SOFTWARE & TECH

Men Who Stare At Goats

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The Curious Case of the Men Who Stare At Goats: Fact, Fiction, and the Paranormal Soldier

There are few movie titles as instantly intriguing as **Men Who Stare At Goats**. The phrase itself conjures an image that is equal parts absurd, humorous, and deeply mysterious. For those familiar only with the 2009 Hollywood comedy starring George Clooney, Ewan McGregor, and Jeff Bridges, the concept might feel like a work of pure satire. However, the reality behind the film is stranger than fiction. The phrase refers to a bizarre, yet documented, chapter of modern military history involving a secret United States Army unit trained in psychic abilities, New Age philosophies, and the purported ability to kill a goat simply by staring at it.

This article dives deep into the true story behind the legend of the men who stare at goats, exploring the origins of the First Earth Battalion, the real-world experiments in parapsychology, and how this fringe military project evolved into a cultural phenomenon. We will separate the facts from the embellishments, examining why the idea of psychic warriors continues to capture our collective imagination.

The Origins: What is the First Earth Battalion?

To understand the men who stare at goats, one must first understand the First Earth Battalion. The concept was largely the brainchild of a Vietnam War veteran and former Army officer named **Jim Channon**. In the late 1970s, disillusioned by the brutal failures of conventional warfare in Vietnam, Channon proposed a radical new type of soldier. He envisioned a warrior who was not only physically fit but also spiritually attuned and psychically empowered.

The Channon Manifesto

In 1979, Channon prepared a now-famous manual for the Army called the "First Earth Battalion Operations Manual." This document was a bizarre and colorful mix of military strategy, human potential movement ideology, and New Age spiritualism. Channon believed that future soldiers should be "warrior-monks" capable of telepathy, precognition, remote viewing, and even walking through walls. The manual recommended practices like meditation, yoga, and biofeedback training alongside standard combat drills.

Channon’s vision was not to create a destructive force but a peaceful, "supersoldier" who could win conflicts without firing a shot. The ultimate goal was to achieve "unity consciousness" and to neutralize threats through non-lethal means. This included the now-infamous ability to influence the physical world through focused intention—hence, the ability to render a goat unconscious or even stop its heart through concentrated staring.

The Goat: Separating Fact from Fiction

The specific claim regarding the men who stare at goats—that a soldier could kill an animal with his mind—is the most sensational part of the story. Did it actually happen?

According to investigative journalist Jon Ronson, who wrote the book on which the movie is based, the answer is a complicated "maybe." During his research, Ronson interviewed a Major General named **Albert Stubblebine**, a commander who firmly believed in psychic phenomena. Stubblebine claimed that soldiers under his command conducted experiments where they successfully killed goats by staring at them.

However, later investigations suggested that the experiments were not as controlled as advertised. In some cases, the goats were likely killed through conventional means (such as a needle or a bolt gun) while the soldiers were told they were doing it with their minds. The placebo effect of belief was strong, but verifiable scientific proof for psychically killing a goat remains absent. Nevertheless, the legend stuck, becoming the most recognizable emblem of the entire psychic spy program.

Project Stargate: The Real Government Program

While the First Earth Battalion was a playful proposal, the U.S. government was actually funding a real, classified paranormal research program. This was known as **Project Stargate**(also known by several other code names like Grill Flame and Center Lane). Operational from the 1970s until 1995, this was the true home of the men who stare at goats—or at least, the men who tried.

Project Stargate was originally born out of the Cold War. The CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) were highly concerned that the Soviet Union was investing heavily in "psychotronic" warfare. They feared a "psychic gap" between the U.S. and the USSR. To counter this threat, America launched its own secret research into **remote viewing**—the ability to perceive a distant or hidden location without using the physical senses.

The Stanford Research Institute Connection

Much of the early work was conducted at the **Stanford Research Institute (SRI)** in Menlo Park, California. Government researchers recruited individuals they believed had naturally high levels of psychic ability. The most famous of these was **Ingo Swann**, a New York artist and self-proclaimed psychic who demonstrated remarkable accuracy in describing remote locations.

Swann and others were tasked with "spying" on Soviet military bases, finding hidden enemy submarines, and even locating hostages or downed airmen. They sat in soundproof rooms, donned blindfolds, and were asked to draw or describe coordinates given to them by military handlers. Some of their descriptions were eerily accurate; others were completely wrong. The data was mixed, but compelling enough to keep the funding flowing for nearly two decades.

The "Jedi" Warriors of the U.S. Army

The men involved in these programs were not typical infantrymen. They were a motley crew of mystics, human potential gurus, and experimental soldiers. They were often referred to as "Jedi Warriors" by those in the know, a pop-culture reference to *Star Wars* that perfectly captured their unusual skill set.

Training Regimens

What did the training look like for these aspiring psychic soldiers? It was a far cry from boot camp.

- Remote Viewing: Hours of practice focusing on envelopes containing hidden photographs or coordinates.
- Biofeedback: Using machines to learn how to control heart rate, blood pressure, and brainwaves.
- Meditation and Visualization: Clearing the mind to allow psychic impressions to surface.
- The "Sparkle Flicker": A technique where soldiers would try to "vanish" by flooding their body with energy and blinking out of sight (this was never successful).

- Bending Spoons: A classic test of psychokinesis, often attempted but rarely verified.

These soldiers believed they were on the cutting edge of human evolution. They were convinced that the mind was the ultimate weapon.

Why Did the Program End?

In 1995, the CIA decided to declassify and terminate **Project Stargate**. The official reason was a lack of consistent, actionable intelligence. While there were occasional "hits," the process was unreliable and incompatible with the rigorous standards of hard science.

A comprehensive report commissioned by the American Institutes for Research concluded that there was no scientific evidence that remote viewing had ever been successfully used to support intelligence operations. The data was anecdotal and could not be replicated under strict laboratory conditions. Furthermore, the program had become an embarrassment to the Pentagon. The idea of the men who stare at goats was mocked in the press, and the military was eager to distance itself from the New Age image.

However, many former participants maintain that the program was shut down not because it failed, but because it worked too well. They claim that the technology was buried to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands or to protect the existing intelligence infrastructure, which felt threatened by a method of espionage that could not be controlled by standard means.

The Cultural Legacy of the Psychic Soldier

The story of the men who stare at goats has proven to have a long shelf life, far outlasting the actual military program. The concept has seeped into popular culture in several distinct ways.

The Book and the Movie

Jon Ronson's book"The Men Who Stare at Goats" (2004) is a work of gonzo journalism that blends interviews with real veterans of the psychic program with Ronson's characteristic humor and skepticism. It is a hilarious and unsettling look at the fringes of the military industrial complex.

The **2009 film adaptation**took the story and ran with it as a full-blown comedy. Starring George Clooney as a veteran "Jedi warrior," the film introduced the absurdity of the concept to a global audience. While the film is heavily fictionalized, it is grounded in the very real absurdity of Channon's manual and the secret programs. Scenes of soldiers trying to walk through walls or stopping a goat's heart with a glare are based on actual anecdotes from Ronson's research.

The Rise of Remote Viewing in Pop Culture

The end of the government program did not kill interest in the subject. Instead, it spawned a cottage industry. Today, there are countless books, courses, and YouTube channels dedicated to teaching **remote viewing**. Former military "viewers" like **Joe McMoneagle** and **Paul H. Smith**have become authors and public speakers, claiming that the skill is real and teachable.

The concept has also been a rich vein for conspiracy theories. Enthusiasts believe that while the public program was closed, a deeper, more secretive "black budget" psychic program continues to operate. They point to unexplained phenomena in modern warfare, such as the precision of drone strikes, and suggest that psychic intelligence is still being used to guide operations.

The Science (Or Lack Thereof) Behind the Goat

From a scientific perspective, the claims of the men who stare at goats remain firmly in the realm of

pseudoscience. The foundational principles of modern physics—Newtonian mechanics, quantum mechanics as we currently understand them, and the laws of thermodynamics—do not allow for the direct influence of a distant object by thought alone.

Why We Want to Believe

Psychologists suggest that the enduring appeal of the psychic soldier narrative is deeply rooted in human psychology.

1. Control: The idea that we can control the world with our minds offers a sense of security in a chaotic world.
2. Mystery: The human mind remains a vast frontier. The thought that we are only using 10% of our brain (a debunked but persistent myth) feeds the fantasy that we have hidden powers.
3. Distrust of Authority: Stories about secret government mind-control programs tap into a deep well of distrust. The "truth" being hidden makes the story feel more authentic.

While controlled studies of remote viewing at places like the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) lab showed slight statistical anomalies, they were never robust enough to change the consensus of mainstream science. The effect, if it exists at all, appears to be incredibly weak and unreliable.

Conclusion: A Goat, A Dream, and A Warning

The story of the men who stare at goats is more than just a funny story or a bad movie; it is a cautionary tale about the limits of power and the danger of magical thinking within institutions of force. It reveals a moment in history when the greatest military power on Earth was so desperate for an edge in the Cold War that it turned to mystics, mediums, and human potential gurus. It wasted millions of dollars on spoon-bending and remote viewing, chasing a phantom that never materialized into a usable weapon.

Yet, there is a strange nobility in the dream. The vision of the First Earth Battalion—a soldier who could end conflict without violence—is a beautiful, if naive, ideal. Jim Channon's manual was ultimately a plea for peace, dressed in the language of the New Age. The men who stare at goats, whether they actually possessed psychic powers or not, were trying to find a way out of the endless cycle of brutality that defines war.

In the end, the greatest legacy of these soldiers is not a psychic victory on the battlefield, but a gripping, bizarre, and very human story about the power of belief. As George Clooney's character says in the film: "This isn't just about goats. It's about the future of warfare." Whether that future ever arrived or was

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