKA-AN. Its functions were distributed among different departments, and a

number of Soviet research institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences received tasks to research various aspects of the anomalous phenomenon issue.

On the 18th of October 1978, a meeting took place in the Academy of Sciences, USSR. Those present included Vladimir Vasilyevich Migulin, Georgiy Stepanovich Narimanov, Rem Gennadiyevich Varlamov, Victor Petrovich Balashov, Vladimir Ivanovich Volga, A. N. Makarov, Inna Evgraphovna Petrenko, Evgeniy Pavlovich Chigin, Dmitry Aleksandrovich Men'kov, Zaytsev (a colonel of the Soviet anti-aircraft forces), Lev Mironovich Gindilis, Inna Gennadyevna Petrovskaya, and Yury Victorovich Platov.

By the way, according to Dr. Fomenko, a famous Russian UFO researcher, a group of 10 or 15 researchers who later formed the SETKA core, regularly met outside their work to discuss the UFO phenomenon.

In 1981, the SETKA research program was given another name, Galaktika (MO and designations), and in 1986, the name was changed to Gorizont MO and AN. After the program ended (right after the failed Communist, anti-Gorbachev attempted coup in 1991, although Colonel Kolchin, a noted Russian UFO researcher, mentioned the year of 1990), a group of experts remained in the Department of General Physics and Astronomy of the Russian Academy of Sciences where they analyzed incoming reports until 1996.

THE PLAYERS

We know today that at the historic meeting Migulin and Platov represented the Izmiran (the Academy of Sciences USSR Institute of Terrestrial Magnetism and Diffusion of Radio Waves). Narimanov and Petrovskaya represented the Academy of Sciences USSR Institute for Space Studies. Varlamov represented the Moscow Technological Institute. Balashov and Volga represented the secret military unit 67947. Makarov represented the Department of General Physics and Astronomy of

the Academy of Sciences USSR. Gindilis represented the Shternberg State Astronomical Institute. We are not sure who the other participants represented at the meeting. This was the genesis of the SETKA programs, a fundamental research of anomalous phenomena in the Soviet Union. The main agency of the research was to be the Izmiran. Platov was to be the chief executive at the Izmiran for the *SETKA-AN*. We cannot quote the complete document here, but we need to mention several crucial points. The Ministry of Defense was worried about the effects of anomalous phenomena; such effects interfered with its work. Balashov mentioned that the priority of research should go to the periodically generated phenomena. He later said that there was no confirmation of sightings by either Soviet or American cosmonauts or astronauts (they observed containers, he added; meaning that the objects they saw were not UFOs). Discussions about the organizational details were, too, very interesting (an HQ is needed at the Academy of Sciences; Platov, the CEO, was to provide it; Migulin promised to “organize” rooms in Moscow; Gindilis mentioned the central archives and the catalogue in one central place). Varlamov mentioned that there are 3000 reports coming in each year from general population. Migulin was against Gindilis’s idea of a central storage place of the data. Volga stated that the sources of primary information included the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior Affairs, and TASS.

According to Dr. Fomenko, Migulin was chosen to lead the program while he was absent...no one else wanted to touch the dangerous subject.

In 1978, it was K. Ivanov, the deputy chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Navy (and chief of the Naval Intelligence) who was ordered to research the UFO phenomenon.

THERE ARE NO UFOS...

One of the first acts of the SETKA-AN (according to Yuri Striganov, well-known Russian researcher) resulted in official sanction of "anomalous atmospheric

phenomena" as a descriptive term instead of the forbidden "UFO." The censorship chains on the UFO subject were removed in 1989.

The well-planned tasks of the SETKA programs had a terrifyingly effective impact. According to Stroganov, the "Academic Commission" did its best to prove there are no UFOs, only errors in observation of rocket launches, or at the very least, ball lightning.

SETKA-AN served as a powerful cover, creating a distraction away from the workings of the Ministry of Defense, whose SETKA-MO is said to have been, or is, more serious in its investigations than the academic group. Despite the SETKA's nonchalance there had been occasions when "anomalous phenomena" had led to the unauthorized launches of mobile missiles, and on other occasions, the appearance of UFOs during military training exercises had resulted in the breakdown of radio communications and equipment malfunctions.

There had also been reports from military personnel including senior officers, about the strange conduct of UFOs over Soviet missile bases and cosmodromes.

Scientific arguments regarding the nature of UFOs had been the least of the military researchers' concerns; they did, however, pay close attention to the hypothesis that UFOs are manifestations of an ET civilization. Most of all, they have been concerned with UFOs' impact on military technology and on personnel; such impact could be quite unpredictable.

INSTRUCTIONS AND APPEALS

The Guidelines for the Soviet Navy had been dated March 7, 1980, and signed by Deputy Commander of the Main HQ of the Navy, Vice Admiral Saakyan. A well-known Russian ufologist, Valdimir Ajaja, who at the time had problems with the Communist ideologues and officials because of his UFO research, was given

protection and work by his friends in the Navy; he helped with the writing of the Instruction.



Mantle, Platov & Chernouss

Instructions regarding the procedures to collect information about anomalous phenomena data collection in the atmosphere and space were sent to various Soviet departments and organizations. The order came from the Department of General Physics and Astronomy of the USSR Academy of Sciences. *Nedelya* newspaper published an appeal by V. Migulin and Y. Platov to those who have sighted unusual

phenomena to first determine on site whether the observed object was not an astronomical or another familiar object. If it was not conventional in nature, then to describe the object thoroughly, and send the report to the Department of General Physics and Astronomy of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

As Y. Platov and B. Sokolov state in their *History of State-directed UFO Research in the USSR*, a decision was made to keep the programs secret. The justification was a necessity to ensure “abatement of public response”. There were three reasons for that, according to both apologists for this Inquisition-like approach to UFO phenomena research:

Programs formally belonged to activities pertaining defense-related subjects; initial assumption that there is a high probability of military-technical origin of the observed strange phenomena; and possibilities that in case of successful completion of the raised tasks some of the UFO characteristics could be used for military purposes.



Mantle & Platov

CONTROVERSY

We do not believe that Platov and Sokolov's publication is truthful. For example, look at their insistence that there were virtually no reports of anomalous phenomena from military objects at or next to secret testing areas and ranges. This is simply not true, for Soviet UFO researchers reported a number of such sightings. Y. Platov and B. Sokolov (the latter had somewhat different opinions when he discussed his work with George Knapp, a noted American journalist in 1993) were official participants and leaders of the programs. Also, both authors admit that because scarce funding was available for their programs, and necessary equipment to research such phenomena as large-sized plasma structures in the atmosphere was not available, their methods could not be foolproof.

Basically, information was collected, and analyzed, and some physical models of observed phenomena were developed. But even this assertion seems to be untrue.

Their publication was criticized by Russian and Ukrainian ufologists, and applauded by seasoned debunkers. There is obviously an agenda to denigrate independent UFO research, and not some “secret KGB files”, as the authors state in the publication. It would be very decent on their part to inform Russian and other former Soviet ufologists as to where their archives are located (if there are any left), so that perhaps a joint commission could be formed, and reports researched again. We are not asking that a foreign representation be included, for there may be defense secrets in the archives of reports that spanned over 13 years. But we do not think that Platov and Sokolov should be allowed to dismiss Soviet and CIS UFO phenomenon with their publication. Actually, such prominent participants in the programs as Colonel A. A. Plaksin (liaison between the military and the academic programs) have recently confirmed the UFO incident in 1982 (when a nuclear war was almost triggered because the launch codes for the Soviet ICBMs had been bafflingly enabled just as the gigantic UFO appeared over the secret ICBM base in Ukraine). Although Boris Sokolov for years reported the same, he has later changed his story. We believe it is A. A. Plaksin who should be the authority in the cases investigated by the military SETKA program; or the head of the program, General Balashov. By the way, Colonel Plaksin nowadays is the leading paranormal phenomena expert of the Russian Defense Ministry.

REVELATIONS OF COLONEL PLAKSIN

And he is quite outspoken about the SETKA program (September 8 and 15, 2000, REN-TV program titled *Voyennaya Tayna* or *Military Secret*). A most curious article was published in *Komsomol'skaya Prvada* newspaper on 31st May 2002. The author was Andrey Pavlov, and its title is *UFOs helped Americans create super weapons*. Aleksandr Plaksin, who was interviewed, is called a military geophysicist. In the article Plaksin "reveals" several interesting developments.

1. Many recent achievements of the American military-industrial complex have been generated in the labs dedicated to the research of paranormal phenomena.

2. "Aliens" have nothing to do with American advanced technology (i.e., Stealth).
3. In his 15 years of UFO research A. Plaksin had never obtained direct proof that there are alien civilizations active on our planet.
4. Americans have researched UFOs since 1954 (U.S. Air Force), and since 1974 they have operated a secret scientific research center to study anomalous phenomena and UFOs through the use of a special Earth-based station. Hence, they (the Americans) were able to create a super weapon.
(A. Plaksin goes into terrifying details, but basically his aim is to denigrate American HAARP, future U.S. policies, etc.)
5. A. Plaksin describes the creation of the Soviet program(s) to study the anomalous phenomena from 1978 on.
6. A. Plaksin goes into fascinating details; the information after all, came from Soviet military branches, the Navy, the border guards, anti-aircraft units, etc. Some of the information revealed in the interview in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* contains fascinating details of a sighting from the Borisoglebsk airfield (the immobile black cloud). This case is described below.

This is of great interest; there have been other very strange "clouds" over the former USSR and Russia; such cases are mentioned throughout *Mysterious Sky: Soviet UFO Phenomenon (2006)*.

7. A. Plaksin mentions the infamous and very dangerous 1982 case (and gives the correct date; it was the 4th of October, not the 5th; and nothing other than a UFO almost triggered a nuclear war).
8. A. Plaksin states that there were no UFO crashes in Kazakhstan in 1978; no secret storage for UFO fragments in Mitische (Moscow area), no super secret storage in Novaya Zemlya.

A. Plaksin also mentions that the laboratory he worked with after 1978 was created at the military scientific research institute TSNII-22. He started there as a junior

scientist in 1979, and gradually became its supervisor, until 1991, when the program was disbanded due to the lack of funds. It would be great to compare his information to that provided by such respectable former Soviet military officers as Gherman Kolchin, Lev Ovsischer, and others. Gershtein, Subbotin, Chernobrov should also be heard, for their research skills are diverse and vast.

9. A. Plaksin is of the opinion that the unidentified objects ("20 percent", according to him) are of physical origin that is still unknown to us. Our laws of physics cannot explain such objects. The rest of the cases have to do with UFOs that are of the plasma formation, quite natural in origin. The methodology used by Soviet military scientists allowed them to juxtapose Sun's condition and the timing of UFO appearances. They had determined that under certain conditions a stream of solar radiation penetrates the Earth protective magnetic field and assumes very diverse forms, causing influence on measuring devices and people. He mentions two fascinating episodes (1977 and 1981).

10. Although A. Plaksin states that most likely there are no aliens on Earth, he also mentions that because of military secrecy he cannot reveal everything he knows.

11. Among other projects carried out by the military UFO research lab A. Plaksin worked in was the creation of the USSR anomalous zones map. There have been dozens of such zones. The most important ones were in the Ust'-Koksin area of the Altai Mountainous Autonomous region; the Zarevshan area; the Borisoglebsk area; the Plesetsk area of the Arkhangelsk region; the Dzerdzhinsky area of the Nizhegorodsk region; the Shatursky area near Moscow.

12. The military institute authorized to study UFOs had cooperated with other institutes of the Russian Science Academy to create a number of super sensitive equipment for UFO research. The equipment allowed them to estimate the size of UFOs, density, and their speeds. According to A. Plaksin, the Soviet military scientists also learned to predict UFO waves.

13. They never worked with any contactees. They were only interested in the official reports from Soviet military units; the reports were to be measured by military technological equipment. Plaksin, obviously, is revealing more information, piecemeal. There is more to be learned from him, we hope, in the future.

Scientists in the Novosibirsk “Akademgorodok”, a powerful science center in Siberia, conducted the first data processing of UFO sightings by Soviet computers. The actual calculations were performed in the Institute of Mathematics of the Siberian Branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. They used *EVM ES 1022* computers. This was done in the framework of the *SETKA-AN*. Mikhail Gershtein has a copy of this historic attempt to study UFO data; the report consists of 45 pages of graphs and formulas.

Plaksin never discussed the mysterious “Arkhangelsk Dust” in his interviews, but he knew about it, as does V. Fomenko. Soviet scientists from the SETKA, as well as Novosibirsk came to Arkhangelsk to study the phenomenon. Arkhangelsk Region is situated in the North-West of the European part of Russia. Its shores, three thousand kilometers long, are washed by cold waters of three Arctic seas: the White, Barents and Kara Sea. We could not get more details of the mysterious event. We do know from Mikhail Gershtein’s interview with V. Fomenko that Plaksin gave the elderly researcher some notes and information he had kept in his apartment

Overall, Russian ufologists are not certain what had actually been "caught" by the SETKA-MO. The Instructions signed by Saakyan mention two military units where the most serious UFO data collected was to be telegraphed to immediately: Unit 67947 (Mitishi city, Moscow region), and Unit 62728 (Leningrad). "Serious" data concerned the following: physical traces of anomalous phenomena, death of military personnel (as a result of contacts with the anomalous phenomena), and breakdown of technology.

We are not certain about the fate of the Krasny Kut unidentified phenomena secret archives of the Ministry of Defense that (according to retired Colonel Gherman Kolchin, a respected UFO researcher and author) were kept at the secret testing site in the Saratov region. According to Kolchin, Colonel Sokolov had burned those reports that were not sold (400 most intriguing cases) to the American ufologists who visited Moscow in 1993.

Also, according to Kolchin, back in 1997, one of the scientists involved with the program had confirmed that Migulin's commission virtually stopped its activities. The same situation was in the Ministry of Defense.

And yet, Russia of 2007 is very different from Russia of 1997. President Putin and his government may have a radically different view of the UFO phenomenon and its effects on the Armed Forces. Perhaps, some day we will find out whether other programs are active now. Nikolay Subbotin, an active Russian UFO researcher from the RUFORS organization, mentioned that in the summer of 2002 he discussed the subject with a captain from the strategic rocket forces. Captain Murtazin mentioned that in 2001 he had seen a special registration log for anomalous atmospheric phenomena (the same one that the SETKA had introduced in the late 1970s). That log contained recent entries, and the watch officer very efficiently sent the reports to a special military center that only he had information about....That means that the research program was either revived...or was never really terminated.

SOME OF THE SETKA CASES

1974, BOROSOGLEBSK AREA

The area is also named by A. Plaksin as one of the most important anomalous zones of the former USSR. That year a very interesting case took place at the Povorino airfield. A motionless black cloud appeared over the site. It was hovering at the altitude of seven kilometers. It was approximately a kilometer and a half long. The radar below indicated that it was an aircraft. A jet was sent to intercept it; there

were two fliers aboard. As soon as they entered the cloud, a sharp siren pierced their helmet's earpieces. The sound was powerful, above "pain threshold". At the same time their onboard device illuminated the "dangerous altitude" reading, and the aircraft started shaking violently. The pilots were barely able to shut down the power and with great difficulties guide the aircraft out of the cloud. The cloud hovered over the airfield for four hours, and then disappeared. The Soviets were never able to determine what that "cloud" was or consisted of.

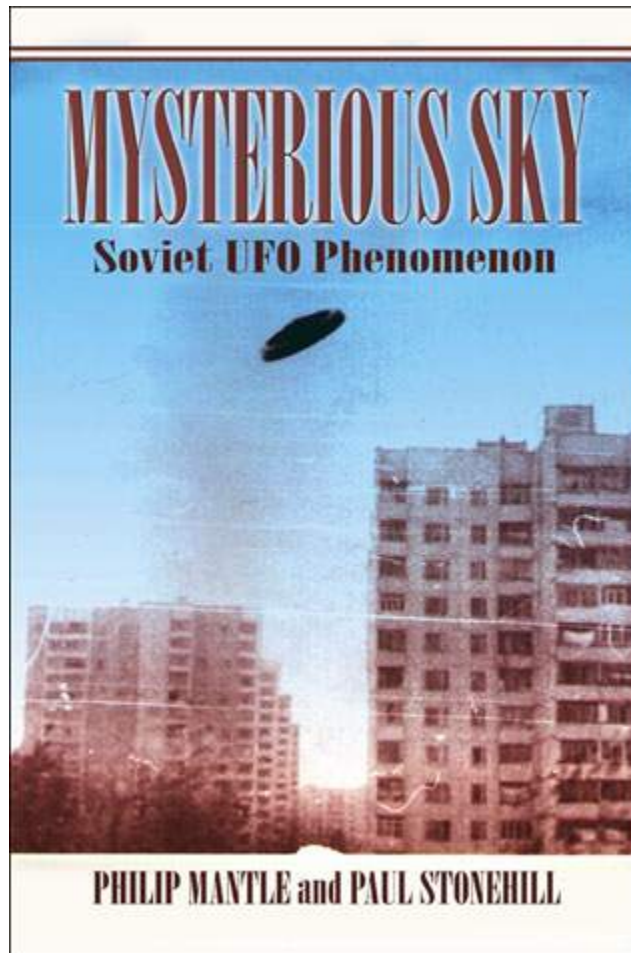
1981, Mukachevo, Ukraine

Again, we have A. Plaksin to thank for the information about the case. It took place on September 14, 1981. A MIG-23 jet was conducting a training flight. And a fiery sphere appeared from nowhere, right in front of the aircraft. The front part of the jet was destroyed. The pilot had time to eject himself from the cockpit. A. Plaksin claimed that such incidents were never explained by his military UFO research.

October, 1982

Reports received from Russia indicate that Soviet Colonel Boris Sokolov investigated the case, and on October 5, 1982, he was sent to Ukraine. Sokolov knew quite a lot about UFOs, as he was involved in the information collection and analysis per the Instruction. The reason he was summoned to the Soviet Ukraine was an urgent report from an ICBM base, sent to the Chief of General Staff. On October 4th, a UFO was observed in the area; it remained there for about four hours. But the control panel indicated that an order came in to prepare launch of the base missiles. Lights actually lit up on the panel, and launch codes enabled the missiles; there were many officers present that witnessed the incident that could have started a nuclear war. Apparently Boris Sokolov's team came to the conclusion that it was the UFO that bears responsibility for arming Soviet missiles. In the year 2000 Sokolov changed his views, perhaps under direct pressure, and came out against UFO hypothesis in this and other cases.

This case became famous in the West years later. A transcript from ABC News Prime Time Live dated October 5, 1995 describes the segment about the KGB files. David Ensor, a well-known correspondent for the network, conducted a five-month investigation of the Soviet UFO files. Dozens of Russian scientists, military and government officials had been interviewed. Ensor found out about forty major incidents, including one that prompted fears of starting an accidental nuclear war. Ensor's team also found out about the Instruction. They viewed awesome footage of a huge triangular UFO filmed by a Soviet propaganda film crew (most likely, it was the so-called Riga UFO, 1961 incident). Other reports confirmed by eyewitnesses proved to be important. The incident that almost unleashed a nuclear war took place in 1982, on October 4. The event in question took place in the Soviet Ukraine. That day a huge UFO of perfect geometrical shape and 900 meters in diameter hovered over a nearby ballistic missile base. Numerous eyewitnesses confirmed the sighting to David Ensor. So did Lt. Colonel Vladimir Plantonev (we are not certain if this name was spelled correctly by ABC news), a missile engineer. According to him the UFO was a noiseless, disc-shaped craft; it had no portholes, its surface completely even. It made turns, like an airplane would. The missile silo at the base contained a nuclear warhead pointed at the United States. It was dismantled in the early 1990's. But in 1982 it was fully functional. Plantonev was in the bunker that fateful day in 1982. The room contained dual control panels for the missile, each of them hooked to Moscow. As the UFO hovered overhead, signal lights on both the control panels suddenly turned on, for a short period of time. The lights indicated that the missiles were preparing for launch. Moscow could have initiated such launch, by its transmission of special orders. But no order came from Moscow, and no one at the base pushed any buttons. For 15 long seconds the base simply lost control of its nuclear weapons. Moscow was very much alarmed, and sent an investigation team to verify the incident. A member of the commission, Colonel Igor Chernovshev (we are not certain if this name was spelled correctly by ABC news), corroborated the 1982 incident to David Ensor.



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