

# **It is Not What You Think**

By Jack English

Sturbridge Lakes is a quiet community at the edge of the woods. So, when a car alarm went off at 2:00 a.m., and a second car alarm went off a few seconds later, I got out of bed to see what was the matter. I figured it was probably teenagers pranking the neighbors.

I spread two slats of the bedroom blinds and peeked out, expecting to see a couple of kids. Instead, I saw a forty-foot-long white cylinder, rounded at both ends. It was right in the middle of the street.

I immediately thought of the forty-foot-long, flying Tic Tac photographed by Navy pilots a few years ago.

I slipped on a pair of pants and grabbed my phone. If this thing was real, I wanted to get a picture of it before it vanished in a puff of smoke.

I went out through my garage and saw my neighbor Fred standing on his front step. He was wearing his Superman pajamas. He cut

across his lawn and pushed through the pine trees separating our properties.

“What is it?” Fred pointed to the white cylinder.

“It’s a... a...” I did not want to call it a UFO even though it was floating three feet off the ground.

“Did you get a picture of it?” Fred extended his hand toward the object.

“Taking pictures now,” I said as I walked down the path from my house to the street. I clicked pictures as I went, expecting it to vanish at any instant. I walked into the street behind the thing, continuing to snap pictures, and walked up onto the lawn of my neighbor across the street where I shot more pictures.

Fred followed me. “Did you call the police?”

“I’ll call as soon as I finish taking these snaps.” I closed the camera app and dialed 911.

Fred got close in my face and whispered, “What are you going to tell them? Are you going to tell them it is a...” He hesitated. “You know, one of those...” He pointed to the sky.

He didn’t want to call it a UFO even though it was unidentified, it was an object and it was hovering above the ground.

“911 What is your emergency?” the operator asked.

I said, "Somebody left a large propane cylinder in the street in front of my house."

"How big?"

"Forty feet long, maybe ten feet across."

The 911 operator asked, "Is it leaking?"

"Not that I can tell, but I am no expert."

"What is your name and address?"

I told the operator.

"We will send an officer to assess the situation."

Four minutes later, Officer Derek Haines pulled up and parked his police car fifty feet in front of the cylinder. I waved him down and said I was the one who phoned in the report.

"What is it?" Haines asked.

I wasn't going to call it a UFO. Let the experts name it. "It looks like a propane tank to me."

"Then why is it floating three feet off the ground?"

"No clue," I shrugged. "What do you think it is?"

"We'll see." Haines didn't want to call it a UFO either. Let the sergeant call it a UFO. He got on the radio. "Sergeant, we have an issue that needs your attention."

"What?"

“I’m not sure. I just know it is over my pay grade.”

“I’m on my way.”

Five minutes later, Sergeant Bob Murphy got out of his car and walked around the object looking for markings. Officer Haines followed him. Then Murphy stepped up to it and banged on it with his flashlight. “It’s not metal,” he told Haines. “Set up a police line and get everyone back a hundred feet, just in case it is a propane tank.”

Haines was happy to have a clear order. Something he could do. “OK, everybody back a hundred feet,” He shouted while waving his arms.

It was a warm silky night and neighbors poured out their homes to see what was going on.

A channel 6, Action News van pulled up. A reporter and cameraman got out.

Other police officers arrived and they all worked to push the curious crowd back behind a thin, insubstantial line of police tape.

The Action News cameraman scooted under the police tape and got within twenty feet of the cylinder.

Officer Haines shouted at him. “Get away from there. Get back behind the line.”

The channel 6 reporter stuck a microphone in Haines face and she asked, “What is it? Is it a UFO?”

“I don’t know what it is,” Haines said, “but it looks like a propane tank to me.”

“A propane tank?” the reporter grinned. “You don’t expect anyone to believe that do you?”

“It looks like a propane tank,” Haines said, “and it will stay a propane tank until my sergeant says it looks like something else.”

The reporter marched in the direction of Sergeant Murphy.

A news helicopter hovered overhead and threw a spotlight on the object.

Julie Fisk, the fire marshal, pulled up in a red pickup truck. She was followed by an impressively large red fire engine.

There was a crowd of at least a hundred by this point and the police were having a hard time keeping them back behind the police tape. More people were coming. It was a warm summer evening and there was a carnival-like feeling in the air. A Mr. Softee truck pulled up at the rear of the crowd. Its jingle provided background noise for the crowd.

My neighbor Fred turned toward the sound.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“I want to get a cone with sprinkles on it.”

“Vanilla or chocolate?” I asked.

“Chocolate, of course.”

Fire Chief Julie Fisk strode over to Sergeant Bob Murphy. They knew each other well. “What is it?” she asked. “I heard it was a propane tank. But, how do you know it is propane? How do you know its not gasoline or toxic chemicals? If it was a commercial tank, there would be markings, hazmat codes, something.”

“I don’t know what it is,” Murphy said. “I couldn’t find any hatches or valves or openings of any kind.” He did not want to be the one that called it a UFO. He had been around long enough to know that the first person to call it a UFO would become the butt of all jokes if it turned out to be something else. And, if something went wrong, the first person to call it a UFO would be blamed. He could hear it all in his head, “Why did you call it a UFO when it was plainly an X and if you knew it was an X why didn’t you do Y?”

“OK,” Fisk said, “until we figure out what it is, let’s pull everyone back two hundred feet. See if you can get people to move their cars back behind the line. If it bursts into flames, we don’t want the fuel in the cars making things worse. And, let’s evacuate four houses on that

side of the street,” she pointed, “and three on that side, just in case.”

“You got it,” Sergeant Murphy said, and he began shouting orders to his people. Then he called Rudy Rodriguez, the Chief of Police at his home. “Chief, this is Bob Murphy. We have a situation.”

“Geez, Bob. It is 3:00 a.m. Whatever it is, can’t it wait until morning?”

“There is a...,” *Don’t say UFO*, he said to himself. “There is a propane tank blocking a residential street, a big one.”

“A big street?” the Chief asked.

“No, a big tank. It is attracting a lot of attention and I am having a hard time maintaining the perimeter the fire marshal asked for.”

Rodriguez sat up in bed and wiped the sleepy out of his eyes. “How big is the propane tank and how big is the crowd?”

“The propane tank is about forty-feet long and the crowd is at least two hundred and growing fast. Can I call neighboring towns for backup?”

“I will do it. Tell me where you are.”

Sergeant Murphy told him.

Then the Chief Rodriguez said, “I’ll be there in fifteen.”

“Make it ten,” Sergeant Murphy said.

A second news helicopter appeared over the development. Its spotlight alternated between playing over the cylinder and playing over the crowd.

Julie Fisk smacked the sergeant with the side of her hand. “If that is a propane tank, or any other kind of tank, why is it floating three feet in the air? Is it some kind of...” She did not want to be the one to call it a UFO either.

“I don’t know,” Murphy said. “Maybe it’s got legs and we just can’t see them.”

A tow truck driver walked up to the sergeant and asked, “Are you in charge here?”

Murphy said, “I guess I am as in charge as anybody. What do you want?”

“Your department called for a tow. What needs to be towed?”

Murphy pointed the white cylinder, “That.”

“What is it?” the driver asked.

“It’s a...” *Do not say UFO; Do not say UFO.* Murphy told himself. “It’s a propane tank.”

“Let’s take a look,” the tow truck driver said, and started toward the cylinder.

Sergeant Murphy walked alongside him.

The tow truck driver stood back thirty feet from the center of the object and said matter of factly, “It is too big for a tow truck. You need a

flatbed and a crane.” He was not going to be the first to call it a UFO either. “How come it is hovering three feet off the ground?”

Murphy shrugged and asked, “Can you arrange for a flatbed and a crane?”

“Yeah, but probably not until morning.”

“Do it.”

Chief of Police Rodriguez walked up. “What is it?”

Murphy said, “I’m going to call it a propane tank until somebody tells me to call it something else.”

“Let’s have a look,” Rodriguez said. He stalked off, walked around it once and returned. “It is not a propane tank. Propane tanks do not float three feet off the ground. This is way over my pay grade. I am going to call Sid Blunt. He is the Lieutenant Colonel in my army reserve unit.”

“What are you going to tell him?” Murphy asked. “You are not going to tell him it’s a...”  
*Don’t say UFO*, he said to himself while twirling his hand in the air.

“I need to tell him something that the Army will be interested in.” Rodriguez called Blunt. “Sid, I know it is late, but I think a piece of a Chinese satellite crashed on my patch and that is way over my pay grade. I have cordoned off

the area. Do you want to look at it? Or should I call someone else?"

"How big is it?" Blunt asked.

"About forty-feet long and about ten feet across. You are going to need a flatbed and a crane to get it out of here."

"Give me the location. I will be there in an hour."

Rodriguez gave Blunt the location and as he did, a cameraman for channel 10 news ran out from between two houses and got within thirty feet of the object before he started filming.

Sergeant Murphy chased the channel 10 cameraman back between the houses.

Police officer Larry Kranz arrived on scene carrying coffees and a box of donuts. "I figured we would be here for a while, chief. So, I wanted to be proactive."

"Good work, Larry," Rodriguez said as he selected a cream filled donut.

By this time, the crowd was nearing three hundred. Two street vendors appeared out of nowhere. One was hawking meatball sandwiches, the other shaved water ice in cones. I said it was hot.

My neighbor Fred returned with his soft-serve ice cream cone to watch the unfolding chaos.

“This is turning into a circus,” I said.

“A circus with food,” Fred licked his cone.

A few dozen people were sitting on the roofs of houses just beyond the police cordon. A man at the back of the crowd wearing a paper Pizza Palace hat shouted, “Did anyone order a dozen pies?”

Things were spinning out of control.

Another helicopter hovered overhead bring the total to three.

Two firemen in hazmat suits stepped up to the fire marshal. “Julie, we’re going to take a peek.”

“OK,” the fire marshal said. “At the first sign of trouble, run.”

“Good plan.” One of the men in the hazmat suits said. “Save us some donuts.”

“What are they going to do?” Chief Rodriguez asked.

Julie Fisk said, “One of them has a Geiger counter. The other has a sniffer. It is an electronic nose. If any gas or hydrocarbons are leaking, the sniffer should pick it up. And if there are any explosives in that thing, the sniffer will pick that up too.”

“Explosives?” Chief Rodriguez’ voice slid up an octave.

The Fire Chief looked at him and said, “If that thing is a bomb, we will need to push the perimeter out to half a mile.”

“Any idea why it is floating?”

“I would say it is hovering rather than floating,” Fisk said. “If it was floating, it would have drifted away. Something is holding it in place.”

“But what is it?” Rodriguez asked.

The Fire Chief was bound and determined not call to it a UFO. Her job, her life, was hard enough without calling it a UFO. So, she turned toward the Chief of Police and said, “Sorry, Rudy, I just don’t know.”

An army truck full of soldiers pulled up to the police cordon. It was followed by truck towing a flatbed trailer. The Chief of Police waved them trough.

As that was happening, the fire department set up lights on both sides of the object.

Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Sydney Blunt marched over to the Police Chief. “Rudy, Is that the...” He didn’t want to call it a UFO either. He was only two years from getting an army pension and he was smart enough to know that calling it a UFO when it might turn out to be a propane tank was a career ending move.

So, he asked, “Is that the suspected Chinese satellite?”

“I don’t know what it is,” Rodriquez said. “All I know is that it is... odd. It is something way over my pay grade. If the army is not interested in it, I can call somebody else, Homeland Security, or maybe the FBI.”

The two guys in hazmat suits reported into the Fire Chief. “No radiation, Julie,” one of them said.

“No gas leaks or explosives; not that the sniffer could find,” the other one said as he held up the device.

“OK,” the Fire Marshal said. “It is probably not a bomb.”

“Then what is it?” Lt. Colonel Blunt asked.

“I don’t know Colonel,” the Fire Marshal said. “That’s why we called the army.”

Blunt straightened up, threw out his chest and said, “Good plan. I’m going to get it back to Joint Base Dix where we can analyze it.” It was all he could do to keep from calling it a UFO. “Let’s get that thing onto a flatbed.”

An army sergeant saluted the colonel then marched off to talk to the flatbed driver.

Larry brought the colonel a coffee and offered him a selection of donuts.

The colonel selected a donut with pink icing.

When he got stares from Fisk and Rodriguez he said, “What? They were out of chocolate.”

It took some maneuvering to get the flatbed turned around in the residential neighborhood. Finally, it backed down the street toward the white cylinder.

Colonel Blunt said, “That thing is floating in the air. Let’s see whether we can back the flatbed under it.”

They eased the trailer back and just as it was about to slip under the end of the cylinder, it moved back. The truck eased back a little more and the cylinder moved back the same amount.

“What now?” Chief Rodriguez asked.

“I have an idea,” the Fire Chief said. “Let’s put trash trucks on either side of the thing and another one behind it so the...” *Don’t call it a UFO; don’t call it a UFO*, she thought. “So, the thing has no place to go, and hopefully, we can get the flatbed under it.”

Officer Kranz stepped up to Chief of Police and said, “I was going to order pizza. Do you want some? Do you want any special toppings?”

“Do you think we have time for that?” Chief Rodriguez asked.

“I could use a slice,” Fisk said.

“Me too,” Blunt said. “Just cheese though.”

“Could I get a little sausage on mine?”  
Sergeant Murphy asked.

“I am on it,” Kranz said.

By the time the trash trucks were in place, it was getting light.

As the flatbed backed up. The forty foot Tic Tac bumped back against the rear trash truck, then bounced off the trash trucks hemming it in on the sides. The object bucked and heaved and finally went up onto the flatbed. Even then, it hovered three feet over the trailer bed.

The driver said, “It is going to slid off as soon as I pull out.”

“What is going to slide off?” The colonel asked. He wanted the truck driver to call it a UFO.

But the truck driver was too smart for that. He said, “The dingus is going to slip off as soon as I pull out from between the trash trucks.”

“Can’t you strap it down?”

“Not while it is floating three feet above the trailer.”

“Try,” the colonel said. “And if you can’t strap it down, tie it up so it won’t float away.”

“Colonel,” Rodriguez said. “You have got to get this thing out of here. People are trampling through the woods to get a look at it. I cannot

control the crowd and neither can your soldiers.”

The air was split by a deafening noise. A helicopter landed between the flatbed and the police cordon.

General Agustus Noth, commander of Joint Base Dix got out. He quick marched to Colonel Blunt and pointed to the white cylinder. “Is this the...” He did not want to be the one to call it a UFO either, just in case it turned out to be something else. He pointed again. “Is that what all the fuss is about?”

“Yes, sir,” Colonel Blunt said.

“What is it?” The general baited him.

The general’s aid stood by grinning.

Blunt said, “I don’t know, general, sir.”

“Are you telling me it is identified?” General Noth asked.

“There are no markings on it that I can see.”

“And...,” the general said, “It is clearly a solid object.”

Colonel Blunt sensed danger. The general was trying to get him to say the giant Tic Tac was an unidentified object. It would only be a short leap from UO to UFO. It was a leap he did not want to make.

The colonel's friends stood behind the general and were shaking their heads "no." They also tried to wave him off.

"Frankly, general I don't know what it is," Blunt said. "I only know we should get it out of a residential neighborhood if we can. Let's take it back to the base where the experts can look at it."

The general knew the game was up in so far as getting the colonel to be the one who called it a UFO. So, he turned to the Chief of Police. "I don't suppose you know what it is."

The Chief, the Fire Marshal, and the Sergeant all shook their heads, "no" and said, "not a clue," or words to that effect.

Kranz returned with the pizza. Everyone took a slice including the general.

By this time, the flatbed driver, with the assistance of several soldiers and firemen, had put a dozen hauling straps over the object. A soldier retrieved a heavy chain from his truck and snugged it tight over the object. And, the fire department donated a thousand feet of nylon rope that was also used to secure the object to the truck. It looked like a mess but the general's aide assured him the Tic Tac was not going anywhere.

“I’ll take it from here, Colonel,” General Noth said.

His aid brought the army truck around. The general climbed into the passenger’s side. The flatbed pulled out. The general’s truck followed the flatbed. Chief of Police Rodriguez led the caravan; his red and blue car lights swept the area. The fire chief’s truck followed the caravan and had its red and blue lights on.

The helicopter took off for Joint Base Dix without the general.

The sun was up and it was the middle of rush hour when the convoy left Sturbridge Lakes and pulled out onto Route 73. The Tic Tac was still hovering over the flatbed. A dozen Sturbridge Lakes residents and a Mr. Softee truck followed the caravan.

They traveled north along Route 73 in the direction of Joint Base Dix at 40 miles an hour on a 55 mile an hour highway. Passing cars honked and made rude gestures. As the convoy approached the junction of Route 70 and 73, the Tic Tac began to rise, straining against the straps, chain and ropes holding it in place.

Fire Marshal Fisk radioed, “Flatbed, come in.”

“Flatbed here, what is up?”

“Your load, its bouncing around.”

The flatbed driver slowed to 25 miles an hour and looked for a place to pull over.

The Tic Tac continued its upward push, straining the straps, chains and ropes securing it to the truck bed. Then it settled down for a few seconds and began trying to rise again.

The driver pulled over and got out to inspect his load. The Tic Tac lifted the flatbed trailer a foot into the air. Massive tires dangled above the pavement.

“Enough of this sh...,” the driver said and disconnected the trailer from the truck pulling it.

The Tic Tac lifted the entire trailer five feet into the air; then slammed it onto the road. It lifted the trailer ten feet into the air; and slammed it to the ground again.

Everyone in the caravan had stepped out of their vehicles to watch. My neighbor Fred and I were three cars behind the Fire Marshall. Fred was barefoot and still in his Superman pajamas. Somehow, he managed to score a Dunkin Donuts coffee and was hanging onto it for dear life. The Mr. Softee truck started playing its jingle, in case there was an opportunity to sell more ice cream.

The chain securing the object to the trailer bed came loose and fell to earth with a metallic

clanking sound. The Tic Tac rose again. One of the securing straps broke, then another one. The nylon rope supplied by the fire department stretched and stretched. Two more straps broke, then two more in quick succession. The nylon rope continued to stretch and as the last securing strap broke, the horribly stretched nylon rope was the only thing holding the flatbed trailer up under the Tic Tac. A few seconds later, the rope reached its breaking point; gave way; and the trailer crashed to the ground sending bits of shrapnel flying. As soon as the trailer hit the ground, the Tic Tac flew straight up and disappeared in the clouds.

The general's aid handed him a phone. "General Noth, sir, it is the Pentagon, the Chief of Army Intelligence.

"Is that you, Noth?"

"Yes, sir," Noth choked out the words.

"I heard you caught one," the Chief of Army Intelligence said.

"One what sir?" Noth asked.

"A... you know, one of them. The Navy might have video of a one of them," the Chief of Army Intelligence was not going to call it a UFO either. "The Navy might have a video, but we have one we can dissect, study, reverse

engineer. We will show them.” There was a long pause. “Agustus? Are you still there?”

“Yes, sir,” Noth said. “It is not what you think, sir.”

“You didn’t let it get away, did you?”

“Like I said general, it is not what you think it is.”

“I have seen the pictures of it posted on line.”

“We thought it was propane tank, but it must have been a hydrogen or helium tank because it broke free and floated away.”

“Then it wasn’t a UFO?” the head of Army Intelligence asked.

“Nobody ever said it was.”

## **THE END**

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