



The Mothman

MOTHMAN: Alien Creature in West Virginia? "MOTHMAN" is the name given a creature allegedly sighted in the Point Pleasant, West Virginia area. The sightings occurred from mid-November 1966 to mid-December 1967, making 1996 the 30th anniversary of the creature's arrival. Was it alien, delivered by UFO? Was it a freak of nature? Was it some sort of misidentified bird? Or was it simply a well-crafted hoax?

MOTHMAN: Eyewitness Descriptions Unfortunately, no photographs exist of the creature -- just like a bad monster movie where the camera jams or the film is not exposed properly. According to eyewitness accounts, Mothman stood taller than a man, at 6 or 7 feet, perhaps taller. Its most prominent features were the huge, featherless wings spanning 10 feet across; even more unusual were the huge, red, glowing eyes on the generally featureless face. Some eyewitnesses were unable to recall seeing a head; these reports stated the eyes were actually in the shoulder area where a neck and head "should" be. Few, if any, could remember details about the presence or type of feet the creature possessed. Eyewitnesses alleged that Mothman could fly without flapping its wings, and could match the speed of an automobile trying to flee at 100 miles an hour. The creature never seemed to flap its wings when rising from the ground-- it evidently was able to rise and float above the earth's surface with little or no effort, not making any sound or noise.

MOTHMAN: A Map and Description of the area where first sighted The creature was allegedly first sighted at the West Virginia Ordnance Works North Power Plant by a pair of "parkers" in mid-November, 1966. The West Virginia Ordnance Works were created early during World War II to supply TNT (tri-nitro-toluene) -- a highly dangerous explosive -- for the United States war effort. Located about six miles north of Point Pleasant, West Virginia the area now serves as a public hunting and fishing area, and is known locally as the "TNT Area" or just "TNT." Constructed during the buildup of the war, the plant was ostensibly laid out to avoid a possible Japanese or German attack. Storage of the dangerous explosives was accomplished through a series of concrete bunkers built above ground. These bunkers, or "igloos," were huge dome-shaped concrete structures, covered with a foot or more of earth and spaced in a grid pattern to reduce the chances of all igloos being destroyed in a chain reaction from an enemy bomb. Doors on the igloos are approximately a foot thick and solid. The covering of earth also served as camouflage, since grass was allowed to grow over the entire complex, although from the air the facility must have appeared odd. Twin coal-fired power plants were constructed to supply power for the manufacturing facility. A series of underground bunkers, tunnels and sewers also connected the entire complex. Sometime after the war, the blueprints of the plant layout were

destroyed in an act of typical Washington, DC efficiency. The plant suspended operations in 1945. The igloos were later used for storage of commercial explosives (perhaps still are) and rumor had it that low-level nuclear wastes were also periodically stored in the igloos. Virtually all the igloos are locked and inaccessible, unless someone has trespassed and tried to break in; this is not advisable and potentially very dangerous, even life-threatening, because of snakes, rats, skunks, possible nuclear waste, explosives (and later explosive residue more powerful than TNT), plus industrial waste from the plant's heyday. In the early 1980s some folks were fishing in one of the designated fishing ponds when they noticed a red liquid bubbling to the surface. It turned out to be a toluene compound. Subsequent testing determined the area to be one of the most polluted sites in the United States; it was granted "Top 10 Superfund Cleanup" status. During the plant's operation waste products were allowed to settle into unlined holding "reservoirs" for evaporation; these pits were plowed under and vegetation eventually grew back. This action, coupled with possible sewers, led to the poisoning of the area. The Army Corps is busy remediating the site; permanent, perpetual monitoring of groundwater will be required from now until forever (!). The ponds affected have been drained, "capped" with a clay liner and monitoring wells installed. Because of the destruction of the plant blueprints, the Army Corps has had to advertise publicly for information from anyone with work experience at the plant. This was done to try and recover some information about locations of sewers and tunnels. It is unknown if all remaining facilities will be found.

MOTHMAN: More unusual occurrences around Point Pleasant, West Virginia The Curse of Cornstalk Point Pleasant has seen its share of devastating floods and fires; some attribute it to the dying curse of the great Shawnee chieftain, Cornstalk. On October 10, 1774 a great battle took place between Virginia militiamen led by Andrew Lewis, and a multi-tribal confederation led by the Shawnee warrior, Cornstalk; this battle took place at the confluence of the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers, later incorporated in 1794 as the town of Point Pleasant. The Native American tribesmen were duped by the British-loyalist Governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, into believing the militiamen were coming to sign a peace treaty. The confederation suffered a massive defeat, never to return to the area to fight again; the militiamen suffered heavy casualties also. Dunmore's intent was to divert the attention of the colonists away from independence from Britain by stirring hatred between colonists and Native Americans. Because of the British interests in the battle, some have declared this battle to be the first of the American Revolution; detractors label it the last battle of the border/Indian wars. Upon Cornstalk's demise as the result of an ambush, he reportedly with his dying breath cursed the area for 200 years. His words spurred many a discussion upon each unfortunate occurrence in the town during that time span, including floods and severe fires that seemed to plague the downtown through the years, up through a cowardly, murderous hostage situation at the Mason County Courthouse in 1976. (Photo is postcard image circa 1930 of the Cornstalk monument in its former location on the Mason County Courthouse lawn. In the early 1950s it was moved, along with the chief's remains, six blocks south to Battle Monument State Park at the confluence of the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers, scene of the battle described above.) The Silver Bridge Disaster On December 15, 1967 at just after 5:00 pm the Silver Bridge spanning the Ohio River between Point Pleasant and Kanauga, Ohio collapsed; 46 people died in the tragedy. The rush hour travelers had been going about their daily lives, preparing for the Christmas holiday when the structure gave way beneath them. The bridge was constructed in 1928 as an "eyebar" suspension bridge, meaning that in place of wire cables such as those found on the Golden Gate Bridge, the bridge used eyebars linked in a chain from which the bridge deck was suspended. (An eyebar resembles, for all intents and purposes, a dogbone with a hole, or "eye," in each end. These eyebars ran in pairs linked by massive pins.) In the months following the collapse, the pieces of the bridge

were recovered and laid out like a massive jigsaw puzzle in a field just south of Point Pleasant; all but the roadbed was recovered. Final analysis conducted by the U.S. Department of Transportation ruled that failure of the number 13 eyebar pin, on the upriver (north) side of the bridge and west of the Ohio tower, had failed, causing the eyebar chain to drop below the roadway. The downriver (south) eyebar chain was unable to support the weight of the entire structure, resulting in immediate, complete failure of the span. Carrying U.S. Route 35 at the time, the bridge had two twin structures: one just upriver in St. Marys, West Virginia and one in Brazil. The St. Marys span was immediately closed, destroyed and replaced. In 1969, a new bridge was completed just south of Point Pleasant and Route 35 was relocated to the south side of the Kanawha River, following the path of the former WV State Route 17. The former Route 35 was renumbered as WV State Route 62. (The image above is taken from an early postcard illustration. The view is from the Point Pleasant ramp looking west towards Kanauga, Ohio. The photo is taken above the former intersection of U.S. Route 35 and Main Street, adjacent to the Mason County Courthouse. The railroad bridge in the background is still standing and still in use by Conrail. It dates from early this century, originally part of the Kanawha & Michigan Railroad and later used by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. In 1914, a U.S. Government anti-trust suit forced the C&O to divest the line; it then served the New York Central Railway, later Penn Central and now Conrail.)