

Another U.K. defense scientist found dead

by Mark Burdman

Leading security experts in Western Europe privately estimate that there is an identifiable connection between the Aug. 28 crash of Italian Aeromacchi jets at the Ramstein Base air show in West Germany, the Jan. 28, 1986 explosion of the U.S. shuttle Challenger, and the recent years' pattern of strange deaths and disappearances of British defense scientists. All point to East bloc intelligence services' sabotage of Western defense capabilities, these experts believe.

Three days before Ramstein, police in Britain found retired Army Brig. Gen. John Ferry, assistant marketing manager at the Marconi company, dead in a company apartment south of London. The 60-year-old Ferry was found with electric wires in his mouth, electrocuted from the main current. Police immediately labeled this brutal death suicide, even though Ferry had shown few signs of mental problems, except mild depression following a car accident.

Ferry was the ninth employee of British defense contractor Marconi to die or disappear under odd circumstances in the past few years. Press reports said he had access to secret files on a revolutionary new gun, and that he was a liaison between Marconi and the British armed services.

On Sept. 3, British Trades Union Congress president Clive Jenkins announced that he was launching a top-level inquiry into recent suspicious deaths of British scientists working on the frontiers of high-technology defense research. According to the Sept. 4 *Sunday Telegraph* of London, Jenkins, joint general secretary of the high-technology Manufacturing, Science, and Finance (MSF) union whose members include many research scientists, said that it was "statistically incredible" that so many research workers at the Marconi company all died of suicide. He spoke of great concern among his members over "these clusters of suicides, violent deaths, or murders."

Jenkins stated: "We have decided to write to the other major firms (besides Marconi) in advanced electronics asking for comparable details. The question is, could there be a link between these deaths? I ask myself, is there a great cover-up going on? If so, what? By whom? Is it ours, or is it theirs—whoever they may be?" The firms that Jenkins sent his questions to include Ferranti, Phillips, Plessey, Racal, and Thorn EMI, all of which do research in electronics high technology.

Jenkins himself has strong leftist persuasions. His comments, all the more, betray the level of anxiety among British scientific and defense personnel over the deaths.

'Star Wars deaths'

So far, no official explanation worth its salt has been given for the pattern of untoward happenings among British defense scientists. The public line from British police has been to deny that there is even a pattern. Each death or disappearance has been explained away as an isolated suicide or accident, or left "open" for further investigation. One theory making the rounds in Britain, attributes the deaths to the extraordinary stress felt by British scientists, under conditions of an ongoing Ministry of Defense probe into alleged malpractices at Marconi and perhaps other companies. Supposedly, this stress is driving scientists to suicide and weird self-destructive accidents.

Undoubtedly, what would be causing stress in defense layers, is the absence of will to locate these deaths in the context of an expanded "irregular warfare" campaign against the West by Soviet or Soviet-linked special forces.

Last March 27, British Labour Party parliamentarian Douglas Hoyle called on Defense Minister George Younger to start an urgent inquiry into the pattern of deaths, following what was, at that time, the eighth mysterious death of a British defense scientist within 18 months.

On March 25, 52-year-old Trevor Knight had been found slumped at the wheel of his car in the garage of his home in Harpenden, Hertfordshire, with a hose connected to the exhaust pipe. Knight, an engineer, worked in the guided weapons division of Marconi Defense Systems in Stanmore, Middlesex, which is Marconi's base for work in space and defense. MP Hoyle, president of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, charged that the police view that Knight's death was not suspicious, was "inadequate."

Said Hoyle: "The authorities have said there was nothing suspicious about all of these deaths, but there are too many coincidences. How many deaths are we going to have before something is done? Why have these deaths suddenly begun to occur? They have all happened in such a short space of time. . . . What is the link between all these? Is it not worrying that this is happening to top scientists? Is it simply overwork or is there something more sinister afoot? It is very alarming."

Aside from the scientists who have died under odd circumstances over the past couple of years, at least three others have disappeared and have never been found.

Many of these have been directly or indirectly employed by Marconi, the defense subsidiary of GEC. Some worked in projects potentially relevant to the American Strategic Defense Initiative project. The March 28 *Daily Telegraph* called them "Star Wars deaths." The *Telegraph* said that Knight, for example, was "involved in the Star Wars program at the Marconi defense company."