

SEVEN UFOs SEEN FROM B-36 BOMBER

Richard F. Haines

THE official files of the United States Air Force conducted under the code name "Project Blue Book" contain interesting material for the student of UFO phenomena. The present case was selected for review because of the relatively large number of eye witnesses, their training, and unique vantage point from which the sighting took place, namely at 18,000 feet altitude. The evidence consists of an official Air Force report, individual signed statements by eight crew members involved, maps, and several black and white photographs.

Case Summary

"While flying on a training mission on 19 May 1952 in the vicinity of San Angelo, Texas, an RB-36 crew of the 31st Strat(egic) Recon(naissance) Squadron, 5th Strat Recon Wing, observed seven unidentified flying objects ahead of their aircraft. The RB-36 was at an altitude of 18,000 feet, indicating 189 mph (214 mph TAS), and the weather conditions in the area were CAVU, with winds aloft of 35 knots from 315 degrees. The time of the sighting was 0148 GCT, and the aircraft's exact position at the time of the sighting was 30-37 N; 100-47 W, heading 301 deg true. The seven objects appeared at a position of 11 o'clock to the aircraft at an estimated distance of 50 to 75 miles, and were stacked in a vertical column, the bottom of which was estimated to be at 25,000 feet and the top at 60,000 feet. Several conflicting reports were received on the length of time the objects were in view, but it is believed that the time ranged from 15 to 20 minutes. The objects were lost from sight at a position approximately 30-53 N; 101-20 W, as light conditions were becoming very poor since the aircraft was flying in the direction of the setting sun. The objects were white in colour and no estimate of their size could be given. One crew member described the objects as white doughnuts like small vapour trails. A pair of six power binoculars were used to observe the objects. The radar observer did not see any unusual returns on his scope.

"The aircraft commander of the RB-36 radioed the San Angelo ground station, and a ground observer from that station was also able to see the objects.

"One crew member had a 35 mm personal camera aboard, loaded with colour film. He took six photographs of the objects, but only two were of any value. These two transparencies have been attached to the report forwarded to the Air Technical Intelligence Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The attached photographs are enlargements of the transparencies. When viewed with a 35 mm projector, the objects are clearly distinguishable in the transparencies."

Thus ended the critical details of the Project Blue Book

NASA scientist Dr. Haines, who has already contributed articles published by *Flying Saucer Review*, is associated with the Life Sciences Directorate at Ames Research Center, and is a member of the Center for UFO Studies founded by Dr. J. Allen Hynek. Editor of a fascinating book *UFO Phenomena and the Behavioral Scientist* — a compendium of works on phenomena associated with UFOs — Dr. Haines now has had published an important new work *Observing UFOs* (see Janet & Colin Bord's review in *FSR Bookshelf* — 4 on page 19 of this issue)

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file's summary report. This was followed by statements by eight crew-members, four of which included sketches of what they witnessed. Rather than present all eight statements in their entirety, Table 1 presents a comparative summary of the reported sighting details for purposes of cross comparison. Quotation marks are used to indicate the exact word(s) used in the original statement.

Crew stations

It is instructive to have some idea of the location of the various crew sighting stations and interior structure in this aircraft, because such factors play a part in determining what each eye witness can see. Unfortunately, it is not possible to be sure exactly which aircraft station is referred to in Table 1 in all cases because the microfilm copy of this case (received from the Library of Congress) had deleted this information. Nevertheless, three station locations were positively identified and two more (i.e., aircraft commander; co-pilot) were surmised based upon contextual details. This bomber carried a full crew of 22 men. Figure 1 illustrates the crew stations for nine men located in the front portion of the aircraft. Positions labelled 3 and 5 are the locations of the co-pilot (right seat) and commander (left seat), respectively. External visibility from these two seats was excellent since it was through the multiple panes of glass which made up the bubble-like canopy. An idea of this is given in Figure 2 which is a drawing of the cockpit region looking forward and to the right at the co-pilot's right seat — as seen from behind — as well as the navigator's station.

A drawing of the interior arrangement of equipment and sighting dome of a typical forward sighting "blister" (i.e., plexiglass approx. hemispheric dome) is shown in Figure 3. It should be noted that visibility from this location would have been impeded by the gun sight

ILLUSTRATIONS COMMENCE ON PAGE 8

Number (arbitrary) and Crewman's, Aircraft Station ¹	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	?	probably commander (left)	left aft blister	?	?	left forward blister	right rear scanner	probably pilot (rt. seat)
Number of UFOs	7	7	5	7	7	7	4	7
Date/Time of Sighting	5/19/52 2005 CST	5/19/52 —	5/19/52 2005 CST	5/19/52 just before sunset	5/19/52 2005 CST	5/19/52 —	— —	5/19/52 2005 CST
Location of Aircraft	approx. 30 mi SW San Angelo, Texas	30 mi SW San Angelo, Texas	—	—	SW of San Angelo, Texas	45 min. NW of San Antonio	—	—
Details of UFOs	Circular part seemed larger and fuzzier	—	—	small white clouds	—	very white "phos- phoric trails" (sic)	"gleaming balls"	"bright lights" "circular for about 30 min- then spread out in the W"
Location of UFOs in Relation to the Aircraft	"ahead and higher"	"ahead, on course"	seen under left wing at 12 o'clock	ahead and slightly to left and 10-15° higher	"seen in the West"	10° above flight line at 11 o'clock	—	"in the West"
UFO shape (Verbal Description Only)	"circular lights, very small, white donut in the sky"	—	—	"small white clouds" (through 6x magn. binoc.)	—	—	—	—
Sketch made? (See Fig. 7 for copies of sketches)	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Location of UFOs in Relation to Each Other	"one above the other" at 60,000 to 25,000 feet	highest at 40,000 ft. in 1,000 foot intervals	—	"vertical formation"	"vertical formation"	"vertical line"	"straight line"	—
UFOs Thought to be Visible Due to	Sun's reflection	"glowing"	"Sun's reflection"	"bright white lights"	—	—	—	reflection of setting sun
Explanation Offered	"fuzzy, hazy appearance of dissipating vapour trail"	"vapour trail"	aircraft in a spiral descent- vapour trail	none given	none given	"must be vapour trail"	none given	none given

Table 1: Aircraft Crewmember Statement Comparison

normally mounted on its support pedestal. That is, there was minimal room to get one's head beside the gun sight so as to view directly forward.

It is known for sure that at least two crew stations involved were in the aft part of the aircraft, namely number 3 (left aft blister) and number 7 (right rear scanner). The location of the "blister" out of which these two crewmen saw the phenomena is shown in Figure 4 which is an external, left-rear view of the aircraft (labelled 3).

A drawing of what a typical lower and upper aft sighting station looked like from the inside is shown in Figures 5 and 6, respectively. Again, it may be seen that it is relatively difficult, but not impossible, to look out of these sighting domes directly forward.

The manually aimed gun sight shown in the above figures could be unlatched and swung out of the way when necessary.

UFO sighting data

The data consists of eye witness reports made by eight crewmen (summarized in Table 1), sketches made by four crewmen (see Figure 7), and photographs taken by a crewman with his own 35 mm camera from an unspecified crew station. One of these photos is reproduced here as Figure 8.

Referring to the drawings of Figure 7, the written comment given for the top drawing (A) was: ". . . I observed seven unidentified glowing objects ahead, on course. We continued on course and approached them for about an hour. On closer observation they appeared to me to be vapour trails, the highest at approximately 40,000 ft, spaced down at 1,000 ft. intervals as sketched."

The written comment accompanying the second drawing (B) was ". . . seven bright lights appeared in the west in trail. . . The lights appeared to be circular for about 30 minutes and then seemed to spread or trail out like a vapour trail. . . As we flew along we did not seem to

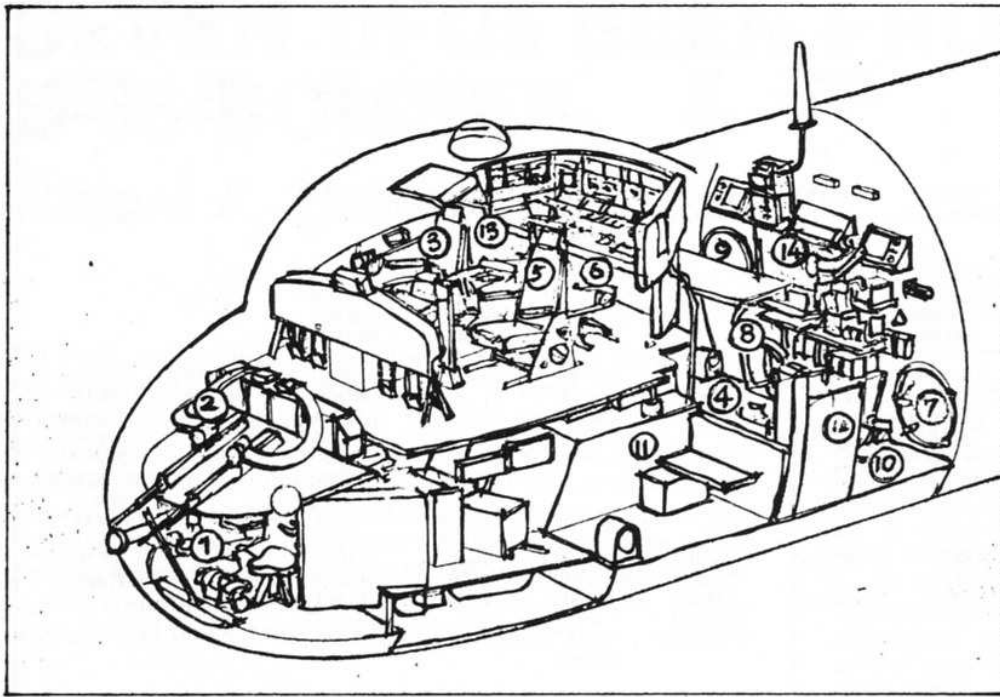


Figure 1: B-36 Flight Deck. See below for key:—

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Weather observer/Nose gunner. | 8. Radio operator. |
| 2. Nose turret. | 9. Communication tube door. |
| 3. Co-pilot. | 10. Left sighting platform. |
| 4. Second engineer. | 11. Stowage rack/dining table. |
| 5. Commander. | 12. Hot cup. |
| 6. First engineer. | 13. Photo-navigator. |
| 7. Left fwd. sighting stn. | 14. Radar observer. |

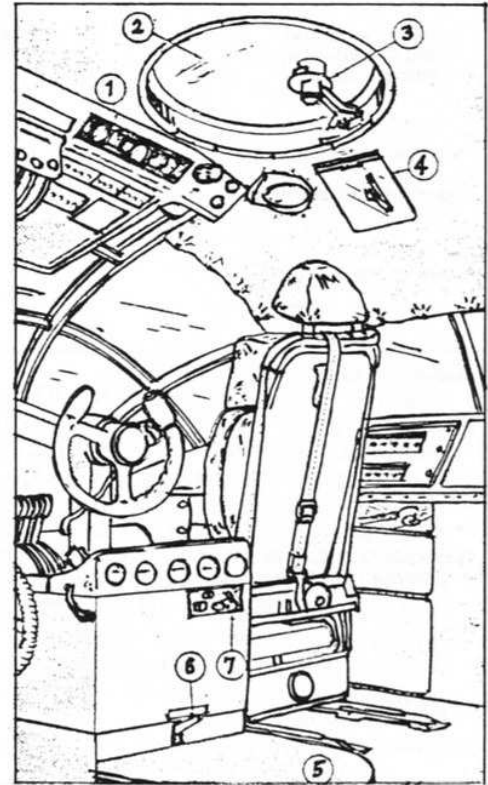


Figure 2: See key below:—

- | |
|--------------------------------|
| 1. Astrodome control panel. |
| 2. Astrodome. |
| 3. Astro compass support. |
| 4. Clip board. |
| 5. Sighting platform. |
| 6. Platform control lever. |
| 7. Co-pilot's AN/ARC3 control. |

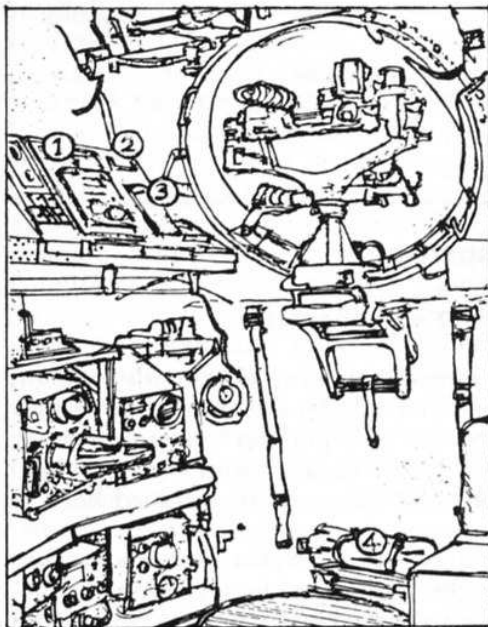


Figure 3

- | |
|----------------------------|
| 1. Turret control. |
| 2. Interphone control. |
| 3. Oxygen controls. |
| 4. Stowed sling-type seat. |

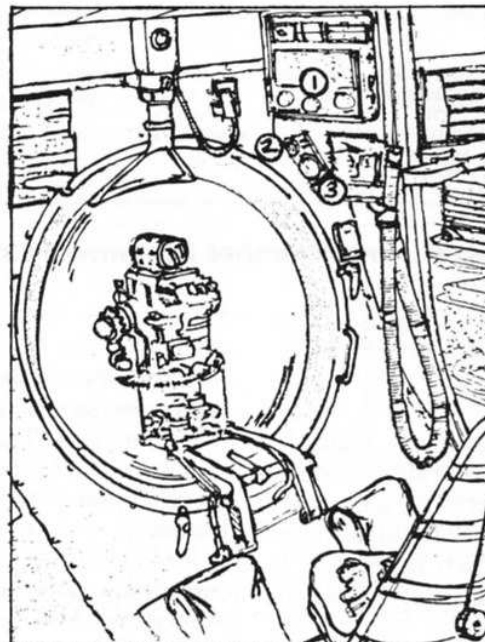


Figure 5: Lower aft stn.

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|------------------------|
| 1. Turret control. |
| 2. Interphone control. |
| 3. Oxygen controls. |

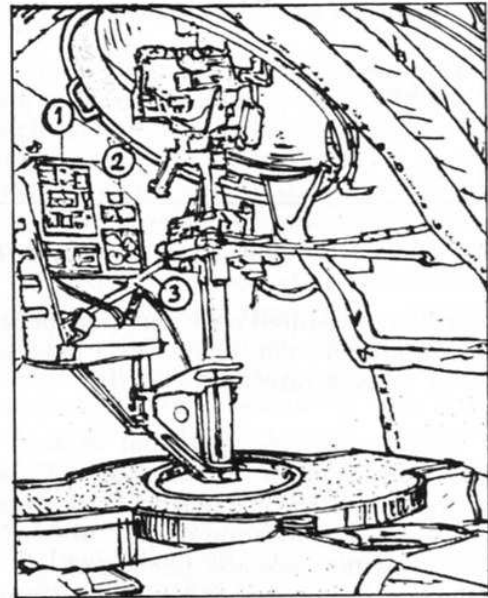


Figure 6: Upper aft stn.

- | |
|------------------------|
| 1. Turret control. |
| 2. Interphone control. |
| 3. Oxygen controls. |

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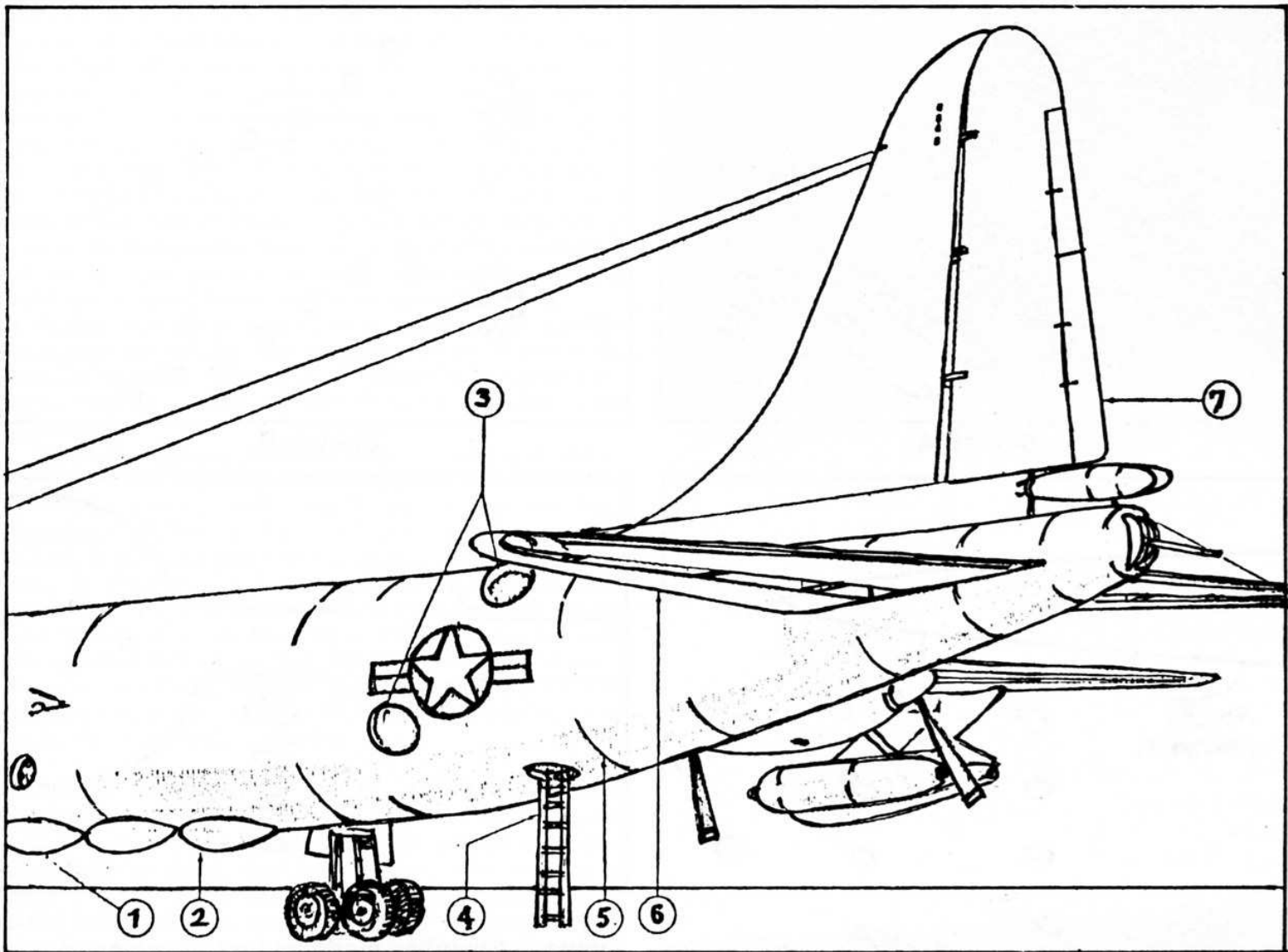


Figure 4: The tail of the formidable B-36 with a partial view of some of the jet-prop nacelles, and two of the pure-jet pods. See key below:—

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 & 2. Radar pods. | 3. Observation blister. | 5. Rear fuselage bulkhead. | 7. Rudder trim tabs. |
| | 4. Access hatch. | 6. Elevators. | |

get closer. I reported this to the San Angelo Radio and the operator observed this incident from the ground."

The third drawing (C) was accompanied by this statement: "I observed (left) at 12 o'clock. They were in a vertical line. As we came closer the spacing between the spots became uneven and gradually left a vertical line."

The written comments accompanying the bottom drawing (D) included: "We were flying along when over the interphone came the question what was that in front of us. . . I was flying right scanner and couldn't see anything. The left scanner gave a report of what he saw, I left my position and looked through the left blister and saw four gleaming balls in a straight line. The wing stopped me from seeing more of them."

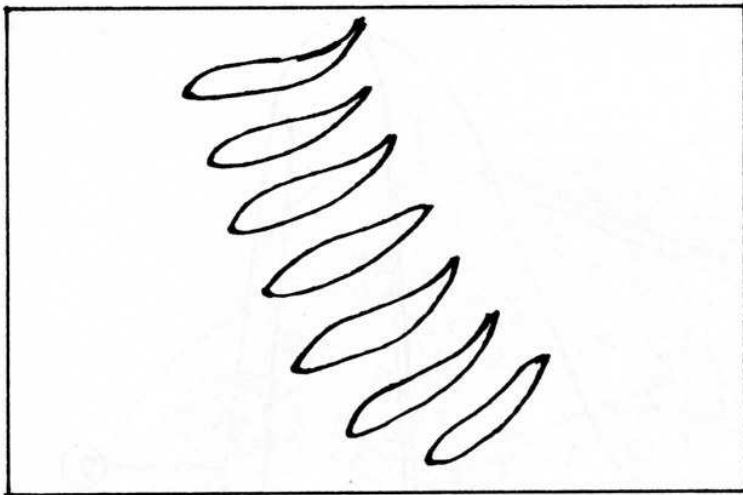
One of the crewmen who did not make a sketch took six 35 mm photographs of the phenomenon. While it is not possible to be sure which crewman this was, the author

believes it was probably either the navigator filming through the bubble (known as the "astrodome") which was located at the top of the forward canopy labelled (2) in Figure 2 or the photo-navigator who occupied one of the two seats located at the nose end of the aircraft (see seat number 14 in Figure 1). Good forward, downward, and sidewise visibility was afforded to the crew members in the nose of the aircraft by the multi-pane windows filling the entire bottom-half of the aircraft's nose.

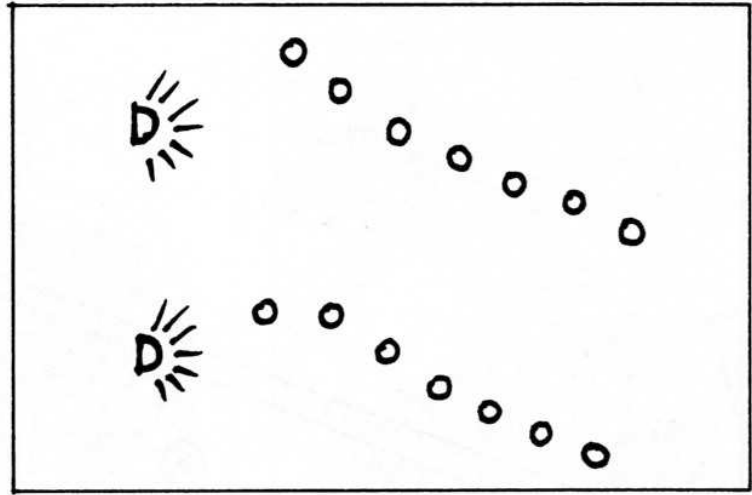
The written comments made by the crewman who took this photograph included the following ". . . seven bright objects were observed in the west in a vertical formation. There appeared to be no apparent movement for the first 15 minutes, then they appeared to be sending off vapour trails in a swirling motion, different from any vapour trails I've observed from high flying aircraft. After the vapour trails drifted off no objects were in sight."

Three more sets of comments remain. The sighting location for two of them is not known for sure and they will only be referred to by the arbitrary number that is used in Table 1 for purposes of cross comparison.

FIGURE 7 WILL BE FOUND ON PAGE 10



Sketch A



Sketch B

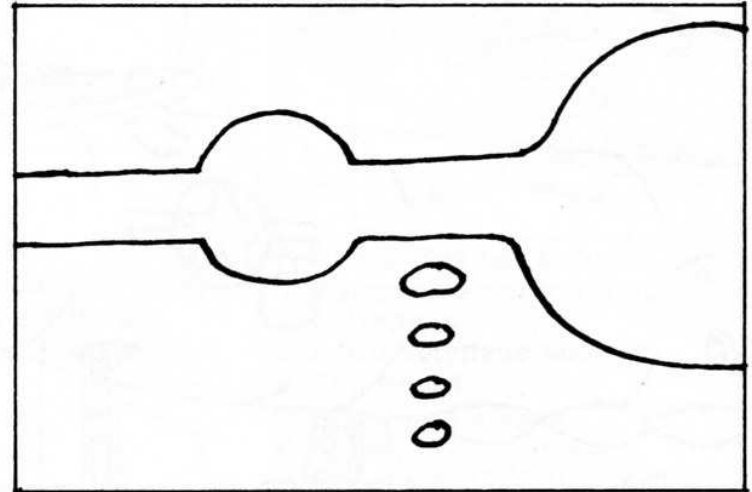
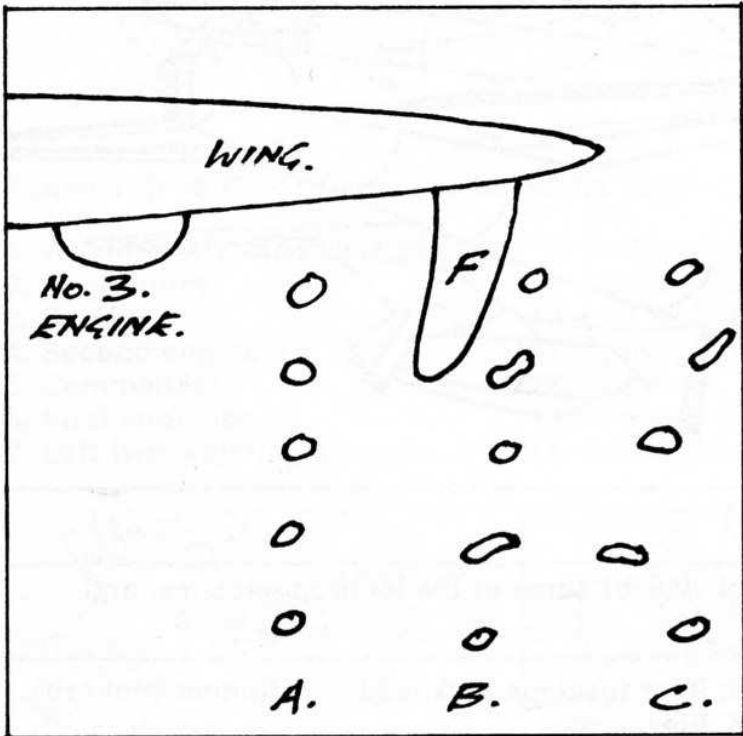


Figure 7: Sketches made by four crewmen of what they saw from their different positions in the giant B-36 aircraft.

Left: sketch C.

Above: sketch D.

Written comment for witness number 1: “. . . a string of seven circular lights was observed ahead of and higher than our aircraft. . . Upon closer observations on my part they appeared to be very small circles such as a small jet plane might make if it were flying an extremely small circle. A better description might be of a white doughnut in the sky. There were seven such objects almost one above the other. . . As we got closer to the objects the circular part of the objects seemed larger and fuzzier as a vapour trail might appear after it begins to dissipate. They stayed in view, still appearing ahead of us, until dark. The extreme brightness of the objects upon first sighting them seemed to come from the sun which was setting. Later on the objects had the fuzzy, hazy appearance of a dissipating vapour trail.”

Witness number 4: “The navigator called our attention to some objects in the air ahead of us. At first glance they looked like seven bright white lights in vertical formation. Looking at them through 6 power binoculars they appeared to be small white clouds, as the edges could be noticed to be cloud-like in nature. The objects continued

to be visible until dark (about one hour) (*sic*) without changing very much in size or distance although we were flying almost directly toward them for this time.”

Witness number 6 occupied the left forward blister and reported: “There were seven objects about 50 to 75 miles away about 10 degrees above flight line at 11 o’clock of the aircraft. They were very white and had the appearance of having phosphorous (*sic*) trails, and were in a vertical line. No movement was apparent and as we drew closer I figured they must be vapour trails and so I returned to my work.”

Discussion of events

There are a number of features of this sighting that deserve further comment. These features will be treated according to temporal, spatial, and luminance characteristics of the phenomenon.

Temporal Events: The time of occurrence of the sighting was well documented as being 2005 CST (i.e., just before sunset) and the duration was claimed by

various crew members to be from 30 to 60 minutes. The project Blue Book files Record Card (form 10073) listed the length of observation to be 15-20 minutes and the explanation of the phenomenon to be "possibly a balloon." If this phenomenon was produced by a series of tethered polyethylene balloons they would very likely become visible due to the light from the setting sun (which set a relative bearing of (*) on May 19, 1952 at (*) local time ((*)Z). It is difficult to explain this phenomenon as one or more balloons, however, in light of the numerous comments from the eye witnesses about seeing a vapour trail closely associated with the individual objects.

If the individual objects were made of a vaporous substance like smoke, one would expect the winds at this altitude to make them drift or otherwise dissipate from sight over the course of the 30 to 60 minutes of the sighting.

Since the sighting duration was so prolonged and no specific times are given in the original report on when each crew member saw them it may be that the shape variations shown in Figure 7 may simply represent relatively accurate representations of the aerial objects but seen at different times. Nevertheless, the objects must have either been located at a great distance from the aircraft (flying at a true heading of 301 deg at an indicated air speed of 189 knots) and stationary, or at some lesser distance and flying radially away from the aircraft, i.e., along a heading of 301 deg. The former possibility seems to be the more likely condition.

Spatial Events: All of the eye witnesses who commented on the apparent angular size of the objects said the objects were small. No more precise statement than this was given. The seven objects were seen not as point sources but as angularly extended sources. The point optical source has the property of increasing in apparent diameter very slowly with decreasing range so that one would not necessarily expect these objects to appear to enlarge over time (assuming the separation distance between the aircraft and the object was initially large and was decreasing). Three of the four sets of sketches given in Figure 7 indicate some definite shape to the objects. There appears to be a temporally related change in relative spacing of the seven objects as well as a change in their perceived shape, toward that of less symmetry. These eye witnesses' sketches were copied as accurately as possible for Figure 7. Thus, it may be noted that not only are some of the separate objects elongated but were oriented with their long axes tilted slightly right-end higher (than their left-end).

No explanation is given for why the four crew men who drew sketches of the objects drew such differently sized shapes. In view of the fact that so many witnesses said the objects were very small, it raises the possibility that drawing (A) in Figure 7 was made by the observer at crew station 4 who viewed the phenomena through 6 power binoculars.

Regarding the single 35 mm photograph that was included in this case file (reproduced here as Figure 8), the dark flat Earth surface can be seen at the very bottom of the photograph with the lighter atmospheric air glow seen arcing above the horizon (which is typical at sunsets as



Figure 8: Detail from the crewman's 35 mm photo.

seen from high altitude). Interestingly, the three white images that are visible in this photograph appear near the upper edge of the airglow region and not against the darker (near space) background.

The approximate geographic locations of the aircraft at the start of this prolonged sighting is given as 30 deg 37 min N and 100 deg 47 min W or about eight miles WNW of Sonora, Texas. The squadron intelligence officer's report claimed that the aircraft's location at the end of the sighting was approximately 30 deg 53 min N and 101 deg 20 min W, which calculates to a linear distance of only 38 miles! If this sighting lasted even 30 minutes (a conservative estimate) and the aircraft travelled at a ground speed of as slow as 100 mph, it would have travelled at least 50 miles distance. It is more likely that the aircraft's ground speed was perhaps 200 mph for an elapsed distance of 100 miles after 30 minutes of flight or 200 miles for an hour of flight. And, even if there had been high head winds of say 100 mph coming from the 111 deg bearing so as to reduce the aircraft's ground speed to 100 mph the same winds aloft would be expected to sweep airborne balloons rapidly toward the aircraft's direction producing (perhaps) a per-

*[Details not supplied by author — ED]

ceptible increase in apparent size over the long duration of this sighting or at least an apparent motion of the objects across the field of view. Obviously, an error in either time and/or geographic position of the aircraft has found its way into this file.

Given the aircraft's starting position at Kelly AFB, San Antonio, Texas, and a constant heading of 301 deg, the terrain over which the aircraft flew at 18,000 feet altitude was flat, dry desert with numerous dry river beds and washes. Approximately straight ahead of the aircraft, some 85 miles, is the town of Midland, Texas. The U.S. Weather Bureau launched both pilot and rawin balloons from the Midland, Texas airport during the summer of 1952. Could there have been an unusual cluster balloon launched from their facility? The 27 years which have elapsed since this sighting make it extremely difficult to find out.

Luminance Events: As mentioned earlier, the period of the day during which this sighting took place very likely contributed to the conspicuousness of the seven "white" objects. As seen from 18,000 feet altitude the Earth's surface would be getting darker while the horizon sky would be much brighter due to the scattering of sunlight in the atmosphere. Neither the heading of the aircraft nor the relative bearing of the objects (from the aircraft) was supposed to have changed throughout the 30 to 60 minutes of the sighting. This suggests that the objects could possibly have been produced by intense ground lights refracted by a temperature inversion. Yet, since there were seven separate objects seen, the ground lights would have had to be in a fairly straight row, oriented almost directly along the flight path of the aircraft. It is difficult to explain the apparent drift of these objects relative to each other on the basis of atmospheric refraction, however.

That these bright objects were not some form of parhelia or mock suns is suggested by the facts that: (1) no colours were reported by any eye witness whereas parhelia are distinctly red on one side, then yellow, and then bluish white, depending upon the angular distance to the sun (Minaert, 1954, pg. 1967); (2) no witness reported seeing any scintillation of these bright objects as might be expected from seeing stars through the atmosphere, and (3) a mock sun phenomena would not produce as many individual images in this orientation as was reported here. It is unfortunate that the U.S. Air Force file contained no details on how the seven objects disappeared.

U.S. Air Force conclusion

The Air Intelligence Information Report on this sighting was approved by Captain William J. Quinn, Jr., Assistant Wing Intelligence officer, on June 20, 1952, over a month after the sighting took place. In his summarizing statement, Captain Quinn said: "The attached photographs prove the authenticity of the report as observed, and the only explanation of the objects that can be reached at this headquarters is the possibility that the white puffs may have been caused by exhaust from a vertically launched, multiple phase, rocket or guided missile. The proximity of the aircraft to the New Mexico testing sites does not rule out this possibility, but since the wind velocity at 18,000 feet was 35 knots, it seems

unlikely that exhaust puffs would remain that long without dissipating."

General comments

It goes without saying that the U.S. Air Force simply could not find a reasonable explanation for this event and thus placed it in one of their "catch all" categories (i.e., "possibly a balloon") rather than call it "unidentified" which it seemed to be. Many other pilots have reported seeing vaporous or cloud-like phenomena either spatially isolated in the sky or associated with apparently solid objects.

Further research is needed on what kinds of multiple and apparently related physical phenomena can maintain spatial integrity in the upper region of the atmosphere over periods of half-an hour or more.

References

Minnaert, M., *The Nature of Light and Colour in the Open Air*. New York, Dover Press, 1954.

National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., *RG 341, Records of Headquarters United States Air Force, Project Blue Book, T1206*, Microfilm reel no. 10, File No. 1188-1376 (text only); Microfilm reel no. 93 (photograph only).

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THE KAIKOURA CONTROVERSY

Kevin R. Berry

While some cases in this round-up from news items are familiar to readers, it is considered that there are so many interesting and new glimpses of the events from different angles that our New Zealand contributor's article well merits inclusion.

KAIKOURA is a town in the South Island of New Zealand, about 100 miles north of Christchurch. During the months of December 1978 and January 1979, this town and the area round it were buzzing with UFO reports, some now known world-wide.

However, these were not the first reports that the area has had. The unidentified flying objects have been there for about three years, the residents say, and perhaps the Kaikoura and Clarence area (Clarence is about 40 miles north of Kaikoura) could be considered as a UFO "entry window."

Earlier sightings

During 1978, two people travelling by car through the Hundalee Hills to Kaikoura saw the now-famous object hovering over the hills. They were so busy watching it that their car almost ran off the road.

One of Clarence's 200 residents described an object he saw in December 1978. He first thought that it was a stationary satellite, but later realised that it wasn't. The UFO had three lights: red, orange, and green. Looking at it through binoculars only made the lights look bigger.

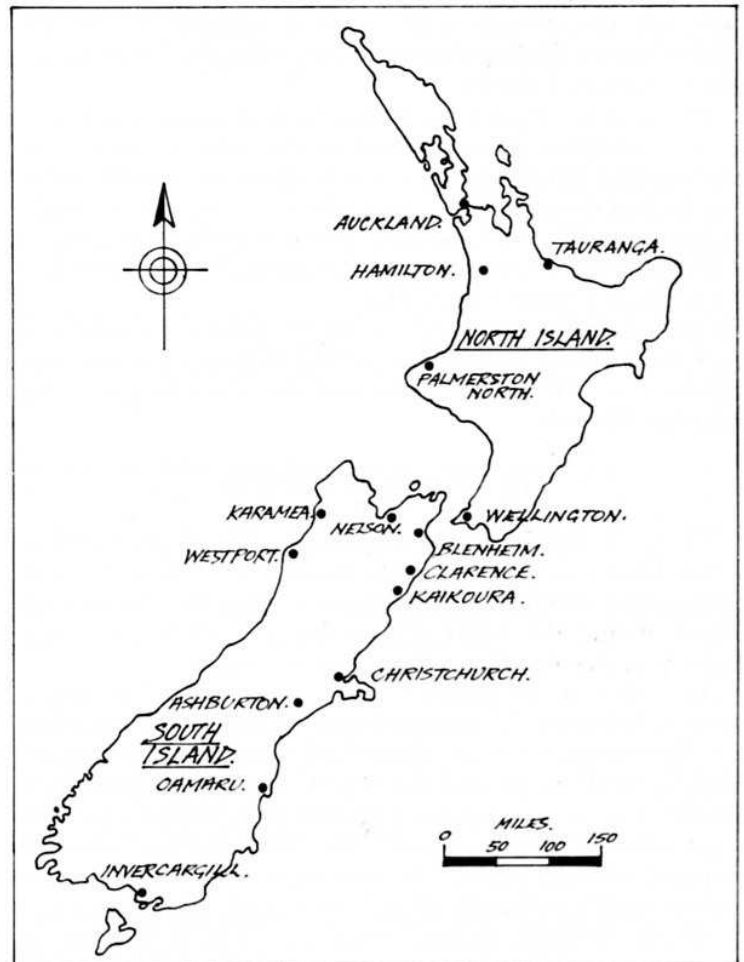
Another man in the same area described the object he saw during the same month as having a red light on one side and a green light on the other.

Farmer Bruce Appleby believes that the object may be responsible for the disappearance of scores of his sheep. (My personal opinion is that his belief is without foundation. The objects sighted there have always been at a distance, and apparently have never taken anyone else's animals.)

The first Argosy sighting

On Thursday morning, December 21, 1978, an *Argosy* left Blenheim bound for Christchurch, piloted by Captain John Randle. At 1.20 a.m. he radioed Wellington to report "several white lights," unusually bright, over the sea off the Kaikoura coast. Wellington already had them on radar, and said they were travelling about 2000 km/h (1250 mph). Captain Randle had another sighting at 4.06 a.m. when flying back to Auckland.

While the Control Tower was watching Randle's UFOs on the radar, they received another radio call. Captain Vernon Powell, the pilot of another *Argosy*, also Christchurch-bound, radioed at 3.28 a.m. to say that "something is coming towards us at a tremendous speed on our radar." It was leaving a trail on the radar screen, and travelled 15 miles in 5 seconds before veering off. If Powell's estimate of the speed was accurate, the object would have been going over 10,000 mph.



The object vanished off the radar screen, but appeared again, about 23 miles east of the aircraft, as a flashing white light. It paced the plane for 12 miles, tracked by Wellington radar. During that time it changed colour.

The Crockett Film

In the early morning hours of December 31, 1978, an Australian TV film crew aboard another *Argosy* looking for UFOs filmed objects around their aircraft. These UFOs were also tracked on radar at Wellington and Christchurch. The film, taken with a telescopic lens by David Crockett, shows a "main" object, coloured bright orange on top and rich red on bottom, about 100 feet in diameter. This was filmed on the return journey.

When the film was analysed in Australia, it was discovered that this object had a translucent dome. It had also done a giant loop in 1/20 of a second, undetected by