

## Rhode Island UFO Film: Fact or Fantasy?

*'PM Magazine' aired a movie film of  
a 'UFO' and said it was not a hoax.  
The evidence points otherwise.*

C. Eugene Emery, Jr.

The promotional announcement for the nationally syndicated television program "PM Magazine" contained an eye-opening promise. In its February 24, 1983, segment on "UFOs: Fact or Fantasy," "PM" officials promised that "for the first time [you] actually see a movie made with a hand-held camera. This is no hoax."

But viewers might have thought differently had they been told some of the facts behind the movie, facts that "PM" sometimes chose to ignore or never bothered to look for.

To best appreciate this untold story, it's helpful to know some background.

Harold Trudel is a 42-year-old Woonsocket, Rhode Island, resident who seems to have a gift for taking daylight photographs of UFOs.

He and a friend, Joseph Ferriere, editor of a now-defunct UFO magazine called *Probe*, claim that on the afternoon of July 24, 1966, they photographed two UFOs meeting in mid-air.

The next summer, over a 38-day period, Trudel says he took daylight photos of UFOs on four separate occasions. In one case, Trudel says, a mysterious man led him into the woods and told him, "There is what you came for." Moments later, a UFO reportedly rose from the trees and glided toward Trudel. The incident was made even more mysterious by the fact that the man who supposedly led Trudel into the woods could never be located.

But the photographs were not received without criticism. Six days after Trudel's encounters were publicized in the *Woonsocket Call*, UFO author James W. Moseley, who was in the area for a lecture at Dean Junior College in Franklin, Massachusetts, said the pictures were "almost too good."

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Moseley commented that "even the best" still photographs can be faked. He added that motion pictures provide the best records of sightings. That comment was widely publicized in the *Providence Journal* and the *Woonsocket Call*. In the *Call*, Trudel insisted again that his photographs were genuine.

And within 13 months, Trudel had taken one of the few UFO movies in existence.

Trudel says that he was alone in the woods in the neighboring town of Cumberland, Rhode Island, in September 1968 when he spotted a cylindrical object moving across the sky. Using a Super 8 movie camera he had borrowed to photograph UFOs, he filmed the object, which he estimated to be about 90 feet long, wider than a car, and traveling 40 to 50 miles an hour.

The 105-second black-and-white film is extremely shaky. (Trudel says he was *not* walking around the rocky hillside when he made the film.) It shows the object passing behind a tree.

Trudel took the film to Ferriere and, in spite of Ferriere's publishing experience, the two men didn't release the film publicly until 1982, when they were asked to make a presentation on UFOs at the newly opened Spiritual Psychic Development Center in Woonsocket. Trudel would later explain that the movie was never made public because interest in UFOs was waning back in 1968.

"PM" affiliate WJAR-TV in Providence found out about the film following last year's presentation.

"PM," which was looking for a skeptic to comment during the show, asked me to look at it. Because it bobbed in the wind and its horizontal motion was—to say the least—erratic, I told them that the "UFO" appeared to be a cardboard tube with a wire strung through it. Although my assessment was never aired, my curiosity was piqued.

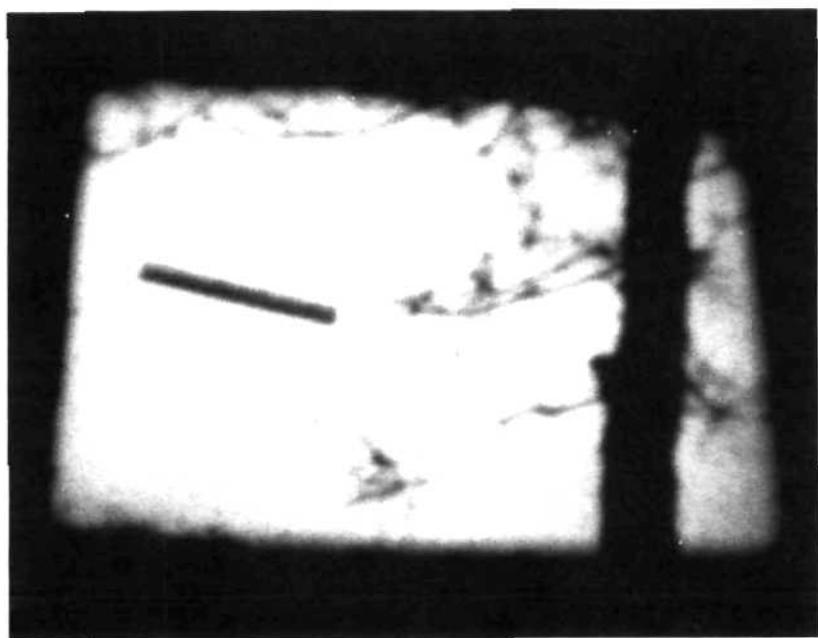
I obtained a copy of the film from Ferriere around January 1983. It was a copy because, Trudel claims, the original was missing. That's not all that was missing. Although Super 8 cartridges contain 50 feet of film, the 50-foot reel was only half-full. Neither Ferriere nor Trudel claim to know what happened to it.

And when I asked Trudel to accompany me to the spot where he had taken the movie so that measurements could be taken to aid in its analysis, he refused. "I would just as soon have it dropped," he said. "After so many years, the interest is gone."

But the UFO believers I took it to for comment were *very* interested. Unfortunately for Trudel, they also were not very impressed.

William H. Spaulding, director of Ground Saucer Watch in Phoenix, said his computer indicated that "the thing is very small and very close," which conflicts with Trudel's story.

Walter N. Webb, who has been looking into UFOs for about thirty years, considers himself a "skeptical believer," and serves as assistant



Two frames from the Trudel 'UFO' movie, shown on PM Magazine.

director of the Charles Hayden Planetarium in Boston, said the movements of the object are all consistent with a small tube suspended on a thin horizontal wire and pulled by a thread.

And even Donald Todd, a UFO buff from South Kingstown, Rhode Island, who was cited by "PM" as a UFO expert, said it appeared to be a hoax because, while the movie shows that Trudel was moving around when he took it, he never tried to get closer to it with his camera. Also, the motion of the object with respect to the tree and the background shows that the "UFO" was near the tree.

(Because the person who took the movie seemed to have so much trouble holding the camera steady, and to make sure the erratic movement of the "UFO" wasn't an illusion, I did an analysis of the individual frames where the tree provides a reference point. The bobbing motion became quite clear and very rhythmic, peaking about once every second. The object had virtually no momentum. At one point it was stationary, then it jumped—if Trudel's length estimates were true—57 feet in 0.4 seconds before coming to a dead stop again.)

Said Michael T. Francis, chief photographer at the Museum of Science in Boston: "It has hoax written all over it."

Unfortunately, none of the viewers of "PM Magazine" had the benefit of this information. Instead, the syndicate, run by Westinghouse Broadcasting, reassured the stations carrying the feature that "This is no hoax."

Facts indicating otherwise were certainly available.

Records of Trudel's previous sightings were in newspaper clip files. The issue of *Probe* that contains details of Trudel's four 1967 sightings, along with his encounter with the mysterious man, was filmed as part of the "PM" segment. And when the lone skeptic (myself) gave a down-to-earth explanation for the object, that part of the interview was not used.

In fact, the program producer of the segment, Michael Valerio of WJAR-TV in Providence, later admitted that after repeatedly viewing the film "I have not been able to convince myself that it actually shows a UFO."

So why did WJAR decide to air the film without criticism?

"I think it was important to present the film in an unbiased light so the viewer can make up his own mind," said Valerio. The statement from the national "PM" office saying that the movie was "no hoax," he said, "was not authorized by us." ●