

could see that it was massive and shiny with what seemed to be "small windows" (with an orange light, said Ron) around it. Ian said the whole object glowed with a misty light as though producing terrific heat. Again the two beams of light at the "front" could be seen and the red flashing lights. Without more ado, and with all thoughts of keeping fit long departed, they ran as hard as they could for Ian's home, now less than 100 yards away. While Ron kept watch on the aerial intruder, Ian shouted to his mother to come out. By the time she reached the door Ron said the

object was descending behind some trees. Nevertheless Mrs. Hoole said she could hear the unusual noise.

When I spoke to Ian's father he said the boys were on the verge of being in a state of shock; they were white faced like ghosts, and were clearly terrified by what they had seen. For some time afterwards they were shaky and jumpy.

Could this have been a return of the mystery object seen extensively throughout Surrey and Hampshire in January & February 1974?

## A PROBLEM FOR THE ITALIAN MINISTER OF DEFENCE?

*Gordon Creighton*

WE are indebted to Dr. Roberto Pinotti, Vice-President of C.U.N. (Centro Ufologico Nazionale — Italian National UFO Centre, Milano) for the text of an article published in the Milan illustrated journal *Gente* of November 19, 1977. I give below my translation of the gist of the story, which we understand is to receive fuller treatment in a forthcoming issue (No. 77) of the quarterly magazine *Notiziario UFO*, published by C.U.N.

The event which has produced some sort of flutter in Italian ministerial circles took place at 5.35 p.m. on October 27, 1977, over the military airfield at Cagliari Elmas, at the southernmost tip of the island of Sardinia.

Three helicopters of the Italian Army's Light Aircraft Corps (A.L.E., *Aviazione Leggera Esercito*) were on training flights over the Air Force Base when, for a period of five minutes the crews of two of them saw a luminous orange "circle." Scores of observers on the ground also witnessed the phenomenon.

The same sort of "luminous orange circle" was again observed over the Cagliari Airfield on November 2, 1977, but this time the matter did not become known until an "official leak" had occurred. (Evidently the Italian military authorities were anxious to prevent the second case from becoming known, "in order to avoid unnecessary alarm.")

On the occasion of the first incident, October 27, the luminous circle was seen and tracked by both military and civilian witnesses on the ground and by personnel in the Elmas Control Tower. The Commander of the Office of Operations of the Air Force Base, Colonel Giomaria, ordered a jet interceptor aircraft to take off and investigate. But the jet was unable to intercept the UFO.

In their official report on the affair, Major Francesco Zoppi, chief pilot of the *Orsa Maggiore* Squadron of the A.L.E. 21st. Helicopter Group, and his co-pilot, Lt. Riccardelli, said that they had been at a distance of less than 1,000 ft. from the luminous circle.

Colonel Mario D'Angelo, Commandant of the Cagliari Air Force Base, made no attempt to deny

what had occurred. Interviewed by the journalist Giuseppe Randazzo, author of the article in *Gente*, the Colonel said: "We are by nature habituated to keeping our feet firmly on the ground and not letting ourselves be impressed by happenings of this sort, but it is undeniable that the episode of October 27 is difficult to explain. I made a personal investigation, and I ascertained that there were definitely no other aircraft in the air in that area at the time. The only conceivable explanation might be that it was a machine that had come from somewhere lying off the island of Sardinia — for example, from an aircraft carrier. Such an aircraft might have been in some sort of difficulty, and might have suddenly lost height without being able to communicate with the Control Tower. And of course it must also be borne in mind that the light often plays funny tricks at sunset."

(This very weak attempt by the Colonel to find some sort of explanation formed part of the official statement which he released immediately after the sighting had occurred. When subsequent enquiries had shown conclusively that the possibility of a plane from an aircraft carrier had to be ruled right out, since no aircraft carrier had been anywhere near that area of the Mediterranean, a report on the affair was forwarded to the Italian Minister of Defence who, it seems, is now to have an official investigation made into the sighting.)

The published statement of the two pilots, Major Zoppi and Lt. Riccardelli, was as follows:—

"We had taken off in the helicopters for a normal training flight when, at a distance of about 300 metres, I saw, in front of me, an extremely bright orange-coloured circle. My first thought was that it was an optical illusion, but as soon as Lt. Riccardelli, who was sitting beside me, also saw it, we at once contacted the Control Tower by radio. They replied that nothing was visible from the ground. Meanwhile, the fiery circle continued to be there, right in front of us, and moving at a speed almost identical with our own. Then I asked the other two helicopters of our squadron whether they could see it.

One said they could, and that they were seeing the same thing as we were, while the third helicopter, piloted by Capt. Romolo Romani, replied that they saw nothing.

"The luminous circle then vanished at a speed impossible for any aircraft of this world to equal. I called the Control Tower again, and was informed that in the meantime other people had seen it and had been following it with binoculars. But the radar had detected nothing. It was all very odd, but it was no moment for theorizing. When the sun is just setting, sights of this sort are quite possible. They are optical illusions, due to refraction of the rays of the Sun. At about 6.45 p.m. I got a second brief glimpse of the orange light, for only a few seconds, and after than nothing more.

"I rule out any possibility that it can have been an aircraft or a sonde balloon. Had it been an aircraft, the radar would have been bound to corroborate its presence. As for a sonde balloon — that is even more improbable because, at the distance at which we were from it, the balloon would never have been able to vanish at so high a speed."

In conclusion, Major Zoppi was at pains to make it clear that he and his co-pilot "do not believe in the Extraterrestrials." But he also admitted that at present there was no logical explanation for what they had seen, and moreover there had been many other witnesses. It was now up to the authorities, he said, to find the explanation.

According to the article in *Gente*, the UFO was in fact seen not only by other observers on the ground at the Cagliari Air Force Base but also by many other folk in and around Cagliari. One of them, Professor Paolo Lai, a language teacher, was quoted as having said: "Anybody who knows me knows perfectly well that I'm no visionary or mythomaniac. And in truth I had firmly decided not to tell anyone what I had seen — not even my wife — so as not to be the butt for jests. But when, later, I saw in the newspapers statements by other people, reliable and trustworthy people, then I felt I wanted to say my own piece too.

"So, this is how it was. Just before 5.30 p.m. on that afternoon, I was on the Via Bocaredda. I had just parked my car, and was wondering why a number of drivers had already put on their side lights. I looked up to see if the street lamps were working, and saw the object. I don't quite know how to describe it. Maybe "a ball of fire" is pretty close to the right description. It was emitting an intensely vivid orange light with yellowish tinges, and it shot across the sky very fast. The whole thing lasted just a few seconds. I have never believed in extraterrestrials and I don't believe in them now. It seems to me that the logical explanation is that it can only have been a low-flying aircraft."

Scores of the other eyewitnesses accounts were gathered and forwarded to the Air Ministry.

The remainder of the article in *Gente* consists of an interview with Dr. Roberto Pinotti on UFOs, the work of C.U.N., etc. Dr. Pinotti's main emphasis was on the fact that, under the Agreement signed in Moscow on September 30, 1971, the USA and

USSR have shown that they are in agreement about hiding the truth about UFOs from the public, but also greatly concerned to avoid the accidental outbreak of war between them through the faulty interpretation of UFOs as ballistic missiles. Dr. Pinotti said this proves that for the two Superpowers UFOs are a reality, and a dangerous one, of which both governments are far more frightened than the ordinary man in the street!

As regards recent UFO sightings, Dr. Pinotti said there had been "more than one hundred" in recent months on the Western coast of Italy facing Sardinia.

One amusing aspect of the article is that the interviewer tried to get Dr. Pinotti to agree that the UFOs "might be secret weapons of the USA or USSR." This hoary old chestnut is still quite popular in Italy, even after thirty years of UFO sightings, and it is not at all difficult to see how useful such a theory might be — desperately threadbare as it now is.

As for the Cagliari case it remains to be seen whether we shall hear anything about it from the Italian authorities.

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