

Was it a Landing at Silverton?

BY ED PITLO AND EDGAR SIEVERS

The police had brought the clamps down fairly early and, at long last, closed their case in a dejected mood. "We have our doubts," were the parting words which Ed got out of them—doubts not in the positive sense that their disbelief in the existence of flying saucers were shaken, but doubts as to the substance of the story which two members of the Police Force had to tell. Our own investigations—as far as we could carry them—confirm the substance to such an extent that there is no doubt about a very close sighting. Whether the UFO really did land on a road a couple of miles east of Pretoria cannot be established.

Two young members of the South African Police Force had been out in their patrol van shortly after midnight on the 16th September, 1965. Their task did not take them long and, having been called back via radio, they started on their return journey to the station at Silverton, a fair-sized suburb east of Pretoria. Through it leads the main artery to the east, but at this time of the night and on that particular stretch all traffic had ceased.

At a point about 3½ miles east from Silverton, the

road follows a slight elevation, then dips again for another mile. Coming up over the rise and travelling fast, the two constables, John Lockem and Koos de Klerk, were surprised to see a fire burning in the middle of the road, some distance ahead of them.

At the same time, something which they later described as resembling a flying saucer shot up into the sky, above the fire and away from them. This took only seconds and occurred during their final approach while slowing down. They were thus able to discern the shape of the UFO. It was like a spinning top, and a shaft of light was emitted from underside that appeared to them as a jet exhaust. There was no noise.

As the object receded into the night north of Silverton, they followed its light for quite some time. In the meantime, the flames on the tarmac had died down. Investigation disclosed that the greater part of a spot which had been drenched by some unidentifiable liquid material, had been burning. Nothing else could be seen, heard or detected. Baffled, they continued on their way and reported the incident at



CAUSED BY A UFO: Unsolvably Riddle

The patch in middle of the road 3 miles east of Silverton, parts of which burnt inexplicably. Facing east a car is coming up and over the rise the same way as the police patrol van did

their station.

It is understandable that under the circumstances both men presumed a close connection to exist between the UFO and this peculiar fire. Their early answers lay in this direction and a section of the press—though giving welcome publicity to the saucer question generally—eagerly grabbed at what looked like a sensational scoop and decidedly overplayed the more mysterious features.

Later probing showed that all the constables were prepared to say was that the object was 'shooting up' the moment they saw it. Thus it was impossible to state whether the UFO had been hovering or had actually alighted, and whether its position was beyond the fire or over and above the area of combustion. As for the rest of the story there is no doubt, since the two constables told us they would never divert from what they had seen and reported, come what may. UFOs had been reported in the Pretoria area that night as well as farther away, and when we confronted Lockem with photographic UFO evidence, he spontaneously exclaimed: "So, dan bestaan hulle tog!"—*so, they do exist after all!* Out of approximately fifteen illustrations of various types of UFOs shown to Lockem for identification, he immediately and without hesitating pointed to the "spinning top" type illustration.

The tantalising questions were (and those question marks will, unfortunately, remain): was it a landing? did the ship jettison fuel or other inflammable material? If so, was it ignited by a jet exhaust, inadvertently? Was something deliberately burnt or destroyed? If so, why, and why on the road? So as not to burn the dry grass veldt next to it? Or did the flames originate from some terrestrial cause? Who spilled petrol or oil on the road and how did it ignite when the policemen should have noticed some vehicle or people ahead of them—but didn't?

The various points can be summed up as follows:—

1. A thorough investigation by senior officers of the Force does not seem to have unearthed any further information of importance (see again the final answer to Ed.).

2. Since the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research is stationed nearby, samples from the burnt area were readily taken. The official hand-

out said "that the dark stains and heat marks on the tarmac could have been caused by the ignition of an inflammable material—such as petrol. There were no signs of any blast effects such as could be caused by a rocket or jet exhaust. . ."

3. Indeed, the heat generated could not have been very high. Press reports conveyed the impression that the asphalt must have been fiercely burning, when actually the road here is in such a condition that the granite gravel is showing and the fine surface long worn away. Likewise, the strip of white paint was only slightly discoloured by soot and smoke, while the asphalt in general did not give off soot or carbon, which would have been a clear indication that the asphalt actually burnt off the road. The general picture showed the tar and asphalt still to be present and sticking to the granite gravel.

4. No analysis of the 'liquid' which, as can be seen from the photograph, ran off towards the side of the road, could be or had been made. According to appearance and judging by the way the sand between the stones had absorbed it, the liquid must have been oily. It seemed as if part of the patch did release a smell of light diesel oil, but this may have been an illusion.

5. Upon Ed's instigation, the spot was tested for radioactivity, with negative results. This, nevertheless, brought a minor success inasmuch as Ed's suggestions led to the following wording in the official releases (our italics): "*In cases of flying objects or meteorites landing in the United States there have always been traces of radioactivity. In this case there is no trace. . .*"

6. As any terrestrial cause of the fire could not be proved and as the policemen had not seen anybody ahead of them, the possibility cannot be excluded that there was indeed a connection between the UFO, the patch and the fire. This possibility should be filed for future reference should there occur a similar incident.

7. Once again the reporting of details by the press has been so inaccurate and misleading that great care should be taken by UFO researchers when taking extensive cases on record without having been in the position to check details themselves. As with general press reporting so, too, with UFO cases accuracy remains an ideal—ever before them, seldom reached.

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