

According to a CIA report, a UFO landed in Armenia on August 4, 1991



A telegram from the Interfax news agency, unearthed from the CIA's declassified reading room, reports the landing of an unidentified object in a mountain pass near Yerevan on August 4, 1991 — two weeks before the putsch that hastened the collapse of the USSR. The craft remained for nearly six hours, constantly changing shape, watched by a village that never dared to approach.

It was around half past nine in the evening on Sunday, August 4, 1991, when the sky above the village of Atsavan — a handful of houses clinging to the foothills overlooking Yerevan, some twelve kilometers to the south — lit up with a glow that nothing had foretold. The object, according to witnesses interviewed the following day by the Interfax news agency, came down in the pass overlooking the village and did not leave until three o'clock in the morning. For nearly six hours its lights flickered and its outline kept shifting — and not a single soul in the village found the courage to draw near.

A Telegram Slipped Out of the Silence of the Archives

The document carries a dry, anonymous file number: DOC_0005517731. Today it sits in the digital shelves of the CIA's electronic reading room, among thousands of other now-declassified telegrams — the agency's well-known "UFO files," gradually made public since the 1990s. The format is the austere one typical of the era's cables: the marking "UNCLAS" (unclassified), a serial number — OW0508195491 — a country code ("USSR"), and the terse subject line: "UFO Reportedly Lands In Mountain Pass Near Yerevan."

The source, however, is more puzzling. The telegram attributes the report to an agency called the "Norutium Service News Agency" — a name that matches no known Soviet or Armenian press agency. Everything points to a scanning corruption: perhaps a garbling of "Noyan Tapan," the Armenian agency founded that very same year, 1991, or a distorted transcription of "Novosti." Whatever the case, the error — or the mystery — has sat frozen in the archives for more than three decades, with no correction ever appearing.

Stranger still: the document closes, after the final notation "(ENDALL) BT," with four characters in the Hebrew alphabet that serve no apparent function in the body of the text. A scanning artifact, the residue of an archival stamp, or simply the technical noise of a 1990s scanner? No source consulted by The Strange Courier offers any explanation for this phantom signature, which closes the document on a note as enigmatic as its contents.

Atsavan: A Pass in the Shadow of Sacred Mountains

Atsavan appears on no tourist map. The telegram places it twelve to fifteen kilometers from Yerevan — a distance that, given Armenia's rugged topography, can mean an hour's drive along switchback roads through volcanic foothills. The region as a whole, shaped by several hundred now-extinct volcanic formations, is one of the most geologically restless in Eurasia: the Anatolian and Arabian tectonic plates still grind against each other here, producing steep ridges, narrow passes, and nights of an almost total darkness, far from any light pollution.

A few dozen kilometers to the west rises Aragats, Armenia's highest peak since Mount Ararat passed under Turkish sovereignty in 1915. Its name, according to the tradition recorded by the medieval historian Movses Khorenatsi, is said to mean "the throne of Ara" — Ara the Beautiful, a legendary hero whose exploits still haunt the mountain's trails. It was on its slopes that the Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory was founded in 1946, one of the great centers of Soviet cosmic research. A region, then, where eyes have turned skyward for centuries — for reasons sometimes scientific, sometimes sacred.

A Shape That Refused to Settle

The telegram's description is brief, but it contains the two elements that, in UFO literature, mark out the most unsettling encounters: unstable luminosity and a shifting morphology.

"The object remained in place until three o'clock in the morning, its lights flickering and its shape changing — yet no one dared to approach it."

This kind of behavior — a stationary object whose brightness varies and whose contours seem to rearrange themselves in the darkness — recurs in numerous reports compiled since by databases such as NUFORC's, or by researchers studying unidentified anomalous phenomena. Several hypotheses compete: a cluster of separate lights flying in formation, perceived from a distance as a single moving object; a plasma-like phenomenon, whose luminous envelope pulses with electromagnetic fluctuations; or, more prosaically, a nighttime optical effect amplified by fatigue and apprehension. The telegram itself takes no position — it simply records the observation, raw, without comment or hypothesis.

Five and a Half Hours of Shared Stillness

What stands out in this brief report is less the apparition itself than its duration. Five and a half hours — from 9:30 p.m. to 3 a.m. — is a remarkably long exposure for an unidentified aerial phenomenon. Most sightings logged in specialized databases last minutes, occasionally tens of minutes in the most notable cases. A presence of this length implies either a genuinely stationary object on the ground, as suggested by the dispatch's use of the word "landed," or a collective scene in which different witnesses kept watch in shifts from dusk until dawn.

And yet, over six hours, no one in Atsavan crossed the distance separating the village from the pass. Reports of prolonged sightings are often accompanied, in the specialized literature, by a form of collective stupor — a reluctance that goes beyond ordinary caution, which some witnesses later describe as a physical inability to move rather than a conscious choice to keep their distance. The telegram does not say whether the people of Atsavan experienced any such effect, or whether they simply preferred, on a moonless Caucasian night, not to walk toward a light they did not understand.

The Shadow of Voronezh, Two Years Earlier

The Atsavan report is not an isolated case in the Soviet skies of the late 1980s. Less than two years earlier, on September 27, 1989, the official TASS agency had distributed one of the most extraordinary accounts in the entire history of ufology: in a park in Voronezh, an industrial city roughly 500 kilometers south of Moscow, a group of children claimed to have seen a spherical object land, from which emerged a towering being with three eyes, accompanied by a robot. The story circled the globe, to the point — according to several commentators at the time — of turning Voronezh into a pilgrimage site for foreign correspondents based in Moscow.

The aftermath was, as so often, more mundane: the "extraterrestrial rocks" collected at the scene turned out to be hematite, a mineral common in Russia, and an official at the local geophysical laboratory suggested that TASS had considerably embellished the original testimonies. But the context itself was never seriously questioned: a Soviet Union deep in perestroika, where the press had suddenly discovered the freedom to relay — even to stir up — sensations that, a few years earlier, would have been instantly suppressed.

The Atsavan telegram belongs to that same current: a brief dispatch, with no apparent in-depth investigation, relayed by a news agency at a moment when Soviet control over information, already badly weakened, was about to undergo an upheaval of an altogether different magnitude.

Two Weeks Before the End of a World

The date matters. On August 4, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev's USSR was living out its final weeks of existence without quite knowing it yet. The Soviet president was preparing to leave for a holiday in Crimea — a holiday that would be brutally interrupted on August 19 by a coup attempt mounted by part of his own government. For three days, tanks stood before the Russian parliament in Moscow, before the putsch collapsed, hastening the dissolution of the Soviet Union a few months later, in December 1991.

Seen in this light, the Atsavan telegram reads like a cosmic footnote to the collapse of an empire — one of those

curiosities relayed by a press in the midst of transformation, at a moment when the attention of Western chancelleries was fixed on matters of an entirely different order. It is easy to imagine analysts receiving this dispatch amid a flood of far more urgent reports on Soviet political instability, and filing it away — without further thought — among the curiosities.

Sidebar — The Mountain That Defies Gravity

Some forty kilometers northwest of Yerevan, the Aragats massif has long carried a reputation that goes beyond simple geological curiosity. Along the winding road leading up to the medieval fortress of Amberd, several stretches are said to display apparent gravity anomalies: trickles of water that seem to run uphill, vehicles left in neutral that appear to roll upward on their own. The explanations offered — optical illusions tied to the terrain, peculiar configurations of the slope — have not stopped these spots from becoming, since the 2010s, an attraction featured on several regional television channels.

In Armenian tradition, the mountain bears the name of Ara the Beautiful, whose "throne" (gah) is said to have stood at its summit. According to legend, Gregory the Illuminator, after converting Armenia to Christianity in the 4th century, prayed there — and a light is said to have appeared on the summit ever since, visible only to the "worthy." Whether or not one credits these tales, they testify to one thing: in this corner of the Caucasus, the night sky above the peaks has never stopped being an object of fascination — long before a 1991 telegram came to add its own riddle to the list.

From the Archive

Reconstructed from the original text held by the CIA, here is the content of the dispatch as it traveled across Western teleprinters on August 5, 1991:

Declassified Telegram — Reconstructed Text

The four Hebrew characters appearing at the very end of the original document have not been reproduced here, as their full meaning could not be identified.

What the File Leaves Unsaid

Like so many other telegrams in this collection, file 0005517731 simply stops. No follow-up, no supplementary report, no mention of any field investigation appears anywhere in the accessible archives. The witnesses are not named — perhaps no one ever asked. The object's fate, its origin, its nature: all of it remains, more than three decades on, exactly as the Interfax agency left it on a Sunday evening in August, hours before the history of the Soviet Union turned on its axis.

What remains is this almost cinematic image: a mountain pass, a light changing shape for six hours, and an entire village watching — without moving — until, at three in the morning, there was nothing left to watch.

Sources

- www.cia.gov

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