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BOOK AND MULTIMEDIA REVIEW

The Star Gate Archives: Reports of the United States Government Sponsored Psi Program, 1972–1995. Volume 4: Operational Remote Viewing: Memorandums and Reports

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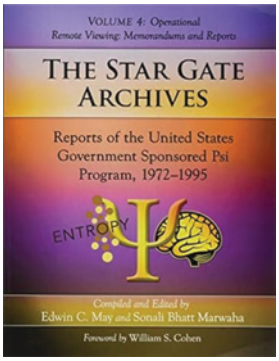

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I started to read the parapsychological literature in 2010 and found the evidence for psychic phenomena convincing. Since then, I have read and reviewed several books about remote viewing (RV), including the previous volumes in this book series (Mörck, 2018, 2019, 2020), but have remained unsure about the value of operational RV. This volume provides some evidence for operational RV. The Editors argue that it is significant that seventeen of the nineteen agencies that tasked remote viewers kept doing so. I don't find this argument convincing. The Editors themselves acknowledge that RV was generally used as a last resort. They provide brief summaries of a number of projects (pp. 34–45), and these combined with positive assessments from agencies indicate that operational RV worked—sometimes. However, as the Editors note and try to explain, evaluations of many projects are not available. In addition, redactions in the declassified documents can make it hard to assess the value of operational RV. The actual success rate is uncertain.

I have sketched out some of the background and context in previous book reviews. In 1972, the CIA provided the initial funding for RV research, and, in 1995, received responsibility for what was then known as the Star Gate project and decided to end it. The Editors argue that this was more due to budget-cuts and the scrutiny the agency faced than due to a lack of results (cf. May et al., 2015). The public had already learned about some of the efforts before the closure, due to, for example, Schnabel (1995) and *The Real X-Files*, which had aired on British Channel 4. It was arguably unthinkable for the CIA to continue with operational RV regardless of the final evaluation (i.e. Mumford et al., 1995). *The Star Gate Archives* allow the reader to follow the history up to the eventual closure of the RV project.

Richard Helms, who would go on to become Director of Central Intelligence, wrote a memo in 1963. He acknowledged that a group within the CIA had earlier concluded that "with minor exceptions, the fields of hypnosis, telepathy, and general control of human behavior were not ready for operational applications" but Helms noted that recent Soviet activity "may indicate more potential than we believed existed" (p. 76). The Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union was ongoing, and all possibilities had to be considered. Some years later, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (Ostrander & Schroeder, 1970) became a bestseller.

In 1972, Russell Targ, a physicist, met Dr. Christopher Green ("Kit Green"), at the time with the CIA, to discuss parapsychology. Later, Dr. Harold Puthoff, another physicist, at Stanford Research Institute (SRI), at the suggestion of Targ, wrote to Green to describe

an informal test he had conducted with a psychic, Ingo Swann (p. 77). The interest generated by that letter led to the initial funding from the CIA. Parapsychology was considered to be "sensitive and controversial" (p. 111), but the CIA continued to provide funds for a few years. Kress (1977/1999) wrote an overview about the early years, when the CIA still provided funding. During this period the psychic abilities of others, in addition to Swann, including Uri Geller, Patrick Price, and Hella Hammid, were assessed.

Geller was a well-known psychic at the time, and the research with him provoked negative publicity (e.g., Jaroff, 1973). Geller had performed as a magician before and was regarded as being difficult to manage in the laboratory. People within the CIA believed that he had worked for Mossad, the national intelligence agency of Israel (Strausbaugh, 1996). Geller was not the ideal participant. Swann was easier to manage and had a desire to learn more about his psychic abilities. Price described himself as a patriot eager to fight communism (p. 101). Hammid was a friend of Targ and was originally brought in to serve as a control subject but turned out to be a good remote viewer.

Someone within the CIA noted that the utility of psychic phenomena "would be in direct proportion to the degree to which the skills could be learned or the powers acquired or developed by appropriate persons ..." and on the researchers' ability to identify persons with "the essential attributes" (p. 79). Much research would concern this, even after the CIA had ceased to provide funding. However, the Editors argue that, despite their best efforts, the researchers failed to develop "a valid psi training methodology" (p. 9) or prove that promising subjects could be identified by other means than through tests of their psychic abilities.

There were several reasons for the withdrawal of the CIA. There was no consensus within the agency. However, occasional remarks indicate that personnel from the CIA were not always satisfied. For example, in a Trip Report, someone noted: "It appears as if Targ and Puthoff may at long last understand that we are interested in good documentation of the methodology backed by data rather than anecdotes" (p. 100). Earlier adverse publicity was also concerning, and fears about future publicity. Later, others would also come to worry about this risk.

Wilhelm (1976) revealed that the CIA had been interested in the research. He also published an article in the *Washington Post* (Wilhelm, 1977). Due to this the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) requested a briefing from the CIA (pp. 135–136). There was a follow-up: a staff member of the committee was dispatched to talk to Dale Graff, at the Foreign Technology Division (FTD), Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.[1] The FTD had contributed some funding, and Graff was involved in overseeing the research.

Congressional interest would persist. For example, Charlie Rose, chairman of the evaluation subcommittee of the HPSCI, became a vocal supporter and repeatedly asked to be kept updated. Later, Claiborne Pell also became a supporter. For years, Pell had a special assistant, C.B. Jones ("Scott Jones"), whose job included keeping an eye on parapsychology. Other friends in high places were Dr. Jack Vorona and Dr. Walter LaBerge. Vorona became aware of the program in 1975, when he was the Deputy Director for Scientific and Technical Intelligence at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). LaBerge became Under Secretary of the Army in 1977. Alexander (2011) has claimed that LaBerge, in the 1980s, had "a strong emotional bias against the program" (p. 36). There is no evidence of this in this volume. However, LaBerge did inquire, more than once, about whether RV had any negative effect on the remote viewers. LaBerge himself once visited SRI International (henceforth SRI) and tried RV, and not without success (Targ, 2008).

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter was briefed by someone from the CIA, who noted that it was not known "whether Soviet capabilities are significantly more advanced" (p. 129). Others were concerned about this possibility, and so Project Gondola Wish came about. The 902d Military Intelligence Group, under the command of the Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), came up with the idea that military intelligence personnel could potentially learn to induce out-of-body experiences at the Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences (MIAS), founded by Robert Monroe. However, the MIAS was "not cleared for classified training or information" and the "training could be categorized as experimenting on the human mind" (p. 145); hence, extra approval would have to be sought. Nevertheless, Monroe came to function as a consultant and was granted a SECRET security clearance in 1980 (p. 316).

A new project was initiated in 1978, Project Grill Flame. That year a memo made it clear that: "From the US army standpoint, a strict need-to-caveat is now operative in any situation involving" (p. 139) parapsychology or RV. Vorona, addressing the Department of Defense (DoD) committee on RV activities,

> "... began the meeting with comments about the extreme sensitivity of the subject. Personnel should only be brought in on a strict need-to-know basis ... then discussed the problem of maintaining the security of the remote viewing project. He had decided against establishment of a restricted access list and a special code word for the program, since this would only generate more paperwork, require that more individuals become involved and further risk compromising the sensitive nature of the project" (p. 141).

Late in 1978, Lieutenant Frederick Atwater and Major Murray Watt, on behalf of INSCOM, set out to conduct interviews—they were hoping to find good remote viewers who would come to function as psychic spies for intelligence agencies. Misconceptions have been spread about how the remote viewers were selected. However, this is well-documented by Atwater (2001) and in several declassified documents. Eventually, six persons were chosen, and Atwater started to hold RV sessions with them at Fort Meade. Later, they went to SRI for "technology transfer"—to get their RV abilities assessed.

In 1979, LaBerge suggested that a committee be appointed to review the research and operational applications (p. 173). The committee was headed by Manfred Gale. He attempted to convey the impression that all committee members were unbiased. However, after having given a briefing, Watt noted that many committee members appeared to consider him (i.e. Watt) to be a believer not worth listening to. After committee members had visited SRI, Puthoff felt compelled to send Gale a letter since all visitors didn't seem to have understood important things (pp. 175–176). Gale gave a presentation to the DoD committee on RV:

> "... Gale's briefing was not received favorably ... There were many substantive reservations based on both facts and analysis. The report was, in the view of the group misleading and inadequate, in part because of ambiguity in language" (p. 230).

The Editors have included the entire report (pp. 187–214), here a single excerpt will have to suffice to give the reader an idea of the style and the conclusions:

> "On balance, the Committee has indeed been persuaded that there is some probability that effects attributed to the RV phenomena exist under unexplained circumstances and in conjunction with particular individuals. However, to date, the experimental techniques have not been adequate to document such effects" (p. 188).

Perhaps the most important consequence of the report was that William Perry, Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, wrote a memo that made it clear that P-6 funds should not be used for RV research (p. 235). The P-6 funds had earlier been an important source of funding. Allegedly, Perry wanted "little to do with the subject" (p. 221), but in the memo, he did not specifically object to the use of operational RV. The remote viewers at Fort Meade had engaged in operational RV since September 1979 and were especially active during the Iran hostage crisis that year (Endersby, 2014). The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the value of the RV during that period "as being qualitatively equal to those of other intelligence sources available to them" (p. 324).

As part of threat assessment, "SRI accepted a task to evaluate the potential for large-scale training" (p. 277). The involvement of the military also contributed to the need to develop a training program. A result of this was a training procedure, Coordinate Remote Viewing (CRV), which was gradually developed, largely by the psychic Ingo Swann and Puthoff. CRV and the training have been described elsewhere (e.g., Smith, 2005). The Editors have reproduced a project manual, dated 16 December 1985, in which it is stated:

> "The majority of the training sessions for novice trainees are Class C ... During Class C sessions, the interviewer provides the trainee with immediate feedback for each element of data he provides, with the exception that negative feedback is not given" (p. 55).

The main point of contention about CRV concerns this (see May et al., 2015). Naturally, due to the procedure, there was a risk that the trainees actually engaged in a guessing game. The researchers at SRI understood that this was a troublesome possibility. However, there are conflicting claims about this that seem difficult to reconcile. Swann angrily addressed claims about CRV in letters to Mishlove (23 July, 1997) and to McMoneagle (17 November, 1997).[2] In 1980, Swann wanted more time to develop CRV training before he accepted trainees from outside SRI (p. 256). Puthoff, who directed the RV research at SRI, disagreed (p. 247), and there was an urgent need for

funding; hence, trainees from the military were accepted before CRV had been fully developed or evaluated.

In a report from 1982, prepared by the DIA, it is noted that the "effort to date at SRI leaves no doubt" (p. 289) that RV exists, and the authors made it clear that they wanted the RV project to remain active. The RV projects continued to be the subject of congressional interest, but securing funding would remain a recurring problem. However, Richard DeLauer, the new Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, allowed INSCOM to use P-6 funds again. Formally, Major General Albert Stubblebine, commanding general of INSCOM, acknowledged that Project Grill Flame ended in 1982, but wrote that he had "decided to conduct a similar program" (p. 303). Major General William Odom advised Stubblebine to make it seem as if INSCOM was "engaged in a similar, cooperative effort of its own initiative" (p. 313). Odom described himself as "an honest skeptic" (p. 282). However, Odom was not supportive nor a friend to Stubblebine (see Smith, 2005). The RV project received a new name, Project Center Lane.

It should be noted that RV was just one of several unconventional techniques whose potential use Stubblebine wanted assessed. He was a visionary. Working under Stubblebine was Lieutenant Colonel John Alexander, now known within the parapsychology and ufology community. He has written about some explorations conducted under Stubblebine (Alexander 2017; Alexander et al., 1990). The potential value of training at MIAS was reconsidered. Remote viewers at Fort Meade used "audio tapes which produced enhanced levels of mental concentration" (p. 316). Later remote viewers went to MIAS for training which, according to Atwater, "further developed the ability of project personnel to achieve enhanced levels of concentration, improved their target acquisition, and increased target resolution during operational missions" (p. 316). Atwater (2001), McMoneagle,[3] and Smith (2005) have written about their visits to MIAS.

Lieutenant Colonel Brian Buzby, Project Manager, noted that the RV unit "neither had nor wanted any contact" (p. 319) with Alexander, who was openly interested in parapsychology (e.g., Alexander, 1980). Buzby went on to note that Stubblebine, during a discussion concerning funding, "started to relate some of his experiences and personal thoughts in the field of parapsychology" (p. 319), and would have liked to continue if his schedule had permitted. Stubblebine was not only interested in what was happening at MIAS. He was also fascinated by Cleve Backster's experiments about communication with plants.

Memos indicate that personnel within the NSA were interested in RV (p. 302), but judging by the questions posed, in 1982, the NSA did not have an RV unit at the time. The last request from the NSA for operational RV came in 1984—the CIA also ceased requesting operational RV after 1984 (see p. 6). However, the reasons for this are unclear. The Deputy Director for Operations at the CIA was aware of the "less than hoped for signal-to-noise ratio" yet wanted to continue to task remote viewers when they have "no other recourse and still feel a need to act" (p. 352).

The HPSCI, which had earlier shown interest in RV requested a report in 1982 (p. 300). In a report the following year it was noted that, in the period 1972–1980, "data were highly variable. That is, some good data were mixed with much extraneous or inaccurate information" (p. 330). Later, a request from Congressman Edward Boland made the DIA assemble a team to make an independent evaluation (p. 343). The team noted: "The evidence shown to us is too impressive to dismiss as mere coincidence" and, despite some concerns, concluded that "Dr. Puthoff's team warrants cautious continued fiscal support, and the research should be conducted as much as possible in an open unclassified mode so that its reproducibility and accuracy can be independently verified by others" (pp. 345–346).

In 1984 Stubblebine was replaced by Brigadier General Harry Soyster. Neither he nor Odom wanted to retain the RV project. However, the project was saved by Dr. Jack Vorona and Major General Garrison Rapmund, commander of US Army Medical Research and Development Command—both are singled out for special thanks (see p. 3). As a result of their efforts the project was taken over by the DIA, became known as Dragoon Absorb (briefly), and then Sun Streak.

The National Research Council (NRC) was commissioned to assess techniques meant to enhance human performance. The committee also looked at parapsychology. The Editors cover this in passing (p. 14). It was easy for parapsychologists to argue that the report (Druckman & Swets, 1988) was biased against parapsychology (Palmer et al., 1988/1989). The Contracting Officer's Technical Representative, Dr. George Lawrence's negative stance was already known (Weinberger, 2017). In addition, Prof. Ray Hyman, who chaired the subcommittee on parapsychology, was a Fellow of the Committee for the Scientific

Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), as was Prof. James Alcock, who wrote the background paper. In the wake of the criticism the Office of Technology Assessment arranged a workshop on parapsychology (pp. 463–472), during which Hyman and Alcock discussed the subject with parapsychologists. A report on the workshop stated:

> "... it is clear that parapsychology faces strong resistance from the scientific establishment ... one way parapsychology might be released from the constrained situation in which it currently operates would be to demonstrate practical applications of psi" (p. 471).

Sun Streak ended in 1990, but lived on in a way when project Star Gate started in 1991: "To monitor and assess select foreign technology developments on a worldwide basis" (p. 504). This was largely thanks to support from Senators. Vorona had left the DIA at the end of 1989, but his successor, John Berbrich, was supportive, judging by his letters after having met Senator William Cohen and Senator John Glenn (pp. 507–509). The efforts of C. Richard D'Amato, on the Senate Appropriations Committee, are more obscure, but his support is said to have been vital (Smith, 1995). In 1993, Dr. Edwin May wrote to him to complain. (May had directed the research since Puthoff left SRI in 1985). May noted that he had been told that some of the research reports that he had sent to the RV unit at Fort Meade had never been read and went on: "We are supposed to contribute to operational applications, but this task has not been exercised by the sponsor" (p. 582).

In 1995, Congress requested that the Star Gate project should be transferred from the DIA to the CIA. D'Amato was unhappy over how the project was treated by the DIA and applied pressure to get the transfer done. The CIA reluctantly accepted the Star Gate project and promptly terminated it. In an email, dated 24 January 1995, someone noted: "The DI is going to take the position that it can't support this effort" (p. 606). DI here refers to the Director of Intelligence, CIA. That email was written long before the controversial final retrospective review had been conducted (i.e. Mumford et al., 1995). The contributions to the report by Hyman (1996) and Utts (1996a, 1996b) have been republished in this Journal (see also May, 1996).

Congress had also stated that "the time has come for a re-evaluation of the classification of the existence of this effort as well as the results" (p. 615). In a memo, dated 21 February 1995, it is noted that the "CIA plans to declassify parts of its program immediately" (p. 615). This eagerness to declassify seems consistent with the decision to not support the effort. However, it is stated that the "CIA would abide by the recommendations" (p. 641) provided from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) review. Originally the review was meant to have been conducted by the NRC. In hindsight, it all seems rushed. The NRC formally declined on 5 May 1995, "the kickoff meeting of the blue ribbon panel" (p. 648) with AIR was held on 25 July, and the AIR study was published 29 September 1995. It seems ambitious to properly review the massive amount of material during such a short time and this was recognized, hence, May was asked to select ten studies. May certainly made Dr. Andrew Kirby, at the CIA, aware of his various concerns (p. 636) but in vain. The AIR report provided the CIA with reasons to end the Star Gate project, which it did.

The fourth and final volume in *The Star Gate Archives* series is a massive paperback. For $95.00 you get: 715 pages, including valuable overviews and good explanations by the Editors, informative appendices, a list of abbreviations, and an index. The Editors have reproduced "the most important and relevant memorandums and reports (a balance of support for the program or not)" (p. 11). Mayer (2008) suggested that the declassified documents from the projects constitute "a gold mine for scientific exploration of possibly anomalous cognition" (p. 128). Unfortunately, it is not always easy to see the gold. The Editors note: "The CIA declassified about 11067 documents, covering the period 1972 to 1995 ..." (p. 10). McMoneagle's assessment, in 2004, was perhaps overly harsh: "... it's been thoroughly picked through and there is nothing of material value ..." (Vallee, 2023, p. 472). However, much of the paperwork did not strike me as particularly interesting and there is overlap between documents. The Editors also wish to provide evidence for operational RV, but this appear overly ambitious and their efforts are not entirely successful. They only provide brief summaries (pp. 34–45), though project numbers are given so the reader can follow-up. However, the massive volume provides a glimpse behind the scenes and should be of value to historians. Dr. Harold Puthoff once summarized:

> "The evidence is in—solidly in. But our ability to rely on remote viewing as an intelligence tool isn't ready for prime-time TV and that's a very real problem. We don't know enough. The results produced by remote viewing have

been truly impressive but they're inconsistent, unpredictable, and we know very little about who's good at it or why" (Mayer, 2008, p. 128).

ENDNOTES

1 CIA-RDP96-00788R001100030001-6.
2 Available at the Special Collections, Ingram Library, University of West Georgia.
3 CIA-RDP96-00788R001700210017-4.

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