

A Second Helping

A Review of the A.I.R. Report Part 2 of 4

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An Evaluation of Remote Viewing: Research and Applications

*This document is the first of a three-part review of the CIA- sponsored report by the American Institutes of Research (AIR) of its evaluation of the U.S. government's twenty-four year long remote viewing program. Part One, ***Bologna on Wry Bread***, covers the operational intelligence portion of the program. Part Two, ***A Second Helping***, points out that the research reviewed by the AIR was inadequate as a basis for a fair assessment of remote viewing. Part Three, ***Scraps and Crumbs***, examines the AIR's faulty evaluation of that research. Part Four, has additional ***notes and corrections***.*

In Part 1 of this review I discussed some of the highlights of the AIR/CIA report that was responsible for the demise of the STAR GATE remote viewing program. I focused primarily on the operations half of the unit. As promised, Part 2 will concentrate on the research portion of the program. As Part 1 explained, two experienced scientists were retained to do the evaluation: Dr. Jessica Utts, a nationally-known expert on statistical analysis and a supporter of parapsychology research, and Dr. Ray Hyman, a professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon, and among the most widely-known skeptics of parapsychology.

Utts and Hyman were to conduct a thorough review of "all laboratory experiments and meta-analytic reviews conducted as part of the research program," which amounted to about 80 reports, a number of which summarized several experiments each (p. E-2). The scientists would be assisted by a couple of AIR associates, an additional statistics consultant, and AIR's president, Dr. David Goslin.

All experiments available for review were conducted over an approximate ten-year period by Dr. Ed May, who had assumed responsibility for the experimental side of the remote viewing program at SRI-International in the mid-1980's after the departure of Dr. Hal Puthoff, who had lead the program since it's founding in 1971. In the early '90s, May and his experiments moved to Science Applications

International Corporation (SAIC).

On the surface, AIR's review of the research program is a more credible effort than was its evaluation of the operational unit. The review process was to all appearances well documented, the rationales employed seemed well thought out, and a seemingly equitable point/counterpoint format between pro-psi Utts and anti-psi Hyman adopted in an attempt to bring consensus to the differing conclusions arrived at by the two primary evaluators. However, the evaluation turned out to be nothing so much as a comedy of errors, with both sides--AIR and the STAR GATE researchers--in starring roles.

To best sort out this muddled situation, we will explore the shortcomings of the research effort first, to provide a context in which to understand where AIR failed in its evaluation.

THE RESEARCH PROGRAM

Dr. Ed May and I are on the same side on this issue, so it's not overly pleasant to have to criticize the SAIC research. Nonetheless, there are things that must be brought out to understand what really happened during the AIR review.

I will begin with a brief summary of the ten experiments ultimately examined by AIR reviewers. Fortunately, Dr. Utts provided summaries in her portion of the AIR report. In the interest of space I have condensed these summaries still further, but retain the essentials:

Experiment 1:

Purpose. Two-fold:

1. (a) determine if a "sender"(i.e., someone at the site) was necessary to help the viewer access the target or if the viewer could obtain information merely by being focused on the site through a coordinate or other mechanism;
2. (b) Determine whether "static" targets--i.e., the photos--would be easier or harder to perceive than "dynamic" targets--i.e., short video clips.

Target. Photos from the pages of National Geographic sealed in envelopes; alternatively, short video clips.

Experiment 2:

Purpose. Discover if viewers can correctly determine computer-generated "binary targets"--"Is it one or is it zero?" "Is it yes or is it no?" If so, this might lead to answering questions such as, "Is there a bomb in this building or not?"

Target. A computer-driven random number generator.

Experiment 3:

Purpose. Using a magnetoencephalograph (MEG), attempt to detect anomalous brain signals of remote viewers.

Target. A flashing light observed by a "sender."

Experiment 4:

Purpose. Determine if remote viewing can be used in an information-sending capacity.

Target. Specially designed or chosen targets with distinct characteristics.

Presence or absence of each characteristic represented either a "1" or a "0." If a characteristic was perceived and reported by the viewer, a "1" was recorded; if the characteristic was not perceived to be present, a "0" was recorded. Binary numbers could thus be constructed by tabulating presence or absence of target characteristics. If successful, information could be "sent" in a manner roughly analogous to Morse code.

Experiment 5:

Purpose. Test three novices to see if they could remote view.

Target. National Geographic photos placed on a table in another room.

Experiment 6:

Purpose. Could lucid dreaming be used as a tool to enhance remote-viewing?

Target. National Geographic photos contained in opaque envelopes placed next to the bed where person was attempting to achieve a "lucid dreaming" state.

Experiment 7:

Purpose. Determine if a person becomes "physiologically aware" of being watched, even though he/she is not consciously aware of being watched.

Target. The subject him/herself. He/she is seated in a room with a video camera aimed at him/her. Galvanic skin response was then measured to determine if it increased during periods of observation.

Experiment 8:

Purpose. Using an electroencephalograph (EEG), attempt to identify interruptions in alpha brain-waves when a remote viewing target is flashed on a computer screen in another room.

Experiment 9:

Purpose. Determine if viewers could describe a target briefly displayed on a computer monitor. (This is the remote viewing portion of Experiment 8.)

Target. Target (not further described in the report, but perhaps the aforementioned video clips) was displayed briefly on a computer CRT in another room.

Experiment 10:

Purpose. An improved version of Experiment 1. An equal number of static and

dynamic targets were employed, no "senders" were used, and all attempts were done at SAIC in California, instead of from the participants homes, as was the case with Experiment 1.

Target. Selections from a pool of various photos and video clips.

[Summaries were excerpted from pp. 3-33 to 3-41 of the AIR report.]

As listed in the AIR report, the three assigned missions of the STAR GATE-affiliated research program were to: (1) Demonstrate through scientific experiment the existence of the remote viewing phenomenon; (2) Determine the cause and effect mechanism through which the phenomenon functions; and (3) Explore methods and techniques to enhance the operational effectiveness of the phenomenon [p. 2-1]. These goals, incidentally, were essentially unchanged from the days of the GRILL FLAME effort, as enumerated in a report I recently saw dating from 1977.

Let us evaluate these experiments in terms of the three stated missions of the research effort--in effect, the intended purpose for which research money had originally been appropriated.

Mission 1: DEMONSTRATE EXISTENCE OF THE REMOTE VIEWING PHENOMENON

As designed, seven of the SAIC experiments would provide useful support to the existence of the remote viewing phenomenon, and one would have been of marginal value. Two would not have given useful support in demonstrating the RV phenomenon. Experiment 3 (which was unsuccessful because of faulty experiment construction) might have been of marginal value but would not in itself have provided unambiguous support for the existence of RV. Had this experiment been a success, any anomalous brain signals detected might still have been the artifact of some other common element in the viewers' experiences, backgrounds, or training. However, isolating and identifying the signal might ultimately have led to useful information which could potentially provide later support to the existence of RV.

Experiment 2, which focused on computer-generated "binary" targets, might demonstrate a paranormal effect, but not in the sense of classic remote viewing. The experiment's results may actually display some sort of "dowsing" effect (though some would argue that RV and dowsing

are but different sides to the same coin), or perhaps even a psychokinetic (PK) effect, since it would be difficult to determine if the viewer were merely anticipating the correct answer, or in some way influencing the number generation process.

Experiment 7 could be useful in demonstrating the existence of some sort of paranormal linking effect between observed and observer. But the experiment would not have been useful in supporting the existence of remote viewing. No useable information could be transferred across space and/or time using the demonstrated effect.

Mission 2: DETERMINE CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP

None of the SAIC experiments, even when successful, would have provided any substantial answers to the cause-and-effect relationship for the remote viewing phenomenon. Only Experiments 3 and 8 would have provided even marginal information bearing on cause-and-effect, and they would have merely demonstrated an anomalous effect without identifying a causal linkage.

Mission 3: DEVELOP MORE EFFECTIVE RV OPERATIONS METHODS

Because of their design, seven of the SAIC experiments could have provided no benefit whatsoever in developing new or better operational methods or techniques. Experiment 2 showed potential, were it to lead to a reliable "yes/no" selection technique. However, the experiment only involved trying to "second-guess" a machine. A real-world binary problem, such as, "Is Gen. Dozier in Italy?" or "Will Hezbollah attack the Statue of Liberty tomorrow?" involves much different selection mechanisms than tapping a computer key, is of much different psychic texture than "0"s and "1"s, and has far greater ultimate consequences--and therefore dramatically greater emotional loading in the viewing process--than do yes-or-no type questions on a computer.

Experiment 4, an attempt to use RV to transmit coded information by identifying specific characteristics of a target, uses remote viewing not as an intelligence collection tool, but as a communications method. This would by definition be of no use for operational RV; however, if such a communications ability could be reliably developed, it would have great utilitarian value--to include undetectable transmission of intelligence

from a denied area.

As explored in Experiment 6, lucid dreaming might possibly provide added value to the remote viewing process (though I personally have my doubts). Therefore, this experiment at least had the potential to benefit operational remote viewing.

When we tabulate the results, this is what we find:

| MISSION # | Relevant | Maybe | Irrelevant |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Mission 1--Proof of Phenomenon | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| Mission 2--Determine Cause/Effect | 0 | 1 | 9 |
| Mission 3--Operations Enhancement | 0 | 3 | 7 |

By far the majority of the ten experiments focus on proving the existence of the phenomenon--the first mission. The other two missions were essentially ignored. In fact, one experiment--determining whether someone is physiologically aware of being watched--is interesting from a parapsychology standpoint, but has almost nothing to do with remote viewing (one individual prominent in RV research did suggest that the experiment might be a preliminary step toward determining if one could be aware of being targeted by a remote viewer). Another three--Experiments 2,3,and 4--are only indirectly related to RV, particularly RV as an intelligence collection tool.

The research program's first error was fundamental--it failed to evenly address all aspects of this three-fold mission, concentrating instead almost exclusively on the first of the specified goals. This would have been forgivable, had the program indeed successfully proved beyond any doubt the existence of remote viewing as a paranormal phenomenon. However, as demonstrated by Ray Hyman's conclusion that something was happening, but it was too early to assume it was psi [pp. 3-75, 3-76], this goal eluded the program. To be fair, this effect was certainly amplified by AIR efforts (discussed below) to "stack the deck" against STAR GATE. Nonetheless, the whole research emphasis was generally out of sync with the stated purpose of the STAR GATE effort.

Perhaps the rationale was something like this: "Until we can prove the existence of the phenomenon, there's no point in trying to establish the cause-and-effect; and if these first two questions aren't answered, it seems pointless as well to bother much about how to enhance the

operational effectiveness of something we haven't proved to exist, nor know how it works." At any rate, the bulk of the experiments focused on trying to convincingly demonstrate an effect, and few went beyond that decidedly preliminary step. While statistically, at least, some remarkable effects were demonstrated, both Utts, the supporter, and Hyman, the skeptic agree that nothing irrefutably conclusive was proven. Utts believed that the effects nonetheless demonstrated the strong possibility of a psi-based effect. Hyman and the AIR researchers concluded there was not enough evidence to say even that.

Would the results have been better had May concentrated more on true RV experiments, and tried more concertedly to address the other two missions? The answer to this is a qualified yes. Notably, the experiments more closely approaching a classical remote-viewing model were the most successful, with Experiment 10 producing quite impressive results. Those which departed most from the model tended to be the least conclusive. Additionally, had more experiments been designed to enhance operational methods or develop new techniques, they would in and of themselves have provided additional proof for existence of the phenomenon. If RV technique gets good enough to work nearly every time, producing solid information under a variety of conditions, the phenomenon is essentially proved--accomplishing two of the research missions for the price of one. (As they say, nothing succeeds like success.)

Cause-and-effect research would, however, have been less productive. Of course, if in some brilliant moment of discovery a verifiable causal relationship were found and demonstrated, the skeptics would have to retreat. But such an event is highly unlikely. Thus far, there is not even a worthwhile hypothesis as to what the phenomenon is in terms of the "physical" world--if it even has such a connection (though there are one or two interesting ideas waiting in the wings to emerge). We do have a pretty good idea what the basic nature of remote viewing is NOT: It is unlikely to be electro-magnetic in any sense, as demonstrated by the successful remote viewings done in electro- magnetically shielded Faraday cages, or those which are precognitive or retrocognitive, seemingly in violation of the accepted laws of physics which radio waves or other electromagnetic phenomena obey.

Since we have no other good candidate to account for information transmission of the nature and quality good remote viewing produces,

we are pretty much left in the dark as to where to start. It makes far more sense to work on practical applications and leave the fundamental underpinnings for those with more time, money, and no need to answer to a house full of skeptics. Regrettably, the wavering focus of the SAIC effort was inadequate for fair assessment of remote viewing in its own right.

I should point out here that the experimental focus was not entirely up to Dr. May and his team. Representatives for a contracting agency write the statement of work and draft the contract that specifies what will be done in the course of the research. A review of the DIA contracts shows that much of the work performed at SAIC was indeed specified by the DIA representative.

Still, there is a lot of behind-the-scenes give-and-take before the formal document is drafted, and the government representative must rely heavily on the expertise and advice of the contractor in the process of deciding what can or should be done in the course of the contract. Further, there is an added degree of flexibility built into the contract to allow researchers to explore promising directions that may not necessarily have been foreseen during the original contracting process. This flexibility is necessary and desirable to allow examination of serendipitous discoveries or unforeseen effects, but it is also a point vulnerable to exploitation by researchers with their own agendas to pursue. Ultimately, both parties share responsibility for the direction a research program takes, right or wrong.

As an additional consideration, the SAIC work was a follow-on to previous research done via a still-classified connection with an agency which mandated more generalized research. Remote viewing was only one of several phenomena to be explored. PK, for example, was always of interest in prior research programs and, as the random number generation experiment shows, some vestiges of interest may have remained in the SAIC experiments. This interest in general parapsychology seems to have bled over into the DIA/SAIC remote viewing research.

May's broader-ranging experimental focus did produce some interesting and perhaps even ultimately useful research. Unfortunately, there was not a more rigorous attempt made to route the SAIC research further away from this general focus and concentrate more intently on what should have been STAR GATE's RV-centered research agenda.

Ultimately, the overly-eclectic approach increased vulnerability to pointed criticism which Ray Hyman and AIR were only too eager to provide.

In fact Dr. Hyman does give lip service to Ed May's difficulties in not being "free to run the program to maximize scientific payoff," because May was required to "do experiments and add variables to suit the desires of his sponsors," resulting in "an attempt to explore too many questions with too few resources. . . The scientific inquiry was spread too thin." (3- 46) Of course, as just mentioned, there was much room for negotiation in the contracting process, and May could certainly have argued for a more narrow focus. The evidence suggests it was more the other way around. In fact, several people in a position to know have suggested that Dr. May saw the RV research contracts as an opportunity to explore some of his own parapsychological interests at the same time as pursuing the official purposes for which the research was contracted.

However that may be, Hyman's gratuitous comments are no exoneration in this matter. If Hyman recognized the eclectic nature of the research AIR was to evaluate, he is certainly well- qualified enough as a scientist to realize that the limited numbers of experiments were inadequate to answer the question EITHER WAY as to whether or not remote viewing had any efficacy as an intelligence collection tool. That Hyman persisted (as discussed below) in pretending that they did seems intellectually dishonest.

PROTOCOLS

The bias in favor of wider parapsychology research was not the only problem with the SAIC experiments, however. Curiously, May and his colleagues seem to have followed rather anachronistic procedures in conducting even the experiments which were more purely remote viewing in character. My first quarrel is with the target pool.

Remote viewing, both experimentally and operationally, has been pursued for more than two decades. While a lot has been learned, some of the most valuable data--that accumulated by the operational RV unit in its various incarnations--has hardly been considered in the research process. The operational data set includes brilliant successes that point to improved ways of doing things, as well as ignominious failures which can be just as instructive. There was a fair amount of well-structured experimentation at Ft. Meade in targeting and cuing methods, RV data documentation and analysis, accessing target details,

and so forth. Unfortunately, the operations activity was kept mostly separate from the research program until after the 1992 transition to STAR GATE, and even then the connection existed primarily to provide subjects for some of the SAIC experiments. The vast database from the Ft. Meade unit of thousands of documented sessions--both training and operational--remains largely unmined.

One pronounced difference between RV targeting in the SAIC research effort and that in operations was that operations focused on "live" targets, while the SAIC experiments used two- dimensional images, both static photographs (pictures gleaned from the pages of National Geographic) and short, live-action video clips. The thinking at SRI was that the video clips might provide increased "change" values, adding variety to the target material, perhaps making it easier for viewers to detect and report. Similarly, photos were selected that displayed significant "change in entropy"--that is, contrast and variety in shapes and in color and value patterns that again theoretically would make detection and reporting easier.

In comparison, daily operational remote viewing missions at Ft. Meade accessed targets in real time "on the ground" (or water, or whatever), not in a photograph. What photos that were provided were not used as targets, but only for later feedback or to guide analysts. There was plenty of evidence that the operational viewers were indeed accessing the sites themselves and not merely the feedback folders (in operations, feedback was usually pretty lean and sporadic anyway). When a viewer accurately describes several significant structural or functional details that are completely lacking from feedback packages yet which are later confirmed to be at the site, it becomes obvious very quickly that "real" remote viewing is occurring. This literally happened scores, even hundreds of times.

However, at Ft. Meade there was some experimentation with photos as actual targets. This was conducted both as an in-house training exercise, and at one or two other times as part of one of the rare instances when the operations unit was asked to participate long-distance in an SRI experimental series during the mid-to-late '80s. Across the board operational viewer results dropped off when targeted against "static" photographic targets. At the time, video clips were not available as an option (or so I presume, as participating viewer received only terse feedback), so I can render no judgement as to whether they

would have been more effective.

Indeed, to a remote viewer accustomed to accessing actual sites in four-dimensional space, a static photograph is not a representation of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor or Mount Pinatubo during an eruption. It is in reality only a colored piece of paper in a manila envelope. It's not surprising that results from operational viewers suffer when targeted under such circumstances.

To be sure, an experienced viewer CAN access a photograph--the positive results of several of the SAIC's experimental RV sessions demonstrate this. But if the focus had been on "real"--and therefore naturally dynamic--sites as opposed to two-dimensional representations, May and his colleagues might not have had to bother about testing the use of "dynamic" moving images (the videos) to provide greater change and variety to improve remote viewer detection; or about mapping the "change in entropy" of the static images to enhance researchers' ability to decode viewer results, as was done for these experiments. Perhaps there were experimental control reasons why such a fixed target pool was desired. In my mind, however, the drawbacks far outweigh the possible benefits.

Another troublesome aspect of at least one of the SAIC experiments was the apparent need to experiment further with "senders"--individuals sent to the target site to act as a "beacon" or a "transmitter" for the remote viewer. Indeed, one of the stated purposes of the experiment was to determine if a "sender" was necessary. Senders and beacons were used in the early SRI experiments, and continued to be used for beginner trainees at Ft. Meade, simply as a way of providing a connection with the site that the novice viewer could easily grasp. Both at SRI and Ft. Meade, however, the need for senders in advanced remote viewings was surpassed long ago. The introduction of coordinates as a targeting mechanism, and later (to avoid any hint of contamination) encrypted coordinates, made senders/beacons obsolete. No degradation in response quality resulted, and in fact, accuracy seemed even to be enhanced. The encrypted coordinates provided the added benefit of defusing one of the most popular (if improbable) criticisms of coordinate-cued RV--that some viewer might just "memorize" what was at the end of all the geographic coordinates in the world, and cheat.

The need for beacon or sender was already discounted by the late '70s and early '80s, and was certainly well established at the time Ed May

took over as primary researcher. Though the sender/beacon personnel were dispensed with later in the SAIC ten-experiment sequence, it was puzzling why the researchers felt the need to thus "reinvent the wheel" at the start.

In the end, the main problem with the SAIC experiments was not that they were particularly poor experiments, but that they should have been better. More importantly, the experiments could--and really should--have focused more particularly on remote viewing, guided by the three missions that Congress had decreed when earmarking funds for the program. As it was, the primary consequence of the SAIC program was to provide a very tempting strawman for the AIR bull (at the behest of the CIA) to gore and trample, hoodwinking the general public into believing that AIR had a live matador at its mercy. In reality, the matador wasn't even in town.

But now, after I have spent several pages "blaming the victim," it's time to turn my attention to the perpetrator.

This is part 2 in a series of 4. ©1996 Leonard Buchanan on behalf of Paul Smith aka "Mr. X"