

UFO CHASE IN BRAZIL (MAY 1986)

Dr Willy Smith, Ph.D.

(Unicat Project). Consultant to FSR

Dr Willy Smith, who lives in Longwood, Florida, is another of the many new and valued Consultants who are rallying to FSR, and we welcome him most warmly!

The Brazilian "flap" which he covers in this report is, of course, the one which was described by the more oafish elements of the American and British press as involving "Pingpong Balls over Brazil!" Needless to say, as Dr Willy Smith emphasises, we have so far found no evidence whatsoever that at any moment any Brazilian referred to "pingpong balls". But, as we know, that sort of term is always calculated to be a sure-fire way of ridiculing our subject and making us all look like a bunch of fools. — EDITOR

Introduction

AFTER maintaining a low profile for a period of several years, UFOs briefly regained the world headlines following an incident in Brazilian air space during the night of May 19, 1986.

In spite of the large amount of clippings received from UNICAT correspondents in Brazil and Argentina, as well as reprints of news items that appeared in American newspapers, I find it difficult to organize the information in a coherent narrative. The different Brazilian newspapers and the statements of Government officials provide somewhat contradictory versions of the events, but it is clear that something out of the ordinary occurred, enough to shake the complacency of the authorities.

* * * *

Sequence of events

The night of May 19, 1986, a Monday, was clear and with good visibility, devoid of heavy clouds that could affect radar.

An executive plane, a Brazilian-made two-engine *Xingu* owned by EMBRAER (Emprêsa Brasileira de Aeronáutica), was en route from Brasília to São José dos Campos (near São Paulo). While starting its descent, it was alerted by the São Paulo radar control that an unknown object was in the area. The presence of this unknown object was confirmed shortly by the radar at Brasília.¹

In the pilot seat of the *Xingu* was a well known man: Colonel Ozires Silva, former president of EMBRAER, who had just been appointed head of PETROBRAS, the Brazilian state-owned oil company. According to the official version, Col. Silvas was the first to spot visually the unidentified object as a "dancing point in the sky".² The time was 21:10.⁸

Seated beside Ozires Silva was a civilian pilot for EMBRAER: Commander Alcir Pereira da Silva, age 37, with more than 6000 hours of flying time. In his statement to the press,¹ Comm. Alcir Pereira da Silva



UFO Chase in Brazil.

indicated that when the *Xingu* had descended to 2000 ft., the pilots perceived a strong light and turned the plane in its direction. The light is described as "brighter than a star, emitting a constant red-orange light" and also as being on for 10-15 seconds, then off, only to reappear at a different location.¹ Whatever the case was, the pilots were very soon discouraged, and abandoned the chase after about 30 minutes.

By that time, the Brazilian Defense Center (CINDACTA = Centro Integrado de Defesa Aérea e Controle de Tráfego Aéreo) which apparently controls all air traffic, was on full alert, as the radar screens in the vicinity of São José dos Campos and nearby São Paulo were saturated and all air traffic had been interrupted.²

Only minutes after the appearance of the unknown objects on the radar screens, jets were scrambled from

two Air Force bases (see map): Santa Cruz, in the State of São Paulo, and Anápolis, near Brasília. Although the number of jet fighters scrambled, as well as the number of UFOs that were detected, is variable depending on the spokesman, the indisputable fact is that planes were dispatched, attempted to approach the lights, and failed.

The UFOs had initially appeared over a mountainous region between the states of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, known as the Serra da Mantiqueira.² The incident terminated near midnight as suddenly as it had started, with the UFO disappearing simultaneously from radar and from visual observation after moving toward the ocean beyond the Brazilian coast. The duration of the sighting was close to three hours.

* * * *

The pilots' accounts

The Brazilian Air Force allowed the pilots to have a press conference in which they freely expressed their versions of the events of May 19. According to our correspondent in Rio, Mrs Irene Granchi, the 7 pilots and 3 radar controllers that participated in the incidents appeared on television.⁴

We summarize their statements from the information received from Mrs Granchi, as well as from the version published by the prestigious newspaper O GLOBO.³

All of the seven pilots were military, except the already named Comm. Alcir Pereira da Silva.

Three *F-5E* jets were scrambled from the Santa Cruz AFB near São Paulo, two of them at 22:23 and the third at 22:55. In addition, three *Mirage III* jet fighters were scrambled from the Anápolis AFB at 22:50,⁸ but only one had an effective contact. The time of the actual contacts has been established as between 22:55 and 23:20.⁸

The pilot of one of the *F-5Es* was Lt. Kleber Caldas Marinho, aged 25. Following the instructions of the radar controller, he vectored his plane to a target 35 miles distant, but was unable to close in. The radar control in Brasília informed him at this point that the target was approaching him rapidly. However, the pilot didn't see anything, and in his own words, "*one gets scared of what one sees, and I saw nothing*". But later in the chase, he finally obtained a visual contact. As verified by both the ground radar and the on-board radar, the target was at a distance of 35 miles, but when the pilot tried to narrow the gap it was "like attempting to reach a point at infinity", in spite of his 1000 km/hr (625 mph) speed. As his fuel was getting low, he returned to the Santa Cruz Air Force Base.³ He describes the target as a reddish light, very intense, which changed colours when the chase was aborted, first to white, then to green and to red again.³

The pilot of the second *F-5E*, Capt. Marcio Jordão,

age 29, was luckier, as he was able to reduce the distance to the target to 12 miles. He describes the UFO as a very strong light of continuous intensity, and changing colours continuously from white to green. Capt. Jordão broke off the contact when the object moved over the sea beyond the 200 mile limit from Santa Cruz.³

Of the three *Mirages* scrambled from the Anápolis Base, only one was able to establish actual contact. It was piloted by Capt. Armindo Souza Viriato de Freitas, age 30, whose statements we transcribe:^{4,8}

"I was warned by ground control that there were several targets ahead of me, at a distance of 20 miles and ranging in number from 10 to 13. I was also advised that the targets were approaching my plane, and finally that they were following me at a distance of 2 miles (*sic*). I had to lower my plane, as the lights had descended, but from then on they climbed vertically. This was my only visual contact, but I could see them in my radar at a distance of 12 miles." The radar controller at the Anápolis AFB was Lt. Hugo Nunes Freitas and he advised Capt. Viriato that he had several targets behind his plane, six to one side and seven to the other.

According to O GLOBO,³ Capt. Viriato added that the targets made 80 degree turns (possibly 180 degrees was meant) and that he could not manage to have a visual contact right ahead of his plane. "No plane I know can make turns like that at 1000 km/hr," he concluded.

One of the traffic controllers, Lt. Valdecir Fernando Coelho, stated: "In my 14 years of experience as a radar operator, I never saw anything like this." ... Familiar, isn't it?

At the close of the press meeting, and immediately following the pilots' reports, the Air Ministry declared that no further reports are to be expected on the incidents until the special commission appointed to investigate the events has reached a conclusion.

* * * *

The Air Minister

Some unusual and out of character developments must be pointed out. The Air Minister, Brigadier Otávio Júlio Moreira Lima, after informing the President of Brazil, José Sarney, of the incident, proceeded to inform the press that the radar screen of CINDACTA in São Paulo had been saturated, that jets had been scrambled, and that visual-radar contacts had been established with "balls of light of multiple colours".

This is the first time that a high-ranking officer of the air force of any nation has come forward and admitted the presence of unidentified objects, and moreover, that intercept attempts had failed.^{2,5}

In addition, the Air Minister carried on his press conference in a semi-humorous tone, indicating that

he "always wanted to see a UFO as a child", but adding "that radar is not subject to optical illusions. The radar echoes are due to solid objects or to massive clouds, which were not present that night."

Strangely enough, the Air Minister, Brig. Moreira Lima, did not seem concerned about this unchecked penetration of the Brazilian air space, but was rather proud of the prompt response of the Air Force to an alert.⁷

According to CLARÍN,² the decision to release the news to the public was made personally by President Sarney, another first.

* * * *

Conclusions

Although their number is uncertain, numerous UFOs were observed visually and detected by both ground and airborne radars. The episode lasted for near three hours, but the only concrete information is that they were balls of light of different and changing colours, which the jet fighters could not really approach. As in many other cases, the initiation and termination of the incident were sudden and unexpected.

Weather was good, a clear night without clouds, so that radar echoes remain unexplained. The number of echoes was very large, enough to saturate the radar screens and, according to the Air Minister, corresponded to solid targets.

Nowhere in the original *Brazilian* newspaper clippings have I found a direct quote about the "pingpong balls" mentioned in the American press. CLARÍN of Buenos Aires² stated that the UFOs were described alternatively as stars, football balls, or "pingpong balls".

As for the speeds of the UFOs, only two specific quotes were made by the Brazilian press. The first refers to the statements made by Colonel Ozires Silva, who is an aeronautical engineer by training, commenting on his attempt to approach the lights. He indicated that the maximum speed of his plane was 400 km/hr (250mph), while the lights were apparently

moving at a speed of 1500 km/hr (937 mph).⁶

The second concrete mention of speeds was made by Major Ney Cerqueira, head of CINDACTA, who actively participated in the tracking operations. According to Maj. Cerqueira, "due to technical limitations in the radar equipment" the speeds could not be determined with precision. "The speeds detected varied in an interval of 5 to 10 minutes from 150 knots/hr to 800 knots/hr".⁵ In miles per hour, this corresponds to a range of 173 to 921 mph, and matches well with the information that jets with speeds of 1000 km/hr (625 mph) were unable to close on the lights.

The sighting started, according to the Air Ministry, at 20:50 and ended about midnight, having thus a total duration of 3 hours.⁸ Finally, the number of UFOs has been quoted by the media as between 13 and 21. The Air Minister placed the number at 20.⁷

Since most of the information on which this report is based was obtained from newspaper clippings, usually a highly unreliable source, it is necessary to emphasize that in this particular instance the media did a very faithful reporting job. Most of the details were released at the press conference in which the pilots related their experiences and were directly questioned by the reporters. The information written in the different papers is consistent and accurate. In addition, the Air Ministry released further information as a chronology of the events.⁸ Altogether, then, we are satisfied that the incident occurred as narrated.

* * * *

REFERENCES

- (1) JORNAL DO BRASIL, May 23, 1986.
- (2) CLARÍN, Buenos Aires, May 23, 1986.
- (3) O GLOBO, May 24, 1986.
- (4) Irene Granchi (UNICAT Project correspondent in Rio de Janeiro), private communication.
- (5) JORNAL DO BRASIL, May 22, 1986.
- (6) O DIA, May 23, 1986.
- (7) O DIA, May 22, 1986.
- (8) FÓLHA DE S. PAULO, May 24, 1986.

AN "OBSERVING EYE" IN THE HOUSE

THE Spanish mimeographed bulletin *Cuadernos de Ufologia*, No. 4/15, issued in March 1986, contains an account of a small object seen inside a house, in Spain, in August 1972.

A lady, Amparo Gascón Valldecabrés, who was a twelve-year-old girl at the time, has only recently revealed the incident to her brother, Juan Marcos Gascón Valldecabrés (author of the present account) and others who, with him, were at that time members of the Valencia UFO Investigation Group (AVIU).

The witness was staying during her holidays with her uncle and aunt who had rented a ground-floor apartment in Losa del Obispo, a village lying some 50 kilometres to the north-east of Valencia. Valencia lies on the east coast of Spain, at 39° 27' N., 0° 23' W.

The witness states that, one night during the month of August 1972, at about 3.00 a.m., while staying in the house in question, she awoke and went to the toilet and, in the corridor outside her room, was confronted with an eye-shaped or almond-shaped object,