

BOOK REVIEW

When They Appeared. Falcon Lake 1967: The Inside Story of a Close Encounter by Stan Michalak and Chris Rutkowski, Plus the original story **My Encounter with The UFO** by Stephen Michalak. August Night Books, 2019, 247 pp., \$17.99 (paperback). ISBN 9781786770851.

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The incident at Manitoba's Falcon Lake in 1967 has been reported upon repeatedly. Thoroughly researched by multiple sources and agencies, the authenticated physical effects are sufficiently convincing and leave little doubt that a serious encounter with UFOs did occur. Those who collect UFO reports and want details about this incident may find this book of interest.

Initially, this was a single-witness case. On 20 May of that year, Stephen (aka Stefan) Michalak, a Polish immigrant to Canada and part-time prospector, was collecting samples in a relatively remote area when the incident happened. The fundamentals are that he reported seeing two UFOs in close proximity. When one landed, his thoughts were that these craft were experimental and of American origin. He reported hearing voices and addressing them in several languages, but to no avail. Among the immediate effects was a feeling of "wafts of warm air that seemed to come out in waves from the craft, accompanied by the pungent odour of sulphur."

Shortly after the incident, Stephen Michalak wrote a short booklet about his experience. Initially published by Osnova Publishing in Winnipeg, Canada, it is included in its entirety in this book. It is not great literature, but in fairness we note that the book was written in Polish and then translated into English for printing. Still, there is value in having this firsthand account. What is of concern are the physical effects that Michalak experienced immediately following the departure of the craft. These adverse effects followed him for a long time and were never clearly understood by the various medical facilities at which treatment was sought. That even included the world-famous Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. In addition to significant weight losses, there were recurring headaches and skin lesions that appeared to be burns as if sustained from engine exhaust. Over time, some of the effects were attributed to allergies, but with no identification of the causal agent.

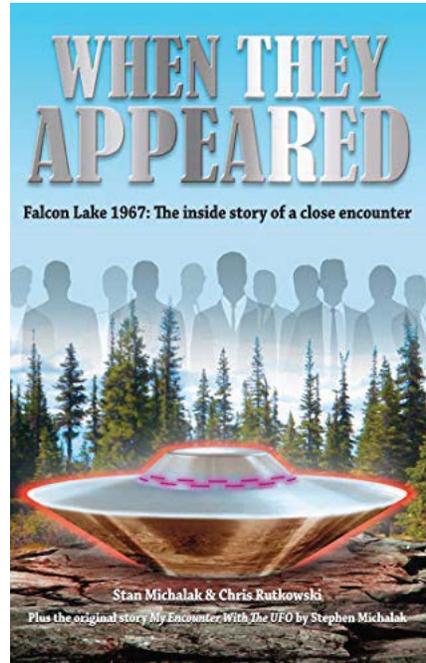
Since the case had considerable physical evidence, it was of sufficient significance to be covered in several pages of the infamous Colorado UFO Study, also known as the Condon Report. In fact, Roy Craig, one of Condon's investigators, did visit Michalak personally and attempted to locate the actual site of the encounter.

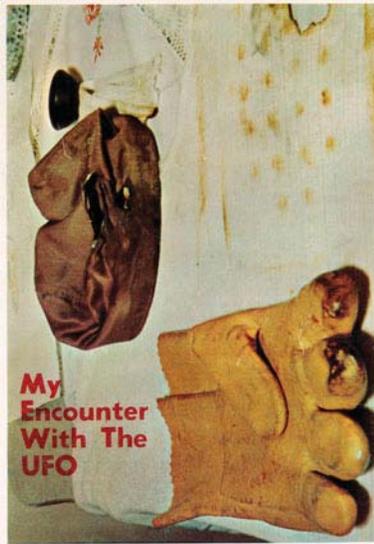
The rationale for the title of this book, *When They Appeared*, is counterintuitive at first blush. It does not refer to the appearance of those craft on 20 May, 1967. Rather, the authors are addressing the aftermath and the plethora of people who showed up, not all with benevolent intentions. That included many media requests, researchers of all ilk, and those

people just obsessively curious. All interfered with the family's lives. In my presentations on UFOs, I suggest that participants need three things: thick skin (as you will be attacked), to understand conspiracy theories (as you are now part of one), and a day job (as you will not make much money for such reports). In my opinion, Michalak's experiences were a textbook example of all of those issues. He was berated, charged as a hoaxer, conned, and accused of being an alcoholic. It did not stop with Stephen Michalak, as the harassment extended to his entire family.

A substantial portion of this book with written by Stephen's son Stan Michalak. In it he describes the bullying he experienced at school when the media printed articles about his father. Also included are many stories of their family life while under scrutiny. A degree of respect for Stephen Michalak was gained when some in the media learned that during World War II he had spent time interned at Gross-Rosen, a Nazi concentration camp. Then, after escaping from Poland, he worked for the U.S. Army as a translator while they were dismantling other German extermination facilities, and he recounted his firsthand observations of the horrors inflicted at those sites. It was his work with the military that facilitated his immigration to Canada.

As might be expected, UFO investigators of both APRO and their Canadian counterpart, CAPRO, descended on the family. Additionally,





there were apparently considerable interest and investigations by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). The RCMP became involved almost from the time of the initial event. Staggering from the burns, and only partially clothed, shortly after trekking to the highway, Michalak came upon an RCMP officer engaged in other activities in the area. He described an encounter that would seem incoherent to any rational person. Fearing he was suffering from radiation and might contaminate others, he refused to allow the officer near him. Some of that activity probably led them to later question if he was merely drunk.

As might be expected, members of both the RCMP and the RCAF approached the incident quite skeptically. As recounted in the book, there were several examples of inconsistent details. Still, there was sufficient evidence to keep their involvement for a considerable period of time. In fact, the amount of effort that both the RCMP and the RCAF put in was remarkable. The critical factor was probably an indication that there was a real risk of radiation poisoning to the civilian population. In the end, both agencies declared the case to be *unexplained*.

In addition to the personal accounts of both Stephen and Stan Michalak, there is a third section written by respected UFO researcher Chris Rutkowski. He had entered the case much later (1996), when A&E (Arts and Entertainment Network) was creating a television program about the Falcon Lake event. Obviously Rutkowski was able to gain the trust of the family and to help them bring credible information to light. While the details remain the same, his section adds his personal reflection on the accounts provided by the father and son.

Since the beginning, this case has been plagued by inconsistencies and conspiracy theories. What *When They Appeared* does provide is considerable documentation to support the claims of the family. Aficionados of UFO research may find this a useful addition to the established body of knowledge.

—JOHN B. ALEXANDER