

In 1978 Mark Lamprey was a Royal Navy Lieutenant on board the frigate HMS Scylla. He sent in the following report”

“The exact date I no longer remember but I am sure it was in early November of that year. Scylla was in a position of approximately 20°N, 68°E, course about 250 true, speed 16 knots. I had the first watch on the bridge. There was no second officer of the watch present. The visibility was good with unbroken cumulostratus cloud cover and the sea state calm.

At about 23:40 the lookout reported seeing a light fine on the port bow. Through binoculars I observed what at first appeared to be a powerful searchlight beam directed downward from some invisible airborne source. Thinking that there may have been some maritime search activity in progress I informed the Captain in accordance with standing orders. A few minutes later he joined me on the bridge. By 23:50 the patch of light was broad on the port bow at a distance of about 2 to 3 miles. There was nothing to be seen on radar out to 20 miles range. At a few minutes short of midnight a second patch of light had appeared on the bow. This was much larger than the first and appeared to consist of beams radiating from some central point. The officer of the middle watch had joined us on the bridge by this time the captain directed me to alter course as necessary for the ship to pass directly through the patch ahead. At about 00:10, we entered the patch which seemed to be at least three cables in diameter. I went out on to the port bridge wing and gazed down into what appeared to be a huge space of luminescence stretching far down below the ship and consisting of a filigree of intersecting strands of light like elements in an electric lamp. The radiance was bright enough to read small print by. I also detected a strange smell which was unlike anything I have experienced before or since.



Photograph courtesy of the National Marine Aquarium

The display did not seem, in any way, to originate from or to be provoked by Scylla. It lasted almost an hour and I eventually handed over the watch to my successor at a few minutes before 01:00. By that time the upper deck was crowded with curious onlookers. Some attempted to photograph the event but I have no knowledge of the results. The whole phenomenon was recorded in the ship's log and in the 'marine phenomenon' log maintained by the navigator.

Subsequent speculation on board attributed the event to seismic activity but I do not recall hearing of any earth tremors in the region.

Since the phenomenon appeared to exist well before 'Scylla's' arrival on the scene, one wonders whether another vessel may have instigated the effect. That is pure speculation since I clearly recall looking at an empty radar screen at the time. A tanker would certainly have been visible out to some 15-20 nm. The smell was another factor which was significant. A frigate has much lower freeboard than a tanker which would place me, on the bridge wing, only about 10 metres above the water.

It is all fascinating stuff!

Mike Lamprey”