

Correspondence

A further Antarctic myth

Rubens J. Villela

Rua Madre Teodora, 265, 01428-010 São Paulo, SP, Brazil

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I refer to the interesting paper by Summerhayes and Beeching entitled ‘Hitler’s Antarctic base: the myth and the reality’ published in the January 2007 issue of *Polar Record* (Summerhayes and Beeching 2007). One might consider that a detailed examination of such obviously faked stories of Nazi activities in Antarctica is an uneconomical use of time and effort by such distinguished researchers were it not for the widespread coverage such fancy and misleading tales have gained in recent years. More importantly perhaps, the article contributes new and more complete information on lesser known aspects of Antarctic history, besides the *Schwabenland* expedition itself. These include Operation Tabarin (responsible for the first effective permanent occupation of the continent), U-boat activity in the South Atlantic, Operation Highjump, and the Argus nuclear explosions. All very interesting subjects indeed and well worth writing and reading about.

I would like to contribute another example, based on personal experience, of how such myth building tales are constructed by authors apparently unconcerned with Antarctic realities and probably counting, to sell their wares, on the high level of ignorance still prevailing amongst the public at large about the polar regions.

In 1960–1961, I was a press correspondent and scientific observer for Brazil with the U.S. Navy’s Operation Deep Freeze, travelling aboard the U.S.S. *Glacier*, which vessel in company with another icebreaker, U.S.S. *Staten Island*, explored an unknown sector of the southern Bellingshausen Sea coastline. The ships reached position 72° 28’ S; 91° 42’ W, a record of penetration into the heavy pack ice off the Eights Coast (McDonald 1962, 1963). Later *Glacier* proceeded to the Antarctic Peninsula area and the South Shetland Islands, and while anchored in Martel Inlet, inside Admiralty Bay, King George Island, we were witness to a strange luminous aerial phenomenon, resembling a meteorite, but which, in my opinion, should be classed as a true UFO. The date was 16 March 1961, and not ‘January 27, 1962’ as quoted in some sources available on the web. Nearly 23 years later (6 February 1984), I would witness at the same spot, the inauguration of the first Brazilian base in the Antarctic, Comandante Ferraz Antarctic Station, erected close to the old FIDS Base G, established 1947, and which had just

been abandoned by the UK when we landed there from *Glacier* (Fig. 1).

Back in Brazil, my press story on Deep Freeze’s 1960–1961 expedition appeared in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, in a 20-part series (Villela 1961). Parts 17, 18 and 19 (the issues for 8, 9, and 10 June respectively) refer to the ‘UFO’ episode and our troublesome visit ashore to Base G to investigate if the light could have been a pistol flare shot by someone in need of help. Other original accounts I wrote were published as listed in the references (Villela 1968, 1979, 1998). A reliable citation may be found in a book by the UFO investigator Timothy Good (Good 2000: 20–25).

As I have written (Villela 1979, 1998; Good 2000), during my work with NASA at the Goddard Space Flight Center from October 1962 to June 1963, I filled in a NICAP (National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena) form, at the request of a fellow scientist, about my Admiralty Bay sighting. A summary appeared in an annual report published by NICAP. Late in 1975, a lady wrote to me and sent a xerox copy of a couple of pages of Ivan T. Sanderson’s book *Invisible residents* (Sanderson 1970: 3). I was shocked by the way this writer had completely falsified my 1961 sighting. I wanted to write to Sanderson in protest, but gave up after learning that he was deceased. Presumably, Sanderson had been inspired by the published NICAP report.

Next, apparently, Sanderson’s book inspired another author, Edwin Corley, who mentioned my name and sighting in his novel *Sargasso* (Corley 1977). To quote from the pocket edition p160:

‘Did you ever hear of Operation Deep Freeze?’...
‘It was a U.S. Navy project at the South Pole. An icebreaker was stationed in Admiralty Bay. A Dr. R.J. Villela, a scientist from Brazil, was on deck when he heard a fantastic crashing sound from the surrounding ice. He saw great chunks of ice being thrown into the air. And the water, when it was revealed, was boiling.’

In truth, the object I saw was silent, its trajectory nearly horizontal, and there was no ice pack in Martel Inlet, only small pieces of drift ice around, besides a few icebergs. This fictional book was later published in Brazil with a title (translated into English) *Sargasso Sea: how death comes about in the Bermuda Triangle* (Corley 1978).



Fig. 1. Base G's main building as found by the landing party from *Glacier* on 17 March 1961.

The editor was conscientious enough to locate me in São Paulo and to ask for confirmation of the story. He added a footnote (Corley 1978: 137) in the Brazilian edition which states: 'According to him, the object did not appear from the bottom of the sea, breaking the ice cover; when seen, it gave the impression it came from behind the mountains that surrounded Admiralty Bay; in horizontal flight, disappeared in the opposite side . . .' And I may add, I was never 'jolted almost out of body and mind' as Sanderson puts it, but only stood intrigued and in wonder at the sight.

Finally, Brinsley LePoer Trench's book *Secret of the ages: UFOs from inside the Earth* (LePoer Trench 1976) has a cover painting which seems exactly inspired by Sanderson's tale, the scenery indeed showing a strong resemblance to the true Admiralty Bay site. But there is no mention of me or of Admiralty Bay in the book.

Also particularly annoying to me are the tales spun around Operation Highjump and Admiral Byrd. As a radio amateur and short wave listener, I monitored Highjump's morse code communications in 1946–1947, and wrote reports about it that were published in the USA and UK hobbyist magazines (Villela 1948). It would be another 43 years until my next published paper with a similar title appeared, this time in *Polar Record* (Villela 1991).

Given such misquotes and downright lies written about my own reports, no wonder that ufology has turned into such a discredited subject. This is unfortunate since, based on further experiences (Villela 1979; Good 2000), I do think the matter of UFOs is a serious business and merits much more attention by scientists. Antarctica itself is the scene of many and well documented UFO sightings and related phenomena.

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