

SPIRICOM OR SPIRICON?

Has an inventor found a way to communicate electronically with the dead? He says yes but the evidence tells another story.

By Terrence Peterson

“ONE OF THE most exciting events in the long history of man. . . . The long silence has been broken. Lengthy, two-way, normal voice conversations with persons who have died are now a reality, they have taken place, they have been recorded.”

This is how George W. Meek of Franklin, N.C., described his half-million-dollar investment in what is called “Spiricom.” The name comes from two words; spirit and communication. The inventor and operator of Spiricom is a medium and electronics experimenter named William O’Neil. He and his wife

Mary Alice live north of Pittsburgh.

The promotional Spiricom tape recording I have sounds different from any taped “spirit” communication I have ever heard. The sound, similar to what might be produced by a mouth harp, has a twanging metallic quality. The precise significance of this sound came to me only later, when I remembered where I had heard it before.

Three different male spirit voices were recorded on this particular tape. The most impressive voice, Meek says in his narration, was that of Dr. George Jefferies Mueller, who died some 14 years before he

began communicating electronically on September 22, 1980.

The procedure worked this way:

O’Neil, the Spiricom inventor, would phone Meek, the promoter, to inform him that communications had occurred, then send tapes with the latest spirit voices. As Meek grew ever more excited about the importance of Spiricom, he set up a foundation known as Metascience. In April 1982 he went before the National Press Club in Washington to announce this breakthrough to the world. As it happened, shortly before this meeting the spirit of Dr. Mueller spoke via Spiricom for the last time. No other voices have come through to date.

Harold Sherman, the well-known author and psychic, sent me a copy of the Spiricom promotional tape for my hearing and evaluation. I listened to it a couple of times, then laid it aside. Something about it

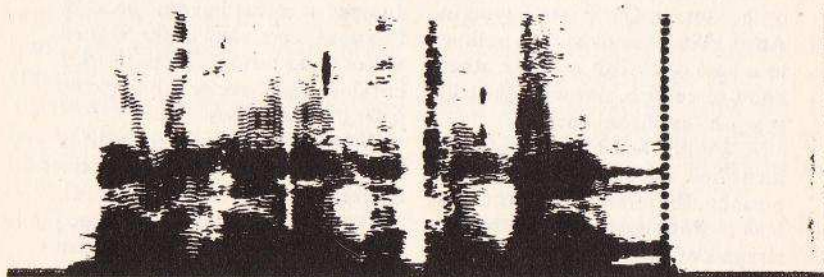
was oddly familiar but I couldn’t put my finger on just what it was.

For five years the tape rested in my file. Then in June 1986 I bought a book, *Ghost of 29 Megacycles*, written by John G. Fuller and published by Signet. The new information in Fuller’s book rekindled my interest in Spiricom.

As I read the book, I couldn’t help noticing the author’s obvious discomfort with his subject matter. He does not seem entirely convinced of Spiricom’s validity. On the cover page he writes, “This is a strange story. It is either true, or it is not. That determination has to be left up to the reader.”

I found several clues, first in the promotional tape, then in Fuller’s book, that suggested answers to a number of questions about Spiricom. The first clue was in the odd usage of words on the tape. The authorship of many historical doc-

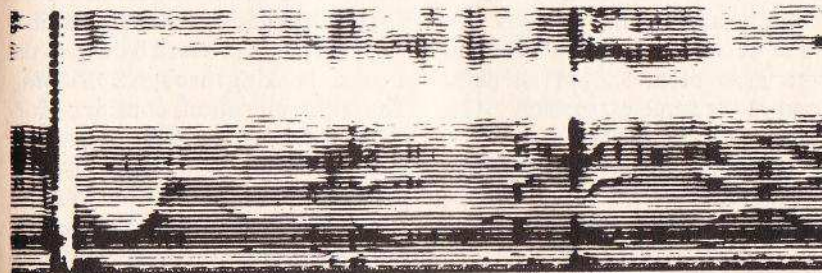
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Mary had a little lamb

Baylor University scientist David Rivers demonstrates that voiceprints taken of normal speaking voice (as here) and same voice speaking through artificial larynx will produce different readings.

TYPE B/ES SONAGRAM © KAY ELEMETRICH CO. PINE BROOK, N. J.



Mary had a little lamb

Claim that “spirit” voice and voice of living Spiricom “inventor” William O’Neil are different because they show different voiceprints is proven meaningless in experiment with artificial larynx.

uments has been proven or disproven on this basis alone.

The tape I have is edited and incomplete but a careful listening uncovers much that is revealing.

The three spirit voices that speak via Spiricom are male and sound alike. The speakers are identified as Dr. Nick, Fred Engstrom and Dr. George Mueller.

In a brief exchange, while speaking to O'Neil, Dr. Nick calls him Bill six times. In a longer conversation Fred Engstrom also uses the name Bill six times. Dr. Mueller, the star of the show, speaks the name William some 53 times! Fred Engstrom uses the expression "oh boy" eight times and Dr. Mueller says it five times. On the same tape O'Neil, operator of the Spiricom, says "oh boy" 10 times.*

When most of us speak on the phone, we rarely use the other speaker's name more than once, unless we have a particular speech habit which leads us to do otherwise. It also seems curious that three persons who are conversing with each other should all be so fond of the same expression.

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ON THE TAPE George Meek says, "We were constantly amazed that Dr. Mueller could see

*According to Eric Partridge's *Slang Dictionary and Unconventional English*, the expression "oh boy" did not come into usage until about 1920. Meek says Engstrom died in 1830.

everything in the lab." Yet elsewhere on that tape we hear Dr. Mueller's voice calling, in long drawn-out tones, "William, William, William, are you there, William?" This from a spirit who can see everything in the lab?

Immediately after the name William is invoked the last time, I noted a change in pitch as if the speaker were moving away. Then a few seconds later William O'Neil's voice in the distance calls, "I am coming, Doctor." To Meek this is evidence that Dr. Mueller and William O'Neil were two different persons. To me it only raises additional questions.

We must accept the word of William O'Neil that the Spiricom voices are legitimate. No scientist—or even Meek, for that matter—was present during the 18 months the spirit voices were taped.

As the story goes, Dr. George Mueller introduced himself to medium O'Neil when he materialized as a spirit and gave his name and history. O'Neil next heard from him as a voice speaking through Spiricom. The communications continued for a year and a half, ending when Dr. Mueller went to a higher spirit plane and communication was no longer possible. All that remained were the voices on tapes and the word of William O'Neil.

In this context it is interesting to review the sequence of events leading to Mueller's silence. Meek

started planning his Washington press conference in August 1981, to take place eight months later, in April 1982. Also in August Meek wrote to author John G. Fuller and asked for a meeting.

Presumably O'Neil was informed of this. In late September or early October Mueller announced over Spiricom, "I cannot be here forever. I cannot guarantee how long I'll be visiting here. However, I will do my best. Do you understand, William?"

According to Fuller, George and Jeanette Meek arrived at the Fuller home in Weston, Conn., on November 22, 1981. Meek's *Metascience Newsletter* for the summer of 1986 reports, "The instrumental contact with Dr. Mueller continued until November 1981." In other words, just before the Meeks met with Fuller, Mueller spoke for the last time. If Dr. Mueller was uninterested in being subjected to investigation, he chose a good time to depart: a noted author was about to come on the scene and the press was to hear the whole story in the near future.

* * *

IN HIS BOOK Fuller writes that that when they met, Meek "was in the process of having several speech and electronic experts analyze the voices." The preliminary reports showed that voiceprints indicated clearly that there were two separate voices. He had sent some of the Mueller tapes to his col-

league, Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama, founder and director of the Institute for Religious Psychology in Tokyo, and author of 30 books on the subject.

"Motoyama had submitted the Spiricom tapes to a voice synthesis expert at the University of Tokyo, who carefully analyzed them. The conclusion was that the voice of Dr. Mueller was clearly not that of either O'Neil or Meek."

Fuller recounts this conversation between Meek and an unnamed scientist:

"I've been wondering,' Meek said, 'have you or some of your associates tried to make a voiceprint analysis or otherwise studied the conversation between O'Neil and Dr. Mueller?'"

"Yes,' the scientist replied. 'Some rather extensive tests were made. The opinion was divided. There were some who were quite convinced that it was a valid exchange between two parties. Yet there were the others who took the position that it would be a very easy matter to stage or create these conversations.'"

My own interest was in the mechanical, robotlike tone of the spirit voices, which all sounded very much alike to me. Moreover, the sound was strangely familiar. Finally it came to me where I had heard it before.

When a person's voice box is removed by surgery (usually be-

cause of cancer of the larynx), the patient sometimes elects to use an artificial larynx. The Spiricom voices, I suddenly realized, sounded as if they were coming through just such a device.

I called an old friend, David Rivers. Dr. Rivers is a speech and language scientist, inventor and professor at Baylor University in Waco, Tex. I was sure he would be able to help me.

I told him about Spiricom, then said, "I have a gut feeling that if your natural voice and your voice using an electromechanical oscillator are acoustically different, it couldn't be proven that the artificial voice was yours."

"That's correct," he replied.

I went on to say, "Some of the strongest evidence Mr. Meek has is that a voiceprint of the spirit voice of Dr. Mueller and the natural voice of William O'Neil are entirely different."

Rivers was not impressed. "Send me your tape and I'll duplicate what Dr. Mueller says with my voice," he said.

"A voiceprint will show differences between the two voices?"

"Of course," he replied.

Within two weeks I received a package, tapes, voiceprints and a letter. Rivers, true to his word, reproduced the essential wording of the Spiricom tape using his voice and an artificial larynx. He used a Servox unit, manufactured by Sei-

mens. It is an electromechanical oscillator, hand-held and battery-driven. I couldn't tell the difference between this artificial larynx voice and the spirit voice of Dr. Mueller.

After explaining in detail how the artificial larynx device works, tuning the pitch up and down and using the device in the proper manner against his throat, he said, "I am now going to hold the Servox in front of my lips. This would never be done for normal use in communication. But I'm going to hold it in front of my lips and I will ask you to judge whether this sound that I produce in saying, 'Mary had a little lamb,' is not *extremely* similar to that sound obtained on the tape titled *Spiricom, Its Development and Potential*."

I was stunned. I was hearing a voice that sounded exactly like Dr. Mueller's.

Rivers had voiceprints made of the words "Mary had a little lamb" using both his normal voice and the artificial larynx. The two prints are not at all alike. As Rivers wrote, "The identity of the speaker is *not* ascertainable."

He concluded, "No one, save the person(s) present at the time, can say precisely how the Spiricom recordings were made. However, the most simple explanation is that they were made by a *living* agent utilizing an audio frequency oscillator. Based on my judgment of the information contained on the Spir-

icom tape, reliable documentation of the authenticity of the recordings of 'spirits' has not been provided."

In short, it appears that Spiricom

is considerably less than "one of the most exciting events in the long history of man." It is, it appears, no more than a fairly transparent hoax.



FOUND: ANCIENT JERUSALEM GATE

ARCHAEOLOGISTS told United Press International on April 21, 1986, that they have uncovered what may be the oldest gate to Jerusalem ever found. It dates to the time of the First Temple more than 2500 years ago.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote that there were 12 gates to Jerusalem in that period, said Eilat Mazar, the archaeologist who headed the Hebrew University excavation, "and this could be one of them."

The gate was found in a maze of excavations in the Ophel area just southeast of the present walled Old City. It is along the inside edge of the road now circling the Old City.

"The significance is that it's the only gate we know of to Jerusalem at that time — the most complete and most preserved," Mazar told reporters. She speculated that the gate may have provided access between the area of the ancient City of David, several hundred feet south, and the area of the Temple Mount, a few hundred feet to the north.

The stone gateway, on bedrock, is nine feet wide and the symmetrically arranged structure on both sides of the gate is 45 feet wide and 54 feet long, Mazar said.

The gate is Solomonic in design but could have been dated any time between King Solomon, about 950 B.C., and 586 B.C. when the First Temple was destroyed. This was the time of the biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

In the six symmetrically arranged "cells" or rooms, three on each side of the gate, 40 complete jars and other vessels were found which date to the same period.

Mazar said the gate was similar to one found in Megiddo, an ancient site overlooking the Valley of Jezreel and according to Christian belief, the site of the climactic Battle of Armageddon.

Ophel, which means acropolis, was probed by British archaeologist Charles Warren 120 years ago and excavated in the early 1970's by Benjamin Mazar, Eilat Mazar's grandfather.

