

Swept To The Sea

The Survival Files — Case 49 — ESS = 202.6

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The following is extracted from an article¹ written by the Honorary Secretary of the S.P.R. for Russia, Michael Solovovo. The case is based, for the most part, on the testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Starck, who was the observer and note taker for a series of talking-board sessions with his wife and daughter as operators.

Although the critical part of the message received is as brief as it is possible to be – merely a single word – this case is of special interest because of the method employed in receiving the information. Prior to each session, Stark would bandage the eyes of both women so that they could see nothing. Then he would write the letters of the alphabet in random order on a piece of paper and place it on a table between the women. He would next place their hands on the traveler, (a small over-turned saucer with a pointer attached). As he asked questions, the traveler would move quickly and precisely to spell out the answers.

This method of employing the talking board is rare, but not unique.² Such cases are excellent antidotes to the venomous suggestion that all talking-board messages come from the operator's minds. Furthermore, in this particular case, the information was not held in the minds of any involved party.

In reading the description of the session that follows, remember that English was not Starck's primary tongue.

“No trance. All the writers are in a perfectly normal state. They are keeping their hands on the saucer with eyes blindfolded ; I read and write down. I put down questions aloud or in writing, and get answers which I do not expect and the contents of which do not correspond to either Zenaïde's or Jeannette's mental level. I am looking upon it as a mystification — by whom, I do not know — then suddenly we get: ‘I HAVE THE HONOR TO PRESENT MYSELF, YOUR HIGH NOBILITY, SKRYTNIKOFF.’”

“This appeared so unexpectedly and had such a meaning that I had to get up from emotion and to suspend the sitting. Skrytnikoff was a soldier who had served in my regiment here, in Caucasia, and was drowned in Pzezuappe³ river in June or July of last year when I was no more on active service. I had learnt about this event by accident and had only once spoken about it in the autumn.”

Starck told his wife and daughter only that there was something convincing in the message and, after a few moments, he rejoined them at the table.

¹ “An Automatic Message Conveying Information Previously Unknown” by Michael Petrovo Solovovo, *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, May 1899, pages 65-68.

² See [Case #40, The Pearl Tie-Pin](#), for example.

³ “Pzezuappe” is apparently a variant spelling for the Psezuapse River that flows into the Black Sea near the Russian village of Lazarevskoe.

“We sit down at the saucer again and get : ‘I WAS DROWNED IN THE SEA, FARAWAY.’ I feel perplexed. From what had been communicated to me at the time of the occurrence I thought he had been drowned in the river.”

Starck’s doubts may have been sensed by the communicating spirit, for next the board spelled out: ‘DOUBOVIK. GO TO HIM.’

“In the morning,” Starck relates, “I go to Doubovik (the local chief of district) and, without saying what the matter was, I ask whether he knows anything about Skrytnikoff who was drowned — and receive, as I expected, a negative answer, because in such cases inquests, etc., are held by the military authorities themselves. During our conversation in the office the secretary interferes and says: ‘No, I think there is something about Skrytnikoff in the papers.’ A search is made in the papers and a procès verbal⁴ by the bailiff of Lazarevskoe village is found ... in which the sentence occurred: ‘The horse swam out, but he [Skrytnikoff] was carried into the sea.’ Now, this is very natural: the river, which is generally shallow, but swift and deep during high water, must have carried him into the sea.”

Solovovo appends several documents to his presentation, including a letter from Doubovik confirming the events of Stark’s visit; an endorsement of Starck’s character as “a most truthful, intelligent, and serious man”; and the testimonies of his wife and daughter as to the accuracy of his report on the talking-board session.

ESS Score

With a bonus for the “double-blind” method employed, the CS rating is “h+”, CS = 132.

With a bonus (5 pts) for the supporting documentation, the WR rating is “f+”, WR = 70.

The Information-Complexity rating is “i”, IC = 0.6

ESS = 132 + 70 + .6 = 202.6

END CASE 49

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⁴ An official record of a legal proceeding.