

# REPEAT PERFORMANCE

*Anton Fitzgerald*

**A South African pilot tells of remarkable and almost identical UFO experiences in both Natal and Texas. His article, entitled *Unidentified Flying Object*, appeared in the South African aviation newsmagazine *Wings over Africa*.\* This journal circulates throughout the African continent, and is published in Johannesburg. FLYING SAUCER REVIEW is grateful to the Editor of *Wings over Africa* for his permission to reprint Mr. Fitzgerald's article.**

WE first saw it on one of those misty, calm mornings so characteristic of the Natal midlands in late June. Jock Marais, the farm manager, and I were walking down the hill towards the homestead.

There was a heavy dew and the grass was fairly long. I remember this particularly as I was wearing a pair of old boots that I normally kept in the Aero Commander for use on trips to the farm or to our cottage at the coast. They were very old boots and the right sole had started to split.

*Linda had repeatedly suggested I hand them over to our garden boy in the Transvaal, but one gets so attached to comfortable shoes and clothes that one is always reluctant to part with them. That morning I was certainly reaping the doubtful reward of this attachment as the dew worked its way around my right ankle at every step.*

A flock of guinea fowl that normally roosted in the bush between the house and the dam were as usual calling to one another, in that characteristic metallic manner they seem to reserve as a means of maintaining station when walking in single file through the scrub towards the nearby mealie land.

Suddenly they stopped calling and Jock and I both saw it at the same time.

From our position on the slope of the hill we could look down on the landing strip adjacent to the homestead with its large hangar which also did duty as a lucerne and maize store. Ndolwana, the Zulu tractor driver, had already pushed out the twin-engined aeroplane in which I had planned to leave for Durban and it stood ghostly white against the dull brown of the winter grass.

## **Eerie glow**

But what had caught our attention in the misty dawn was an eerie reddish glow on the runway, about 300 yards from the house. We were not more than 200 yards away and walking downhill directly towards the phenomenon.

My first thought was that it could be a very large bubble of iridescent marsh gas about 100ft. in diameter, bright pink in the centre and fading gradually towards

the circumference—like the so-called “sun dog” sometimes seen by those pilots who normally fly a great deal during the midnight-to-dawn period.

We slowed down involuntarily and as the light improved noticed that the flock of sheep bedded down in the runway paddock were all standing in two one-third circles on opposite sides of the glow and looking intently towards the centre. It is hard to describe but they were not facing radially.

From our elevated position the sheep reminded me of iron filings on a piece of paper around a magnet—a sort of orderly pattern but yet following no accepted geometrical form.

By this time we were only a stone's throw away and the pinkish glow had started to rise vertically into the air. There was no sound, no rush of air. With a sort of involuntary reaction, we both broke into a run towards the phenomenon, Jock exclaiming: “Just look at those sheep”.

My eyes were following the rapid disappearance of the “bubble” into the mist above but, as we reached the point where the glow had been, I also looked at the sheep and noticed with amazement that they all appeared to be standing on tiptoe like ballet dancers with heads held unusually high just as if they were suspended in space with their hooves barely touching the grass. It was then that we both first experienced a peculiar feeling almost of weightlessness.

The saliva persisted in moving on to the roof of my mouth while the moisture that had penetrated into my right boot worked its way rapidly upwards around my calf at every step. All in all, to put it very mildly it was a most uncanny experience and, to cap it all, Ndolwana came running up to us, his wrinkled face a sort of ashen grey colour, and shouting excitedly in Zulu. He followed this by explaining breathlessly that at last he had seen for himself, in the flesh so to speak, the foundation of the ancient Zulu legend of the red sun that rises straight up into the sky after devouring some of the tribe's cattle.

*Apart from his obvious excitement, this descendant of a Zulu headman accepted the incident without question, confirming, as we ascertained later, that such visitors from another world were known long before the days of the white man in Zululand.*

\* Distributed by Central News Agency Ltd., Johannesburg, S. Africa, the magazine is also obtainable on subscription at R3.60 (£2 6s. sterling) from P.O. Box 9665, Johannesburg.

### Sheep missing

Nothing in the general vicinity seemed to have been disturbed except that one old sheep was missing (the animal was never found) and the rest of the flock gradually resumed their normal placid composure. The eerie weightless feeling had by this time also vanished and we strolled slowly over to the aeroplane, discussing the incident in puzzled tones.

In fact, I was still so deep in thought while doing the walk around preflight of the Aero Commander that I cut my forehead on the sharp edge of one of the main undercarriage doors.

The Commander's engines started easily as usual and I lined the aeroplane up on the runway about 300 yards from where we had seen the object. The engines took a few minutes to reach operating temperatures and I remember idly turning over in my mind the likelihood that V1 in the take off would probably come up about the time the "weightless" spot was reached.

Jock told me over the phone later in the day that he had never seen anything climb so fast. At one moment the aeroplane was running along the paddock runway and next it had disappeared from his view into low cloud. My own recollections are to say the least rather confused, as I had just started to rotate when it happened.

The aeroplane left the ground like a flash and we were IMC virtually instantly and within a couple of seconds out in the clear on top of the stratus. In a sort of daze I instinctively scanned the instrument panel, where everything except the altimeter and the VSI appeared to be behaving fairly normally. The vertical speed needle was, however, hard up against the maximum rate of climb stop, while the altimeter needle was spinning clockwise. There was strangely no feeling of the "G" force one would associate with such an incredibly rapid accelerating ascent and, in fact, I found myself sitting more lightly than usual in my seat.

Almost without realising it, I selected the gear up and noticed with alarm that the wheels retracted with an unusually loud thump. Just as we were passing through what appeared to my confused senses to be about 10,000ft. everything suddenly returned to normal and we were climbing at 1,000ft. per minute with my violently popping ears rapidly adjusting themselves.

I contacted Durban control, descended to our allotted flight level of 90 and reported the experience to them briefly, before flying the 20-minute leg to Virginia in a most contemplative and puzzled mood.

### A year later in Texas

The next time I saw "it" was halfway across the world and almost exactly a year later—on June 15. I had spent the night at the Ramada Inn, located between the runways at Love Field, Dallas, in Texas. Jake Rugel met me in the entrance foyer well before first light.

We had planned a pre-dawn take-off so as to be at San Angelo just after sunrise in the MU2 turboprop that Jake was trying to persuade me to buy as a replacement for the Aero Commander. He was committed to flying another prospect from San Angelo to Tucson at 7.30 a.m.; hence the early start.

Jake, whose grandmother was a full-blooded Cherokee

Indian, did all the flying, while I sat in the right-hand seat and filled in the blank spaces of the comprehensive performance questionnaire that I had prepared for evaluating various aircraft.

We were cruising at flight level 220 and were just about top-of-descent for San Angelo, when we both saw it at the same time. The glow of the rising sun was behind us. The flat country of West Texas partly covered with mist patches unfolded below. What looked like the vapour trail of a fast-climbing jet appeared slightly to the right of the MU2's nose. As it got closer Jake said: "That's not a jet trail; it's one of those large met. balloons with the pin colour coloured by the rising sun behind us."

*As usual I had my camera with me and asked Jake to turn towards the balloon while I searched behind the seat for the camera with the automatic lens mechanism. The children back home would be interested in this, I thought, as I removed the lens cover, wondering whether there would be enough light for a good result with the colour film I had purchased back in Durban only two weeks previously.*

### Watch it climb

Suddenly, Jake let out a cry that could only have originated way back in some Cherokee wigwam and exclaimed, "Look at that goldarned thing climb." I ceased doing mental gymnastics with F values and shutter speeds, looked up and was almost instantly back on the farm near Greytown.

There was the same eerie pinkish glow, more intense in the centre of the circular object as it shot straight up into the sky and disappeared into the vague cirrostratus overcast, which itself was permeated with a reddish tint from the rising sun. All my senses were now alert and I knew what to expect as we flew towards where the object had been only a few seconds before. I asked Jake to pull the power back to flight idle and start descending.

He was still so dumbfounded that he complied automatically before saying: "Have you seen anything like that before" and then listened attentively but obviously disbelievingly while I hurriedly described my experience of the previous year. All this time we had been descending at about 3,000ft. per minute and had just reached flight level 100 when it happened.

The vertical speed needle moved rapidly from descent to against the maximum rate of climb stop, while the altimeter needle reversed direction and started spinning clockwise at an incredible rate. As before, in Natal, there was no G force and my camera, which had been lying on my lap, now felt as light as a feather to the touch. The whole thing lasted only a few seconds before we were descending once again (from flight level 250), with Jake too speechless even to call San Angelo tower.

Even after demonstrating to me a most impressive short landing using reverse thrust, Jake was still obviously not quite himself and was content merely to sit dazedly in a chair in the hangar office, waiting for the local farmer, who had apparently not yet arrived in his Baron from his farm strip about 70 miles away. He was on his third cup of coffee, and I had just finished describing in detail my experience on my Natal farm when he was called to the phone in the nearby Mooney factory office. He was back in a few minutes explaining



excitedly that by a peculiar coincidence his farmer prospect had been visited by the phenomenon and wanted us to fly over and have breakfast with him.

### Steer missing

We climbed into the MU2 and in 20 minutes were being greeted on his strip by Ted Leslie, a typical Texas rancher, who like so many others has forsaken the horse for the aeroplane. He started to tell us what had delayed him but was amazed when I beat him to the draw by telling what had probably happened.

Everything was similar to the Natal incident except that instead of sheep it was "white face" Hereford steers that had stood in a sort of semi-circle in the night paddock, only half a mile from his homestead. There had been the same pinkish glow, the absence of sound, the peculiar weightless feeling and one of the older steers was missing.

Everybody on the ranch was astounded except one of his cowhands who was a Red Indian who calmly told of the legend of the sun that rises straight up. At this stage Jake interrupted and confirmed that his Cherokee grandmother had sometimes spoken with great conviction of this same legend when telling him Indian folklore, when he was only about 7 years old.

We reported the whole incident to "Project Blue Book" at Ohio Air Force Base, which is the special department of the U.S. Air Force dealing with unidentified flying objects. They will I assume sift the information received and try to find some common pattern to tie up with the numerous other reports they obviously receive.

In my two experiences there are numerous common denominators. In each case, the force of gravity is apparently reduced almost to equal the centrifugal force of the earth's rotation; one becomes not quite weightless but very nearly so. In addition, there must be some sort of hypnotic attraction which prevents certain animals from running away from a strange object. Remember, in each case an animal disappeared and was never found.

Jake and Leslie's Indian cowhand both were positive that the ancient folklore legend of the Indian tribes mentions that the "red sun" invariably appeared among the buffalo herds and the Indians believed that some of the buffalo were carried away. They gave as one of the reasons for the absence of the phenomena in modern times (since the arrival of the white man) the fact that the buffalo herds had now disappeared.

Comparatively undeveloped races at virtually opposite sides of the globe have quite obviously had experience of this nature a long time ago; otherwise, why the reference to the red sun in their folklore.

Such incidents as these two make one wonder whether the simple people of the past, their minds uncluttered with the materialistic claims, beliefs and aims of the modern machine world, may not have been more receptive to the so-called "supernatural".

Every time I lower the flaps on final at my farm strip I find myself deep in thought. The stranger of Galilee knew the answer and gave it to us 2,000 years ago, an answer that we with our retractable gears, constant speed units and autopilots seem to think is much too simple to be really worth believing.

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