



THE SOUTH HILL, VA. UFO CASE

An Analysis: By Philip J. Klass

THE SOUTH HILL CASE

New evidence and insight into the UFO case that occurred on April 21, 1967, at South Hill, Va., was obtained during a two-day trip to that city on December 16-17 and from follow-up investigations. A dozen of the principals in the case, including Clifford Crowder who reported the sighting, were interviewed. The interviews were recorded on tape.

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It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the general details of the South Hill case and has read the official case report prepared by William T. Powers of Northwestern University for the Air Force, dated May 10, 1967.

This case seems to this author to be an especially interesting one for several reasons:

1. It demonstrates that physical evidence which may upon superficial examination seem to provide evidence of extra-terrestrial visitations can actually demonstrate quite a different conclusion.
2. It shows how failure to report the full details of a UFO case can mislead the general public into a false conclusion and add to the illusion that the Earth has entertained extra-terrestrial visitors.
3. It illustrates that mature adults with good reputations in a community are not necessarily beyond attempting a spurious UFO report, if only as a psychological experiment.

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The Evidence

The credibility of Clifford Crawford's story that he saw a large, tank-shaped object sitting on four legs on East Farrell St. shortly before 9 p.m. on the evening of April 21, 1967, and that the object suddenly disappeared with a blinding flash that left the asphalt-macadam road afire, rests on the following:

1. The burned spot on the road. According to some accounts, the rocks in the area were still warm to the touch when Crowder and the local police returned to the area a few minutes later.
2. Four tiny holes, or "padprints," measuring approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep, which were found at the site the following morning but not on the evening of the incident.
3. The statement by Norman Martin, who lives 600 feet south of East Farrell St., that he saw bright illumination on trees near the burned spot for a brief interval at approximately the time that Crowder says the incident occurred.
4. Mr. Crowder's long-standing reputation in the community.

The Burned Spot

Crowder's story is that the brief but intense burst of fire emitted by the object when it took-off, or disappeared, set fire to the asphalt-macadam road. On at least fourteen occasions during two recorded interviews, Crowder referred to flame and fire on the road. For added confirmation, upon returning to Washington, I wrote him to ask if the road was merely smoking or if he saw actual flame; if so, how high were the flames and approximately how long they lasted.

Crowder replied: "The road was flaming after the flash of light. At first the flame was about 3 ft. high. When I passed the flame was going out; I would guess 2-5 inches high. When I first saw the flash I stopped my car at once...I would guess the time as 60 seconds or more from the time I saw the flash before I passed the burning pavement.

Other investigators have assumed that the asphalt was set afire. BUT ASPHALT WILL NOT SUPPORT COMBUSTION, according to Blake Cornthwaite, managing engineer of The Asphalt Institute in Washington D.C. Asphalt can be made to burn if its temperature is raised to 400-500F, but when the external source of heat is removed, THE ASPHALT WILL NOT CONTINUE TO BURN. "It cooks over and puts itself out," according to Cornthwaite.

It is true that fast-curing types of asphalt, which are dissolved in naptha, might briefly support combustion for several days after being laid. But within a week, 90% of the naptha will have evaporated. And the road on East Farrell St. was not freshly laid, even if fast-curing asphalt were used.

THIS MEANS THAT THE BURNED SPOT ON THE ROAD WAS PRODUCED BY SOME TYPE OF FLAMMABLE LIQUID OR MATERIAL. This, conceivably, could have been deposited by the "object", by Crowder himself, or by others.

If the flammable material was deposited by the "object," then it was ignited by the "object" in the process of take-off. If deposited by Crowder or others, it would have had to be ignited by more conventional means.

The Charred Matches

Some time after Crowder brought the local police to the site, he drove home to tell his family of the incident. While Crowder was absent, police officer B.O. Murphy discovered three completely charred paper matches within the burned spot on the road, "approximately 6 inches inside the northeast side," according to Murphy's written report. State Trooper James A. Crawford, who also was present at the time, found a fourth paper match in the burned area, also completely charred. Murphy said the three matches he found were so close together "they could have been covered with a half dollar," according to his report.

THE FACT THAT ALL FOUR MATCHES WERE COMPLETELY CHARRED INDICATES THAT THEY WERE ON THE ROAD AT THE TIME OF THE FIRE.

The discovery of these charred matches produced an interesting reaction, but not a surprising one, among those present. (Recall that Crowder was at home at the time.)

Trooper Crawford decided not to bother to report the incident (Crowder's UFO report) to his immediate superior, Sgt. S.H. Raines, head of the local office, "because I didn't think there was anything to it. That's my opinion after we found the matches," Crawford told me.

I asked Trooper Crawford if any of the other officers present also were suspicious. He replied: "I think everyone was...after we found the matches."

The law enforcement officers were not the only ones whose suspicions were aroused. Robert L. Harris, part-time reporter/photographer for the Richmond News-Leader, who was present when Murphy and Crawford found the matches, responded in this way when I asked whether the matches had aroused suspicions of a hoax: "In my mind it did, because I hesitated until 2 a.m. before I mailed my film into the newspaper. I just went and put my camera away and said (here Harris hesitated) well, you know, Crowder is a highly thought-of, upstanding man. I think he's a man of integrity, personally. I've known him...I lived in his home in an apartment when my wife and I were first married...I'm sure you've found Crowder is well thought of. But, I said, well, here's the matches, you know, I said, well, I've wasted my film. I don't even think I'll send it to the newspaper."

Then events took a strange twist. Harris discussed his suspicions with Harry Nanny, publisher of The South Hill Enterprise, a weekly newspaper, who also had come to the scene. "We began to talk," Harris said, "and between the two of us we decided that, ah, Crowder had seen us take these pictures and would expect to see something in the paper, you know. And we knew that he had seen something -- we didn't know what it was -- and so we decided to go ahead. So, at 2 a.m., I put my film on the bus to Richmond." The incident appeared in a feature story in the Richmond News Leader and was quickly picked up by the wire services and given national coverage.

The one person interviewed who attempted to minimize the significance of the charred matches was Crowder himself. Late in the interview, he casually mentioned the matches: "Now another thing they did find, I think, in that same spot, they found some matches, either one match or two matches, the charred remains. But you see there were so many people there smoking cigarettes that night...that was when the State Police got into it, you see, that is when they found, they claimed, these matches -- it was either two or three burned match sticks, these paper matches around the site."

"But to me that didn't mean a thing on God's earth, you know, so far as somebody starting a fire was concerned. As many people as there were around there smoking cigarettes and dropping matches, don't you see."

Later, I asked officer Murphy (who found the three matches) whether they could have been dropped by visitors at the scene after lighting cigarettes. He replied positively: "No, no...no. They had to have been there (before). It would have been impossible for someone to have lit a cigarette and the matches to have been burned like that." Harris agreed: "When we picked them up they just crumbled to ashes."

It is simply impossible that the charred matches or partially burned matches just happened to be clustered together on the precise spot that the UFO chose to land, and that they could have remained so clustered despite the landing and take-off (or explosion) of such an object.

It seems an interesting coincidence that Crowder himself smokes and he uses book (paper) matches to light his cigarettes.

The Four "Padprints"

Although the officers did discover the small, charred matches on the dark burned asphalt-macadam road on the night of April 21, they did not discover even one of the four holes within six feet of the burned spot. This raises the question of whether these "padprints" were indeed there on the night of April 21, or whether they were created in the pre-dawn hours of April 22.

If only one of the four holes had been discovered that night, it is probable that all four would have been found, so there were four "opportunities" for discovery. Trooper Crawford told me that he and Murphy made a careful search, bending down low over the road, using a 6-cell flashlight. Crawford finds it hard to believe that the holes could have been overlooked.

Sgt. Raines, who heads the local Virginia State Police office, acknowledges that Trooper Crawford "is a right thorough fellow, and ordinarily I'd say that when he says the holes weren't there, they weren't there." But Raines, who is a member of the same church as Crowder, says he is sure that the holes were not there that night.

He explains that the reason they were not found is that Crowder had described the UFO's legs as being 5-6 inches in diameter and so the officers naturally were looking for large indentations on the road, not tiny holes. Raines adds that the next morning when he was told of the four holes and went to the site, he still had trouble finding them in broad daylight.

But trooper Crawford says that when he heard about the holes the next day and returned to the site at night to see if he could spot them in the darkness, he said he did find them "without being shown where they were."

If the holes were there on Friday night, it would neither confirm nor deny the possibility of a hoax. But if the holes were NOT there Friday night, then the case is clearly a hoax, for this would mean that they were added sometime after midnight (when the officers left for the night) and the following morning.

If the "padprints" were added in the pre-dawn hours of April 22, it seems safe to conclude that this was done to provide additional evidence to support the original story and to counteract suspicions raised by the discovery of the charred matches. As of midnight, only a handful of people knew of the discovery of the charred matches. Clifford Crowder was one of this handful.

So far as is known, Crowder was the first man to return to the area the next morning, at approximately 7 a.m., while on his way to work. Although Crowder took time to stop and talk with Norman Martin about events of the previous night, Crowder insists that he did not stop at the site itself for even a brief inspection. It is surprising that Crowder would not show more curiosity, especially since he was so early for work on a Saturday morning and is the manager of the fertilizer warehouse.

But as a result, Crowder was not the first to discover the four small holes. Certainly he would have found them if he had stopped to inspect the site. Nor is it known who was the first to discover the holes. None of the dozen persons interviewed claimed this honor, nor did they know who had first spotted them.

Sgt. Raines said he was sitting in Crowder's office, only 1,000 ft. away from the site, when he received word about the four holes. Raines says he promptly left to visit the site and see the holes. But again, Crowder showed a surprising lack of curiosity about this important new discovery. He told me that it was not until an hour or two later, when he drove home for lunch, that he stopped to see the newly discovered holes.

During the first interview with Crowder, he spoke of "ashes" that had been found on the burned spot that night. (Apparently this was a reference to residue from "fusee" flares which the officers had used in an experiment to try to ignite the macadam road.) When asked if the ashes had been analyzed, Crowder explained that they had been washed away because it "poured down rain that night after this happened...came a good hard shower of rain sometime during the night."

If it had indeed rained between midnight and daylight the following day, and if the four holes had been there the night before, there should have been some rainwater in the holes when they were discovered Saturday morning.

I asked Sgt. Raines if he had found anything in the holes when he arrived at the site around 10-11 a.m. He replied: "There was nothing in them." Any water? "No sir," he responded. When I explained that Crowder had said that it rained that night, Raines responded heatedly: "Cliff's not sure about that, is he? That's an opinion. There wasn't any rain. There wasn't any rain."

Had it rained? Robert Harris, who said he remained at the site until shortly after midnight and who put his film on the 2 a.m. bus for Richmond, did not remember any rain. Nor did others, except for George Utley of radio station WJWS. Utley had worked until around 1 a.m., he recalled, and he remembered a little rain at the time he left for home. Everyone seemed to recall that Saturday morning had been bright and sunny.

Upon returning to Washington, I checked the Weather Bureau. They told me that their station at Raleigh, N.C., approximately 60 miles to the south of South Hill, had reported traces of precipitation from 3-5 a.m. followed by several hundredths of an inch starting around 5 a.m. Richmond, about 70 miles to the north, had reported a trace of rain at 3-4 a.m., followed by several hundredths of an inch starting at 4 a.m.

This suggests that Crowder was awake in the very early morning hours of April 22 since he was the only one to recall the "hard shower."

Norman Martin's Role

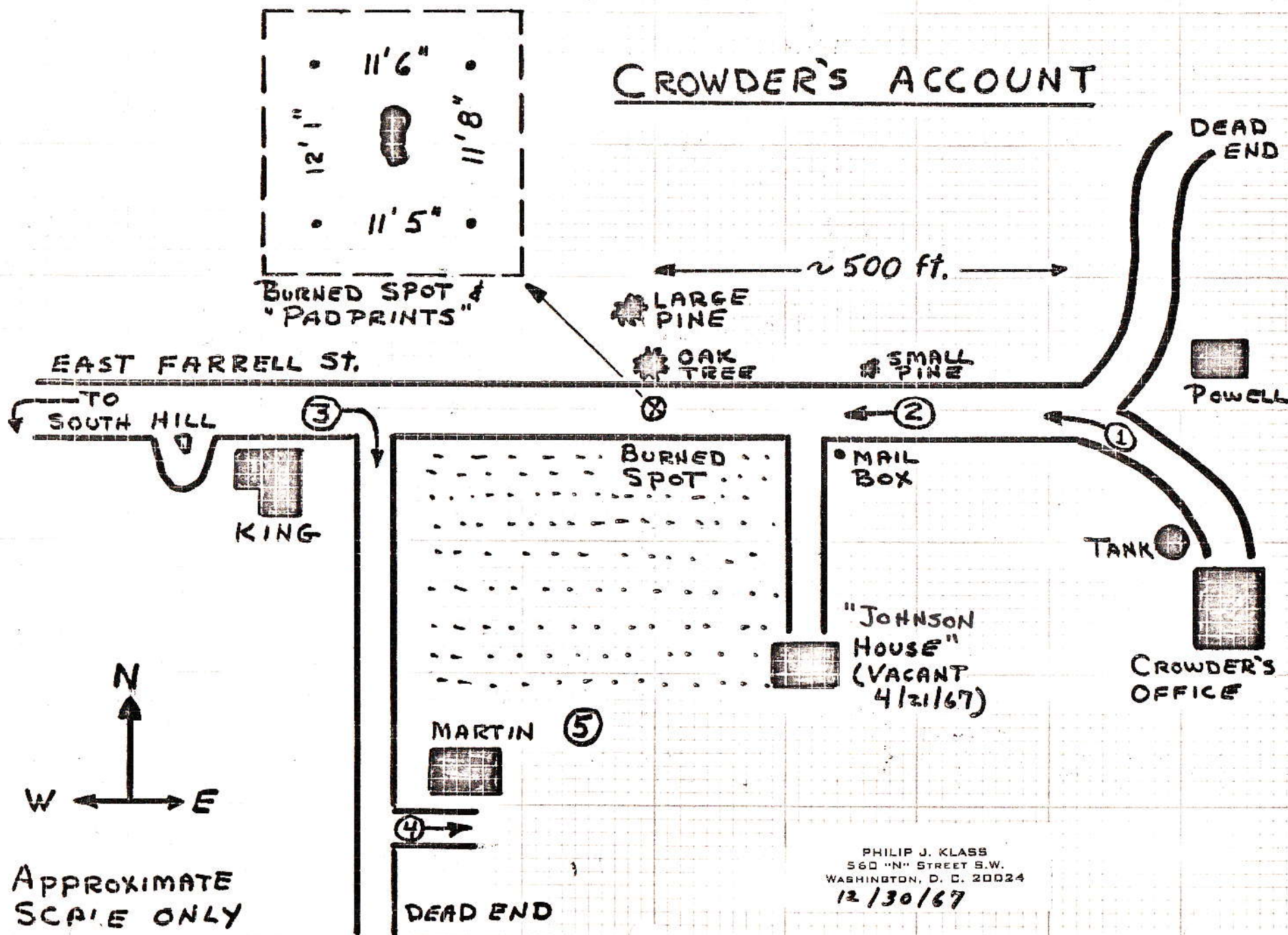
Mr. & Mrs. Norman Martin, who live approximately 600 ft. south of East Farrell St., were visiting Mr. Martin's mother in the local hospital on the evening of April 21. Mr. Martin says they over-stayed the normal 8:30 end of visiting hours by perhaps 10 minutes, which would mean they departed the hospital room at about 8:40 p.m.

Allowing 5 minutes for the Martins to walk to their car, and another 5 minutes to drive home, they should have arrived at their driveway and turned south from East Farrell St. at approximately 8:50 p.m.

Working backward for Crowder, he arrived at the local police station a few moments after 9 p.m. Allowing 5 minutes for him to drive to the station from the site, and a minute or two for the time he says he waited for the flames to die down, this would place the time of the incident at somewhere between 8:50 and 8:55 p.m.

ELEVATION PROFILE

CROWDER'S ACCOUNT



Thus the Martins were arriving home from the hospital at roughly the same time as the incident would have occurred, according to Crowder's account.

And Crowder says he saw the headlights of a car heading east just after the intense flash of light set fire to the road and that the car turned south, seemingly into the Martin driveway. (See Powers report, p. 5.)

IF THIS CAR WAS INDEED THE MARTINS, WHY DID THEY NOT SEE THE FLAMES ON THE ROAD? THEIR CAR WOULD HAVE BEEN ONLY 400 FEET AWAY AT THE TIME.

AND WHY DIDN'T THE MARTINS SEE THE HEADLIGHTS OF CROWDER'S CAR?

To resolve this hard-to-answer question and to explain the apparent conflict of Mr. Martin's statement that he saw an intense flash of light on the trees near the site while standing in his backyard, Powers and others have concluded that the car that Crowder saw was NOT the Martins.

Instead, the "mystery car" that Crowder saw is assumed to have turned south into the drive of the C.A. King residence, approximately 200 feet west of the Martin driveway. It is reasoned that Crowder could easily have erred in thinking the car turned into the Martin drive when in fact the "mystery car" merely turned around in the King drive and headed back toward South Hill.

Powers wrote in his report: "That turned out to be the case. Mr. King, who lived in the house in question, said that at about nine p.m. his wife, who was in the northwest bedroom (from which the scene of the sighting was not visible) saw lights as from a car's headlights turning into their driveway. However, nobody knocked on the door and she assumed that someone had merely turned around in the driveway. If that were the case, then the discrepancy is cleared up."

There are several flaws in this hypothesis. If a "mystery car" had merely turned into the U-shaped drive west of the King house to turn around, Crowder should have seen the headlights or tail-lights emerge in a matter of seconds and would then not have mistaken the car for the Martins.

Furthermore, there are no windows on the west side of the main house (front portion), so that anyone in the northwest portion could not have seen the lights from a car approaching from the west, unless they were looking out the front window.

Finally, in an interview with Mrs. C.A. King, she flatly denies that a car could have turned around in the yard that evening. Here are her own words:

"My daughter was in the front part of the house (facing East Farrell St.) cleaning and I was in the kitchen (back) and she said, 'Momma, I thought I saw lights flash and I thought a car is in the back...I'm sure it was a car pulled in.' But it wasn't, because we went out into the back and there wasn't anyone there."

Thinking perhaps that I had misunderstood, I asked: "So do you think it was a car that turned in?"

Mrs. King replied emphatically: "No, no, it wasn't a car, because we went out and looked and there wasn't a car anywhere because it wouldn't have had time to get out of sight...This is exactly the same thing I told this other man (?) who came by and wanted an interview." (The King house sits on a slight rise and this gives a clear view of traffic heading to/from South Hill.)

Before departing, I again asked: "You are quite sure then that there was no car that pulled into your driveway?" Mrs. King responded: "No, because my daughter and I both went out onto the back porch and she went clean out into the yard and there wasn't a car going or coming."

Illustrating the power of suggestion and the impact of this incident on some of the local residents, Mrs. King said that just before her daughter came in from the front of the house to report seeing a light, Mrs. King herself had seen "a light flashing in the back window." (This would be from the south, from the direction of Martin's house.) Mrs. King added that at the same moment, "I heard something sound exactly like a teeny baby, like an infant crying. Now my daughter had two children but they were both fast asleep." (Note: This is believed to be the first report of a UFO that made sounds like a crying baby!)

Despite this evidence that there was in fact no "mystery car," and that the car that Crowder said he saw was in fact Martin's car, it is possible to resolve most of the apparent conflicts between the accounts of Crowder and Martin, as will be explained shortly.

On at least several occasions, when Crowder has described his visit to Martin on the morning of April 22, Crowder has emphasized that he did not describe the UFO encounter to Martin before Martin volunteered that he had seen a brief intense flash of light.

Martin does not corroborate this. Here are Martin's own words: "He drove down here the next morning...We'd just gotten up, I'd say between 7 and 8 o'clock. Then he asked me did I see anything unusual around here. Well, there's nothing unusual for me. (Martin, a homespun humorist, laughed.) And I told him no, I didn't see anything unusual. And he got to telling me about this thing, and I said, 'Well, Cliff, I'll tell you, being as you mentioned it, I saw a terrible light up there last night'".

Martin explained: "After he brought this up, it made me think that I don't think they was car lights there (that he saw.)"

Which man is telling the truth? In the first of two interviews with Crowder he had volunteered the following comment about Martin: "Well, to tell you the truth, Martin is not considered a very reliable citizen... he's just a very ordinary share-cropper farmer...he's not considered a very substantial citizen."

Later, when I asked Martin about Crowder's reputation, Martin replied: "If Mr. Crowder...(chuckles) I can't say the man is not telling the truth because I don't know of any one to have any dealings with him to say he would lie. But if he saw anything, then I saw the light from it."

On several other occasions, Martin leaned over backward to hedge his own claims to those of Crowder. For example: "Like I say, I don't know what it was. If he (Crowder) saw the real object then I saw the light from it."

Martin explained that after arriving home from the hospital, his wife had gone inside while he walked into the back yard. It was then, he said, that "I saw this glare go off there. It was actually quicker than a car light, but I just took it for granted it was somebody headed from that house and many times I've seen them down there come out and the car would shine on the trees there. Well, I didn't pay too much attention to it." (The house to which he refers is the "Johnson house", then vacant.)

Martin volunteered an interesting comment about the remarkable similarity between the UFO, as described by Crowder, and the large aluminum tank used by Crowder to store liquid fertilizer which sits just outside his office window. "I was thinking some time after this happened, you know, Mr. Crowder's liquid nitrogen tank is sitting there right in front of his office, and I wondered, if he had set there so long and looked at that big tank sitting there...when he comes out he sees a tank sitting in the road."

(Approximately a mile away from Crowder's office is a large steel water tank that sits on four "legs". It also is readily visible when one drives to and from his office along East Farrell St.)

Although Martin says the light he saw was so brightly illuminating the oak tree near the burned spot that he "could have shot a sparrow sitting in the tree," his reactions at the time and his other statements indicate that the incident did not strike him as extraordinary at the time. For example, he did not take the trouble to walk 600 feet north to East Farrell St. to investigate that night. Nor did he stay outside long enough for the police to arrive at the site.

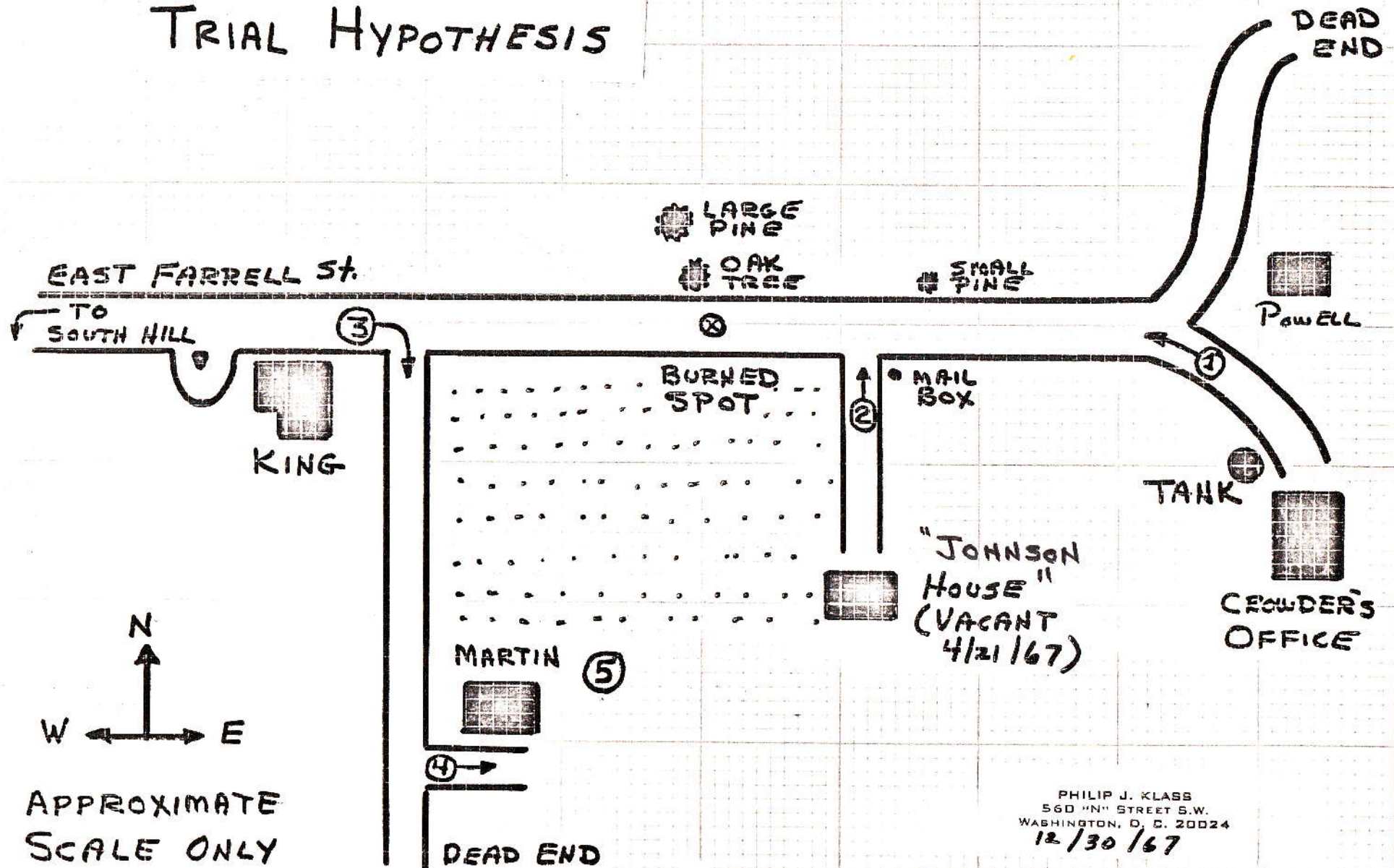
A Trial Hypothesis

Returning again to the question of how it was possible for Crowder to see the Martin car while neither Mr. nor Mrs. Martin saw the burning road nor the headlights of Crowder's car, this question is readily resolved IF Crowder's car was not on East Farrell St. and IF his car lights were turned off, and if the road was not yet afire!

Referring to Map #2, IF Crowder's car had been parked in the driveway to the then-vacant house (now occupied by a family named Johnson), and if Crowder's car lights were turned off, he could easily see the Martin car coming down East Farrell St. and see it turn into the Martin drive-way.

IF the incident is a hoax in which Crowder is the perpetrator, he

TRIAL HYPOTHESIS



would park his car while he poured flammable fluid on the road and lit it. It would be risky to park on East Farrell St. with the car lights on, for this would illuminate his activities and he might be seen by someone in the King house or the Powell house. Yet to park there without lights would risk a collision if another car suddenly came along.

It would be logical instead for Crowder to park in the driveway of the "Johnson house," knowing that it was then unoccupied, for he could then turn off the car lights. (Note that Crowder says he stopped his car roughly opposite this same driveway when the intense flash of light occurred.)

IF this hypothesis is correct, Crowder would be very alert to any approaching car while carrying out his mission, so he could quickly take cover. If the Martin car came over the rise near the King house while he was pouring the flammable liquid on the road, Crowder certainly would take cover and probably would not resume his activities until he saw the Martin car arrive home, its lights go out and then he would assume that both Mr. & Mrs. Martin (i.e. the car's occupants) had all gone inside.

After lighting the fluid, he would return to his car and wait for the flames to die down. Then, turning on his car lights he would turn west (left) onto East Farrell St. and drive to the police station. As Crowder's car turned onto East Farrell St., his car lights should illuminate the oak and pine trees near the burned spot and it would be this illumination that Martin reported seeing.

Because of a drop-off in elevation and the intervening wheat field, Martin would not be able to see Crowder's car -- only the illumination from its headlights. (This was checked by placing a car at the site and trying to see it from Martin's backyard.)

Since the "Johnson house" was then unoccupied, Martin would not expect there to be any cars coming out of its driveway. Recall Martin's statement: "...many times I've seen them down there come out and the car would shine on the trees there. Well, I didn't pay too much attention to it." Certainly it did not seem sufficiently unusual to prompt Martin to walk 600 feet north to East Farrell St. to investigate.

This trial hypothesis seems to fit quite well. But what of the other possibility, that Crowder was merely the victim of a hoax, not its perpetrator?

Immediately after the incident, Crowder said that he had seen a tank-shaped object sitting on legs. He described it as being metallic and he told me that it reflected light from the car headlights.

But more recently, and later in my interview, Crowder says that he believes the object "was a gas-filled flammable bag" which was designed to disintegrate when illuminated by car headlights. On several occasions he said that he now believes the object was "some psychological experiment that one of the branches of the armed forces is fooling with."

The question arises as to how good are Crowder's powers of observation?
Prior to driving to South Hill I had prepared eight 35 mm. slides which were designed to test his powers of observation.

The slides, in color, were taken of an unfamiliar object or an unusual assemblage of objects at night against a darkened sky. The object was illuminated by two photoflood lamps, one on either side of the camera, to crudely simulate the illumination from two auto headlights. One object, for example, was an ancient warrior's helmet from Afghanistan; another was an Old Spice after-shave lotion bottle placed atop a plastic doughnut. Still another was a highly polished chromium-plated cocktail shaker, not too different in shape from the Crowder UFO, according to his description. In addition, there were two slides showing laboratory plasmas and a picture of an unusual gas laser.

Crowder was told that each slide would be projected for approximately five seconds, corresponding to the time he had said he viewed the UFO. The slide would then be removed and he was to try to describe the object, not to identify it. During the tests, he seldom waited for the allotted five seconds before he was ready to describe what he had seen.

Crowder's descriptions were so accurate and perceptive that it seems quite unlikely that on the night of April 21 he really saw one or two human figures on the road and somehow mistook them for a large metal tank or balloon standing on four legs.

And Crowder insists that this is what he saw. He has modified his story only to the extent of saying that it might have been a large balloon which disintegrated suddenly (to explain its sudden disappearance.)

In recent months, someone has painted "P.V. 67 HOAX" alongside the burned spot on the road. The "P.V." stands for Park View High School, suggesting the sign is the work of local teen-agers. (Crowder himself has a teen-age daughter.)

I asked Crowder if he thought the incident of his UFO encounter could have been a hoax staged by high school students. He replied: "It was too complicated for some high school kids to have built some balloon. That's what I always thought it was (NOTE: Not according to his original description)...It appeared to be the size of the upper half of that nitrogen tank (outside his office) and it had those legs."

"Res Ipsa Loquitur" is a Common Law expression which means "Things Speak For Themselves," or "The Facts Speak For Themselves." This applies to the South Hill case, for **there is only one possible explanation** which is fully consistent with the known facts:

1. The charred matches found on the burned spot.
2. The fact that asphalt will not support combustion and Crowder's description of the high flames which he says persisted for an extended period.
3. Crowder's attempts to minimize the significance of the charred matches.
4. The delayed discovery of the "padprints" and Crowder's seeming indifference to their discovery.

5. The inconsistency of the size of the "padprints" for an object the size which Crowder reported, which would result in fantastically high pad loading (See Appendix "A"). And the imperfect symmetry of the "padprint" locations.
6. The lack of symmetry of the burned spot itself, a free-form shape which suggests it was formed by the chance flow of a flammable liquid.
7. The fact that Crowder reported seeing the Martin car immediately after the road was set afire, yet neither Mr. nor Mrs. Martin saw the flames or the headlights of Crowder's car.

Res Ipsa Loquitur'.

But what of Clifford Crowder's high standing in the community? The truth is that an outside investigator is only able to determine what some of the local citizens now say about his reputation unless an in-depth study were made and no investigator, including this one, has attempted such a study.

It is a matter of record that Clifford Crowder is active in the affairs of his church, the South Hill Methodist Church. Beyond this it is difficult to tell how much of his present reputation is his own and how much of it stems from other relatives in the Crowder "clan".

One brother, J. Foster Crowder, is a member of the Virginia State Highway Dept. Another brother, J.L. Crowder, was a member of the Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors at the time of the incident and was running for re-election. He was defeated in the primary held several months after the incident. A cousin, Charles W. Crowder, operates an insurance agency which, incidentally, is an advertiser in the local newspaper. Dr. Charles H. Crowder, an M.D., is a more distant relative, I was told.

Every person interviewed spoke highly of Clifford Crowder, and some volunteered a character endorsement without even being asked.

A stranger, meeting Clifford Crowder for the first time under more casual circumstances, almost certainly would give him a good character endorsement. A man of 55, he is soft-spoken, sincere and well-mannered.

Yet it is difficult to predict what any person will, or will not, do. Every bank attempts to hire only people of unquestioned character for positions of financial responsibility. Yet every year sees disclosures of embezzlements by just such people, followed by expressions of shocked surprise by friends and business associates.

So far as can be determined, Clifford Crowder was not and still is not, what could be termed a "UFO Buff."

But UFOs "were in the air" around South Hill. The town is within range of two American Broadcasting Company TV stations: WLEE (Channel 8) in Richmond and WRAL (Channel 5) in Raleigh, N.C. It was approximately six months before the South Hill incident that the new "flying saucer" program, "The Invaders" began on ABC's television network. (Mrs. C.A. King mentioned that some of the neighborhood children watch the show and were therefore quite excited over the Crowder UFO report.)

Probably a more influential program is one by Frank Edwards, called "Strangest of All," which is broadcast every afternoon at 1 o'clock by the South Hill radio station, WJWS. Although the Edwards program does not limit itself exclusively to flying saucers, they are featured prominently along with other supposedly true stories of the occult and supernatural.

The pastor of Crowder's church writes a regular column, entitled "Study Talk", for The South Hill Enterprise. In the April 27, 1967, issue, the first to appear after the incident, pastor William Mayton devoted his entire column to the subject of UFOs. One extract from this column is especially interesting: "The important thing is that one (UFO) made the scene at South Hill and South Hill is now really on the map."

This proved to be a masterful understatement. South Hill was deluged with visitors, thousands of them, immediately after the incident was reported in the local and national press, and for some weeks afterwards.

Crowder himself has achieved national, even international fame. He has received telephone calls from as far away as Australia, from UFO Buffs who want to hear him describe the incident in his own words!

Sgt. Raines says that Crowder has become "fed up" with all this attention and has, on occasion, said: "If I ever again see a UFO, I'll keep it to myself." But Crowder himself gave no indication of this attitude during our interviews. He cooperated fully, showed no reluctance to describe the experience for the Nth time and he displayed no obvious irritation at being questioned. (However, because I had no status as an "official investigator" and therefore had to rely upon his voluntary cooperation, I did not press him on such matters as the charred matches or other discrepancies.)

The Illusion

The South Hill case demonstrates how the illusion that UFOs must be extra-terrestrial spacecraft is promoted in the public mind by the intentional or unintentional omission of vital details in published accounts.

The four charred matches found on the burned spot raised grave suspicions of a hoax among police officers and reporters at the scene, by their own admissions. Harris himself said he almost didn't send his film and story to the Richmond Times-Dispatch and News Leader. Yet when the story did appear in the two newspapers, THERE WAS NOT A SINGLE MENTION OF THE CHARRED MATCHES.

As a result, the Associated Press story on the case which appeared in newspapers around the country made no mention of the charred matches.

It was not until William Powers visited South Hill on April 23 and mentioned this important finding in discussions with the Press that the charred matches were mentioned, somewhat casually, in the few newspapers that carried follow-up stories.

Three men from NICAP Headquarters, one a NASA physicist, visited South Hill on April 22. The results of their investigation were reported in a feature story in the March-April, 1967, issue of "The U.F.O. Investigator." The article mentions the burned spot and the four "padprints," but there is no mention of the charred matches. When APRO reported the case in the May-June, 1967, issue of "The A.P.R.O. Bulletin," there was no mention of the charred matches.

The new Frank Edwards book, "Flying Saucers -- Here and Now," devotes two full pages to the South Hill case. But again, there is no mention of the charred matches. It seems safe to predict that the South Hill case will be described in dozens of other UFO books, as yet unwritten, and that in most, if not all, there will be no mention of the charred matches.

The cause of public enlightenment is not well-served either by premature statements issued by "official investigators." For example:

- * "Crowder is telling exactly what he saw and there is no reason to disbelieve him." This statement is attributed to William Powers in the April 27, 1967, issue of The South Hill Enterprise. It is quoted also in the Frank Edwards book.
- * "(I) can't think of it being a hoax." Dr. J. Allen Hynek, as quoted in the May 10, 1967, issue of the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Obviously, it is not politic to dismiss the Press with a curt "no comment." But common prudence and past experience suggest that it would be better for an investigator to explain that it is premature to comment on the case until the investigation has been completed and that this will require some additional time.

A DESIGN ANALYSIS OF THE CROWDER UFO:

1. The tank-shaped UFO as described by Crowder was estimated to be approximately 12 ft. in diameter and 15 ft. high (excluding 3 ft. legs.) This would give it a volume of approximately 1,700 cu. ft.
2. The Apollo Lunar Module has somewhat similar overall dimensions, although it is not a simple cylinder. The Lunar Module is approximately 20 ft. high and 14 ft. in diameter. Assuming (for simplicity) that it is a simple cylinder, this would give it a volume of approximately 3,000 cu.ft. (Actual enclosed volume is somewhat less.)
3. The Lunar Module is expected to weigh approximately 30,000 lb. This would give it a specific weight of 10 lb./cu. ft. (By way of comparison, Cork has a specific weight of 15.5 lb./cu. ft.)
4. Assuming that the Crowder UFO had the same specific weight as the Lunar Module (10 lb./cu. ft.), then the Crowder UFO would weigh:

17,000 lb.
5. The Lunar Module has four landing pads, each 37 inches in diameter, giving it a total pad area of 4,280 sq. in.
6. This gives the Lunar Module a pad-loading of 7 psi. on earth.
7. But when landing on the Moon, which has only 1/6th earth gravity, the effective Lunar Module pad-loading will be:

1.2 psi.
8. The four "padprints" allegedly left by the Crowder UFO each measured approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter. The total "padprint" area of the four is then approximately 1 sq. in.
9. This gives the Crowder UFO a pad-loading of approximately: 17,000 psi. (based on assumed specific weight of 10 lb./cu. ft.)
10. Four-lane concrete highways are stressed to withstand loads of 640 psi.
11. Thus, the "designer" of the Crowder UFO, by failing to use larger pads, ended up with a "craft" whose pad loading is 30 times too high to enable it to land on major highways without puncturing the concrete.

Dec. 12, 1968

Mr. William Powers
Northwestern University
Evanston, Ill.

Dear Bill:

Going through my files and I discover that it has been almost a full year since I sent you my report on my investigation of the South Hill case--and I have never even received an acknowledgement, let alone your comments. Did you receive it?

Assuming that you did, I am curious to know your reactions. For example:

1. The serious discrepancy between what Mrs. King told me about the "mystery car" and what your report says.
2. How you explain Crowder's report of high flames and extended burning of the macadam road--when asphalt will not support combustion.
3. Your reactions to my hypothesis that Crowder himself was the perpetrator of the hoax.

Naturally, I welcome your comments on any other aspect of my analysis.

With the lapse of time, to provide perspective, how do you now size up this case, in order of greatest probability:

- (a) Hoax in which Crowder was the perpetrator.
- (b) Hoax in which Crowder was the victim.
- (c) Extraterrestrial spaceship landing.

And if you're in a pensive mood, what are your latest thoughts on Socorro? Still think it was a spaceship--or do you agree with me that it was a hoax. Certainly it was one or the other.

I think that I once offered you my \$10,000 expression of my conviction that UFOs are not extraterrestrial visitors. Since that time, having failed to find a single taker, I have sweetened the terms for the other party even more.

In the hope that the new offer may tempt you, or perhaps Dr. Hynek, I am enclosing copies of the latest version--which I already have signed.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Cordially,