

U.F.O. HISTORICAL REVUE

Number 16

Editor: Barry Greenwood

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Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanganyika, February 19, 1951: Photo Located

As cold-case UFO files go, this was one of the coldest. Buried deep in the obscurity of early 1951, passengers and crew of an East African Airways "Lodestar" airliner were flying from Nairobi, Kenya to Das Es Salaam, Tanganyika (now Tanzania) on the morning of February 19. An hour after take-off between Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya, the co-pilot exited the cockpit and suggested that passengers (totaling about 10) look out of the right side windows. According to one witness, Theo Pezarro:

**"We looked out the window, and there fairly close to the top of the mountain was this bright, cigar-shaped object - just hanging in the skies. I guess the mountain was about 19,000 feet high and this was maybe a little higher than the mountain, maybe at about 20,000 feet. It was shaped like a cigar and it had a dark band around it, not quite in the center of it, maybe a little towards one end of it. I would say that it was fairly close to the mountain because it flew for about 20 minutes and it didn't move its position very much relative to the mountain. I would estimate we were about 15 miles away from the mountain itself. There were some passengers on board who had field glasses and I looked at it through the field glasses and it seemed pretty substantial and solid, and it was just hanging suspended in the sky. There were some American tourists on board that took some pictures of it with a telephoto lens."
(Statement on file with the Center for UFO Studies)**

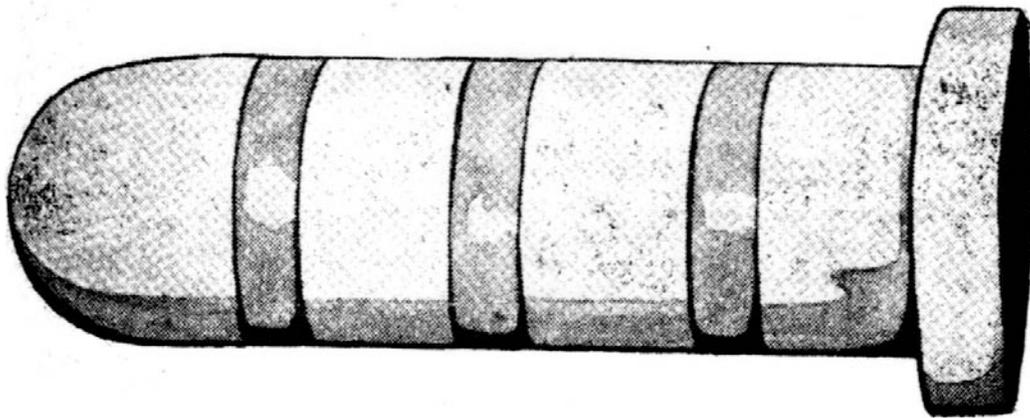
Pezarro went on to say that he thought photos of the object were published in the New York Sun but he never saw the pictures himself. There is no evidence any pictures surfaced in the United States. According to a Project Blue Book file on the story, the American consul at Das Es Salaam, H. Gordon Minnigerode, wrote:

"From descriptions given by the crew and passengers the object, although termed a "flying saucer" appeared to be bullet-shaped with a fin at one end. It was seen through binoculars by several of the passengers and was declared to have three definite stripes along the body

as well as being metallic. As soon as the "flying saucer" was observed, contact was made with Nairobi by radio to ascertain whether the French Constellation aircraft bound from Eastleigh to Tananarive, whose course was approximately in the direction of the "flying saucer" could have been mistaken for it but no information could be furnished beyond the statement that the cruising altitude of the French plane was about 17,500 feet."

Minnigerode continued that the object was in view for 17 minutes, then climbed rapidly, moving eastward toward the coast. Passengers were said to have observed that the object to the naked eye appeared like a bright star but with optical aid had a clear shape. One American passenger, H. B. B. Fussell, took at least one picture with his camera, while another American passenger, Ray Overstreet, was said to have taken 30 feet of color film.

From the Nairobi Post, February 25, 1951:



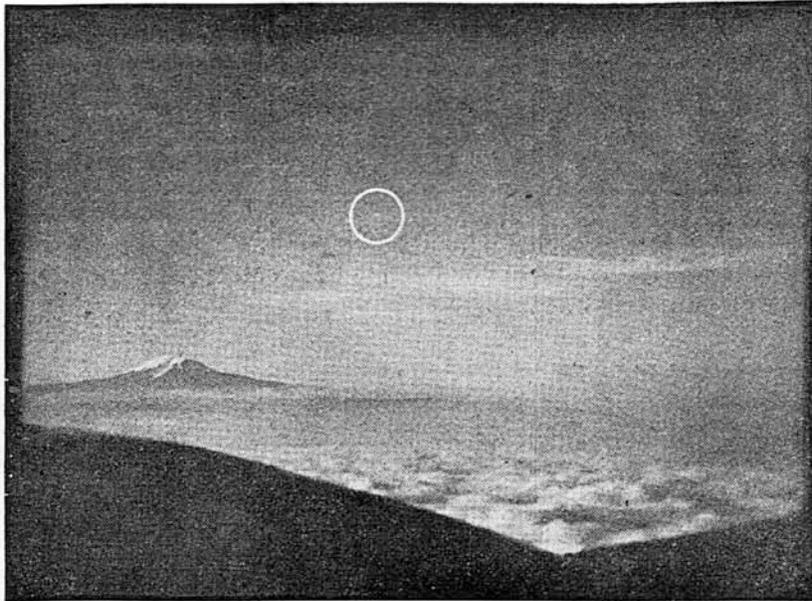
THIS IS WHAT THEY SAW: This diagram was prepared from a sketch by Captain Bicknell. Apart from the dark bands on the fuselage there is a lack of detail which makes the phenomenon even more puzzling. The "fin" at the rear of the machine might indicate some form of jet propulsion.

Ray Overstreet was said to have continued on to South Africa and upon arrival made a point to contact the press, in this case the "Natal Mercury" of Durban (notes in Center for UFO Studies case file). The Mercury was said to have published a story and photo in their March 14, 1951 edition. However, it seemed that no one was able to obtain a copy of the clip or photo for examination over the subsequent 64 years.

Finding a copy of the newspaper proved to be very difficult since incomplete holdings exist in only a few places. The National Library of South Africa for example confirmed that they had this edition of the newspaper, and went as far as to ask me for a permission letter from the current newspaper editor, which was done. After this was provided, no other information

came from the library after at least eight later inquiries. The British Library was finally able to produce the copy of the Mercury for examination.

Flying Saucer?



*Natal Mercury
Durban South Africa
March 14, 1951*

THIS picture was taken yesterday by a "Natal Mercury" photographer while Mr. Ray Overstreet was showing the film of what is claimed to be a flying saucer over Mount Kilimanjaro. On the screen, the object appears about the size of half a crown, but on this newspaper reproduction is seen as only a white pinprick inside the ring.

"SAUCER" FLIES ON CINE FILM — OR DOES IT?

By Our Shipping Reporter

YESTERDAY I saw what is claimed to be the first film of a flying saucer, taken by Mr. Ray Overstreet, radio operator in the American ship Robin Mowbray, when he was a passenger in an aircraft flying between Nairobi and Mombasa. The reel which he had just received after being developed in Johannesburg, opens with Mount Kilimanjaro about 50 miles on the starboard side of the aircraft. Suddenly, between 10,000 and 15,000 feet above the mountain, a white spot appears.

The object is then seen through telephoto lens and appears on the screen, about the size of a half-crown. It hovers past the extreme right edge of the mountain and then suddenly swoops down and across the mountain until it appears on the left edge many miles away.

Before the reel ends, the object ascends what must be many thousands of feet.

When the object is first seen, it appears to be a half circle, similar in shape to a parachute. Later it takes on an oblong shape.

THREE CONVINCED

Viewing the film with me were Durban harbour pilots R. Morton and A. Davis and Mr. R. Jenkins, former chief engineer, now an executive with a ship repairing firm. Before seeing the film, they were cynical. Afterwards Capt. Morton said: "Now I believe in flying saucers — or I'm sure there's something knocking about the skies which is unnatural. What we saw was definitely a solid body and not a cloud or reflection."

The other two concurred.

Mr. Overstreet sailed yesterday for the United States and hopes to interest newsreel companies there in his film.

This seems to be, as far as I know, the first time the photo from the Overstreet film has been available for study, such as it is. The object is very tiny, barely perceptible in the newspaper. It is certain that the image would be a good deal clearer if the original film was available, but it isn't and there is no telling when it might surface, if ever. The coverage in the Mercury adds new detail about the object's movement, saying the film shows the object as it "swoops down and across the mountain," appearing miles away on the left. As with the usual vagueness of newspapers, we are left wondering if this meant the UFO actually crossed in front of the mountain before accelerating upwards again, an observation that would limit its distance from the airliner.



This high contrast enlargement is provided to help illustrate the appearance of the UFO relative to the mountain.

The newspaper article mentions that this is the first flying saucer film, which of course it is not. It surely was one of the most obscure incidents from the early 1950s. Unfortunately, many facts are still not known but at least now we have a bit of a clearer view of this most interesting report.

The Estimate Of The Situation - Well, Not Exactly!

Hearing the phrase "Estimate of the Situation," or "EOTS" triggers an automatic response in many long time UFO researchers. The response is "Did someone find it?" They refer to a 1948 Air Force Project Sign document that pushed to generate military brass interest in continuing inquiries into what was then known as flying saucers. The document was produced sometime in the late summer-early fall and sent up through potential approval channels before being rejected by Hoyt Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff, as lacking proof. It was said to have contained a look at a large sample of the existing case reports up to that time. The document was supposed to have been destroyed but there is clear testimony that it existed as a relic into 1952 in the ATIC Branch records of the Air Force's Current Intelligence files at the Pentagon (personal correspondence from Dewey Fournet to James Melesciuc, May 23, July 27, 1992) No copy of this draft document has been seen except by a few Air Force officers since then.

However, an Estimate of the Situation doesn't concern just UFOs but can cover a wide range of military situations for which assessments as to current and further actions are described in detail, often highly classified. If one performs a modest search of government databases, such as the one for the National Archives, many old EOTS examples can be found. It is difficult, even with the current plans to digitize archival records, exactly what the documents contain unless a detailed index accompanies said records. This is being done at a snail's pace and very far from being finished. Budgetary constraints prohibit swift action for records preservation so we will have to wait short of the on-site, page by page thumbing through files that for most researchers could only last for a week or two.

By routine inquiries of government archives, we have been able to identify an Estimate of the Situation that does discuss unidentified flying objects in the summer of 1948, though not the one anticipated by researchers. As far as can be determined, this is the first EOTS discussing UFO phenomena that we have in hand.

The U.S. 5th Air Force was headquartered at Irumagawa Air Force Base in Japan in the aftermath of World War 2, helping to oversee the occupation forces until late 1950. Periodically, 5AF would issue a variety of assessments concerning post-war theater activities in the general area of the Pacific. A formerly classified Estimate of the Situation was prepared for the period August 7 through September 4, 1948 that well after this time eventually ended up at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama where much old Air Force archival material ends up, sometimes before being passed along to the National Archives in Washington, D. C. In the past, documents and microfilm had been acquired relating to UFO reports by Jan Aldrich in an on-site visit as well as through mail inquiries by a small group of other researchers, including Robert Todd and Robert Powell. Reports and microfilm would be requested for release, without us really knowing what was in them but which showed promise as possibly containing useful information on the topic.

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DECLASSIFIED
EO 11652

~~SECRET~~

5th Air Force

c/s USAF, Wash 25 D.C.

COPY NO. *24/40*

*Attn Air Intel Requirements Div
Dir 3 Intel.*

*730.609
7 AUG 4 SEP 1948*

HEADQUARTERS FIFTH AIR FORCE

HISTORICAL
ARCHIVE
29 SEP 1948

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AF 12963

ESTIMATE
OF THE SITUATION

FROM *7 AUG 1948*

TO *4 SEP 1948*

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1471*

Cover page of 5th Air Force Estimate of the Situation.

When it was noticed that the 5th Air Force EOTS covered the exact time frame that the Project Sign EOTS had been produced, I did a double-take with a fleeting thought of "Could this have been THE Estimate?" This was just as quickly dismissed as I saw no way of working the 5th Air Force into the story. The report was requested to see what was contained within.

When it arrived, this EOTS didn't disappoint. Contained on page 14, mixed in with other non-relevant reporting, was this:

Spheroid Airborne Objects Sighted over Alaska - On 9 July two officers of the 72nd Reconnaissance, fishing at Fielding Lake, sighted a group of unidentified objects whose appearance and behavior were reminiscent of last year's "flying disc" encounters. Weather at the time was bright and sunny with some stratocumulus clouds.

The objects resembled a group of dots, grayish black in color and numbering about 20. They were plainly visible, and could be seen to be either spheroid or disc-shaped. They appeared to be jockeying back and forth in their group formation, which had no particular precision, but was described as resembling a shotgun blast pattern.

The objects were estimated to be at 5,000 feet, immediately below the cloud base. Direction of flight was from WNW to ESE and the objects were definitely flying a straight course at a speed in excess of 500 mph.

Just before the formation was sighted a loud roaring sound was heard, attributed at the time to strong wind in the timber. As the objects approached and passed, however, the sound sharpened into a roar such like that of a formation of jets. No exhaust trails were visible.

Subsequent checks determined that no formations of fighter aircraft were operating in the vicinity of Fielding Lake at that time.

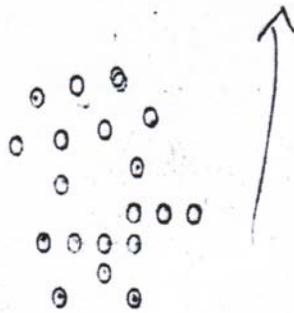
CONFIDENTIAL (k)

At the time of the sighting, July 9, Project Sign was active. So a check of the Project Blue Book (as Sign later became) index was in order. But here is where the story became peculiar. The 5th AF Estimate says the sighting occurred on July 9 at Fielding Lake, Alaska. The Project Blue Book index indicated that the sighting occurred at Fielding Lake, but in Washington State. Further, the letterhead of the 72nd Reconnaissance Squadron, Photographic said that their headquarters was in Seattle. So the report is listed for Washington. The coordinates in the written report for the sighting (63° 11' N, 145° 40' W) are southern Alaskan coordinates and the checklist form in the file explicitly states the sighting was for Fielding Lake, Alaska. So

we are back to Alaska again! The officers, named Caramia and Carpenter, had traveled to Alaska for their fishing trip, not in their home base state.

If there was ever a suggestion that the Air Force's UFO investigation was an efficient operation, this one was off to a bad start. But it gets more interesting. The narrative in the Sign file followed the one in the Estimate closely. One unsigned assessment of "Incident 145," as it was called in the file, thought "It seems more probable that they were distant aircraft flying in formation, or migrating birds." A sketch by the witnesses shows the general arrangement of the ~20 objects.

by a group of jet aircraft. No exhaust trails were visible. There were no photographs available.

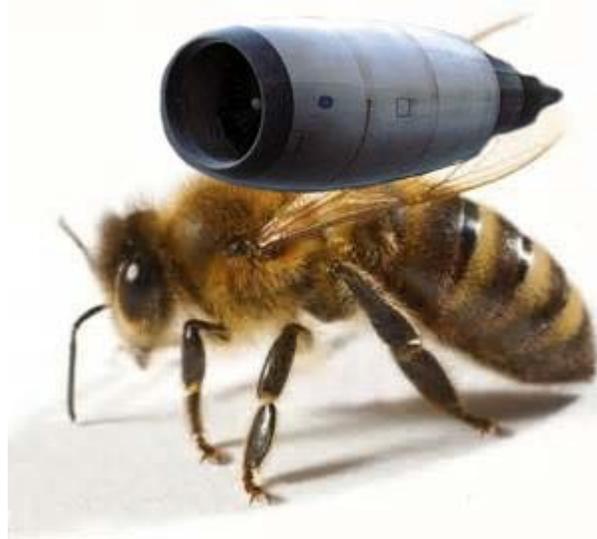


At first they were described as "dots" but soon became resolved as "spheroid or disc" shaped, which would seem to rule out aircraft or birds as to their visual appearance.

A noise accompanied the flight as the officers watched. Just before the objects appeared, the witnesses could hear a "loud roaring sound" that they thought was due to a strong wind in the surrounding trees. But as they passed into view, the sound became a buzz like jet engines would make. Duration of the observation was about 5 seconds. Dr. J. Allen Hynek studied the report and in the early days of his involvement as a consultant to the Air Force on UFO matters, he felt that this incident fell into the category of "Non-Astronomical but Suggestive of Other Explanations - Balloons or Ordinary Aircraft." This despite the objects' having been seen by trained photographic reconnaissance officers. Also, a later check by the 5th AF that no fighter aircraft formations were in the area during the event. Balloons moving in large, tight formation with a heavy drift estimated by the witnesses to be about 500 mph seems unlikely as well.

Hynek's explanation apparently didn't impress Air Force investigators either because the cover sheet for the report contained a hand-written conclusion written in place of an earlier one: Insects! It is uncertain as to how this assessment was made. What tipped off the analyst? The spheroid or disc shape perceived to be the shape of insects, according to the investigator, might have had something to do with it, but more likely as a reason was the loud roar that became a buzz. Everyone knows a "buzz" comes from some insects, particularly bees. Therefore, the witnesses were merely looking at bees or similar but with very loud wings like jet engines (Shades of Gerald Heard's book two years later).

Maybe like this:



You may think this is funny but that is the way the case went into the books. On the Project Blue Book index, the conclusion given is "Other (Insects)." It isn't a ridiculous explanation for a UFO sighting, as one who looks up on a spring day and blocks the sun with the edge of a roof can testify. Bright moving spots can readily be seen meandering in the blue sky, as airborne debris and insects are lit by the sunshine. But we must be reasonable as well in judging how sane an explanation may be. Leaving out large chunks of information in consideration of a final determination is not the way to do it. Blue Book did have officers who thought dealing with flying saucer/UFO reports was a wasteful task. They wanted to be rid of reports as quickly as they were received and would apply fast, if dirty, explanations to this end. Fielding Lake can be seen as one example of how this was accomplished.

So what have we learned from this? We have an idea of how the Project Sign Estimate of the Situation might have looked, with a different emblem of course. We know other Estimates can contain UFO reports. We know that the Air Force's UFO investigation

was sloppy and occasionally ludicrous. We know that some people can believe that bees can roar like a formation of jet aircraft. We know that upper elements of the military do not think much of the observational abilities of personnel trained specifically by them to be observers. Finally we know they didn't listen very closely to the opinions of their paid consultant when assessments were given. Some would call that awful. Others would call that much like a typical day in government!

Odd National Archive Entry

If one visits the U.S. National Archives website and enters "UFO Atlas Motion Picture," they will discover an unusual item. Listed is a movie film from 1962 described as follows:

"This film contains aerial coverage of a flight of Atlas F (Test 103) at the Atlantic Missile Range. It shows the missile in flight, then breaking up, with the camera holding on the nose cone, with a smaller object in flight above and behind the nose cone on a parallel path."

The film was obtained from the Archives by UFO researcher Shepherd Johnson and posted on You Tube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qu-7taSPEWc>) for all to see. A sample of the imagery shows the missile and a smaller object seeming to keep pace. This is reminiscent of the now-famous Big Sur report of 1964 involving Robert Jacobs but two years earlier and on the opposite coast. The object Jacobs filmed was said to have emitted beams that appeared to affect the nose cone's flight. This one did not seem to do anything similar. There doesn't appear to be a written report accompanying the film. Why does the government call it a UFO?



