

The Silly Season – It's All Year Long!

An editorial commentary for April

by Bob Grove W8JHD

It's been seven years since my editorial on conspiracy theories was published in *MT*, and I thought it might be fun to revisit the subject.

Contrails, as aircraft buffs know, are condensation clouds left behind high altitude aircraft, resulting from combustion products (mostly water vapor) hitting the frigid air at those elevations. The resulting ice crystals, admittedly contaminated with combustion compounds, leave a spectacular white trail behind the aircraft's engines.

Painted at those altitudes, the wispy white trails are real attention grabbers – especially if you're paranoid! Yes, there are those who are sure that our government is spraying its citizens with (take your pick):

- a. Mind altering drugs
- b. Slow-acting poisons
- c. Crop-killing herbicides
- d. Sterility agents
- e. Carcinogens
- f. Hazardous wastes
- g. Radioactive dust

Please tell me, conspiracists, how would the government benefit by indiscriminately poisoning masses of our population? Why have there been no increases in hospital admissions following these “sprayings?” How is it possible for thousands of pilots and crew members over several decades to participate in such an activity without one of them telling about it? Does it make sense that this would be done in broad daylight? Why is there no change in the air below the patterns? Isn't it obvious from close-up photos that these are simply combustion products escaping from the jet engines' rear nozzles?

During my scientifically-impressionable teens, I followed high altitude experiments being conducted with dry ice, sodium iodide crystals, cesium vapor, aluminum foil (“chaff”), and other comparatively benign substances intended to modify weather systems and radio signals, not human behavior. I don't recall anyone dying, or even getting sick.

So why the popular hysteria over a common phenomenon? Is overexposure to violent video and computer games, movies, and TV taking its toll on the public's rationale? Is growing disgust at politics for profit driving Americans to cynicism and suspicion? Or is it merely the indiscriminate fantasy of some fundamentalists who will cite nearly anything as evidence of “prophetic fulfillment?”

Imminent Invasions

During the late '90s, well-meaning folks alerted me to trainloads of Russian-marked armored vehicles being conveyed to mysterious destinations to stage a takeover of America. Think about it: If you wanted to take over America, would you send your exposed equipment, marked clearly with your foreign country of origin, during daylight hours, through heartland America? I don't think so. Photos, please?

Then I was informed that black-suited paratroopers were dropped into a Texas town (had those informants been imprinted by watching “Red Dawn”?), and that barbed-wire internment camps were being set up in remote locations to impound U.S. citizens.

Oddly enough, when availability of *real* news has never been more pervasive, many Americans would rather believe the much-altered predictions of Nostradamus as concocted by historical revisionists, or the seriously-flawed prognostications of the late Jeanne Dixon who couldn't even foretell her own death.

During May 1999 a story was widely circulated that the citizens of Reston, Virginia, were sprayed with a brown, hepatitis-inducing agent by Soviet helicopters, and that thousands of residents would be expected to contract the disease. I'd kind'a think that FAA radar operators might have spotted these aircraft, wouldn't you?

There were no police reports of such an event, no scanner intercepts of related communications, and no media mention of such an extraordinary invasion. I subsequently drove through Reston, and it looked pretty normal.

Rampant Modern Myths

We've seen many other examples of conspiracy theories as well:

- *The U.S. moon landing was faked*
- *Kennedy was killed by two assassins' bullets*
- *Tuna mercury levels are inaccurate due to uncalibrated instruments*
- *Mercury in dental fillings causes Alzheimer's*
- *Fluoride in water causes rectal diseases*
- *The American Medical Association is suppressing a cancer cure*
- *Cold fusion truth is rejected by scientists*
- *A Vatican observatory in New Mexico is guarded by U.S. troops*
- *Crop circles are made by UFOs*
- *Roosevelt knew of impending Pearl Harbor invasion*
- *UFOs and their occupants are hidden in Area 51*
- *19 leading microbiologists were assassinated within 4 months by the CIA*
- *Amelia Earhart's mysterious disappearance was a government cover-up*
- *A New World Order will follow the takeover by the Trilateral Commission*

Conspiracy theories are as abundant as cow flops in the pasture, and just as fragrant. With modern, instant communications at our fingertips, secrets shared are secrets revealed. But the terminally twitchy will believe most anything that reinforces their immunity to critical thinking.

Then there's the quackery: Copper bracelets will cure arthritis, magnets improve fuel mileage, stick-on strips increase cell phone range...but that's another editorial.

Now, in all candor, I will admit one long-standing "myth" that appears to have some validity: Powerful magnets do, indeed, seem to open blood vessels, promoting more rapid healing of damaged tissue and reducing swelling by half—at least on rats in a University of Virginia Laboratory!