

An Analysis of the Thomas Mantell UFO Case
By Kevin Randle

<http://www.virtuallystrange.net/ufo/ufoupdates/listers/mantell.html>

ABSTRACT: On January 7, 1948, Kentucky Air National Guard fighter pilot, Captain Thomas F. Mantell, crashed his F-51 fighter near Franklin, Kentucky. He had been chasing a large object claimed by some to be a flying saucer or UFO. There were multiple witnesses to the object including the commanding officer at Godman Army Air Field, Colonel Guy F. Hix. He, along with witnesses in the air and on the ground, provided descriptions of the UFO for Air Force investigators. The official conclusion was that Mantell had died in a tragic aircraft accident caused by his attempt to intercept the object later said to be Venus, a weather balloon, and then Venus and two weather balloons. The final, official conclusion was that Mantell had violated regulations by climbing above 14,000 feet without oxygen equipment and died in the resulting crash, and that the object he chased was a cosmic ray research balloon known as a *Skyhook*.

THE INCIDENT: As it is frequently reported in the UFO literature, the incident began at 1320 hours (1:20 p.m.). Technical Sergeant (T/SGT) Quinton Blackwell, working the tower at Godman Army Air Field at Fort Knox, Kentucky, received a telephone call from the military police saying that they had received a call from the Kentucky State Highway Patrol who said they were taking calls about something flying over Maysville, Kentucky. That information was brought to the attention of the base operations officer, the intelligence officer and finally, the base commander, Colonel Guy F. Hix. None was able to identify it.

For about an hour and twenty-five minutes, dozens of people including Colonel Hix, watched as the UFO seemed to hang motionless in the southwestern sky. In the towns of southern Kentucky, people watched the UFO, some claiming it drifted silently and slowly to the south. Others thought that it hovered for a few minutes and then resumed its slow flight. The witnesses were clearly describing something that was moving very slow.

At 2:45 p.m., the situation suddenly changed. A flight of F-51 Mustang fighters (it should be noted here that the designation of the Mustang had recently been changed from a "P" for pursuit, to an "F" for fighter) flew over Godman Army Air Field. With the UFO still visible, the flight leader, Captain Thomas Mantell, was asked if he would investigate. Mantell replied that he was merely ferrying the aircraft but that he would attempt an intercept. He began a spiraling, climbing turn to 220 degrees and 15,000 feet.

As he reached 15,000 feet, Mantell radioed the tower. Records of that transmission are in dispute. Mantell did say that the object was "above me and appears to be moving about half my speed." Later he would report that it was "metallic and it is tremendous in size." With the UFO still above him, he reported he would continue to climb.

The records are also confusing about the altitudes that various pilots reached. Clearly Mantell and two of his wingman reached 15,000 feet. Some of the documentation suggests that all three aircraft reached 22,000 feet, where the two wingmen who had stayed with him, Lieutenant A.W. Clements and Lieutenant B.A. Hammond turned back. The oxygen equipment of one of the fighters had failed and military regulations required that oxygen be used above 14,000 feet. Hammond radioed that they were abandoning the intercept, but Mantell, who had no oxygen equipment on his aircraft, continued to climb. He did not acknowledge the message from Hammond.

For thirty minutes, as the flight chased the huge object, each of the wingmen broke off the intercept. Now, at 3:10 p.m., Mantell was the only pilot left chasing the object and he was

alone at 23,000 feet. According to the documentation, he either told his wingmen that he was going to climb to 20,000 feet and if he could get no closer or observe anything else, he would break off the intercept. Others suggested that he said he was going to 25,000 feet for ten minutes.

The last that anyone saw of him, he was still climbing toward the UFO but made no more radio calls to either his wingmen or the control tower at Godman. By 3:15 everyone had lost both radio and visual contact with him.

Fearing the worst, a search was launched and just after 5:00 p.m., on a farm near Franklin, Kentucky, the remains of Mantell's F-51 were found scattered over about a half a mile. Mantell's body was inside the broken cockpit. His watch had stopped at 3:18 p.m. From the evidence it seems that Mantell was killed in the crash of his aircraft.

These are the facts as they have been established to this point. This is, of course, a bare bones examination of the incident. There is additional information and analysis of what happened, some of it based solely on speculation.

An accident investigation began immediately, as was required by regulations. It was a two pronged attack. One was to determine what happened to Mantell and why he had crashed. In other words, it was a standard aircraft accident. The second was to identify the object, or objects, that he had chased. This was a UFO investigation.

THE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION: Accident investigators, unconcerned with the reports of the disk-shaped object, attempted to learn why Mantell had crashed. They looked at everything relating to the flight, Mantell's experience as a pilot, and even the manufacture of the aircraft. According to the Army Air Forces Report of Major Accident, aircraft number 44-65869, which was built on December 15, 1944, crashed 3.5 miles from Franklin, Kentucky. The narrative section contains a description of the accident. It stated:

On 7 January 1948 at approximately 1450-1455, Captain Mantell was leading a flight of four (4) P-51 aircraft on a flight from Marietta Air Base, Marietta, Georgia to Standiford Field at Louisville, Kentucky. Nearing Godman Field, Kentucky, the flight was contacted by Godman Field Control Tower and requested to identify an object in the sky if the mission would permit. Captain Mantell replied that his mission was ferrying aircraft and that he would attempt to identify the object in the sky. Captain Mantell began a maximum climb in left spirals until about 14000 feet and from there a straight climb at maximum, on a compass heading of approximately 220 degrees. No conversation between Captain Mantell and any member of his flight revealed a clue as to his intentions. One pilot left the flight as the climb began, the remaining two discontinued the climb at approximately 22000 feet. When last observed by the wing man Lt. Clements, Captain Mantell was in a maximum climb at 22500 feet, the aircraft in perfect control. Captain Mantell was heard to say in ship to ship conversation that he would go to 25000 feet for about ten minutes and then come down. Transmission was garbled and attempts to contact Captain Mantell by his flight were unanswered. Lt. Clements was the only pilot equipped with an oxygen mask. This flight had been planned and scheduled as a ferry and navigational trip at low level.

Consensus is that Captain Mantell lost consciousness at approximately 25000 feet, the P-51 being trimmed for a maximum climb continued to climb gradually levelling out as increasing altitude caused decrease in power. The aircraft began to fly in reasonably level attitude at about 30000 feet. It then began a gradual turn to the left because of torque, slowly increasing degree of bank as the nose depressed, finally began a spiraling dive which resulted in excessive speeds

causing gradual disintegration of aircraft which probably began between 10000 and 20000 feet.

Since canopy lock was in place after the crash, it is assumed that Captain Mantell made no attempt to abandon the aircraft, and was unconscious at moment of crash or had died from lack of oxygen before aircraft began spiraling dive from about 30000 feet.

Parts of the aircraft were found as far as six-tenths (estimated) of a mile from central wreckage. The parts were scattered north to south. The aircraft came straight down in a horizontal position and landed on the left side. The left wing came off while in the air and landed 100 feet from the central wreckage. The aircraft did not slide forward after contact with the ground.

[Mantell had] Violated AAF [Army Air Forces] Reg. 60-16 Par. 43. However Capt. Mantell was requested by Godman Field Control Tower to investigate objects in the sky, causing this Officer to go above limits of AAF Reg. 60-16.

They recommended, quite naturally, that all pilots again be briefed on the use of oxygen equipment and the effects of the lack of oxygen on the human body and mind.

Destruction of Mantell's Aircraft

There were a number of affidavits offered as supporting documentation of the accident. A witness on the ground, William C. Mayes, saw the aircraft as it circled at altitude and then watched as it fell from the sky, breaking apart. He signed an affidavit within hours of the accident. It said:

I, William C. Mayes of Route #3, Lake Springs Road, Franklin, Kentucky, Simpson County do state that on 7 January 1948 at approximately three-fifteen P.M. I heard an airplane overhead making a funny noise as if he were diving down, and pulling up, but it was just circling. After about three circles, the airplane started into a power dive slowly rotating. This place was so high I could hardly see it when it started down. IT started to make a terrific noise, ever increasing, as it descended. It exploded half way between where it started the dive and the ground. No fire was seen. It hit or crashed at three-twenty P.M., Central. It didn't explode when it hit the ground and did not burn.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal at my home on Route #3, Lake Spring Road, Franklin, Kentucky this 7th day of January 1948.

William C. Mayes

Sworn and subscribed before me
7th day of January 1948

Richard L. Tyler
Captain, KY ANG
Summary Court Officer

It should be noted that Glenn Mayes signed a similar statement on the same day. There is little difference between what the two eye witnesses said they saw as Mantell's plane began to break up high overhead.

Time of Impact

The exact time of the crash was established by Mantell's watch which it was assumed stopped on impact. An affidavit was completed with the county coroner. It said:

I, Harry W. Booker, Simpson County, Frnaklin [sic], Kentucky, upon examing [sic] the dead body of Captain Thomas F. Mantell Jr. do state that the shattered watch of Captain Mantell stopped at 3:18 P.M. Central, which I fix as the time of death of Captain Mantell.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal at Franklin, Kentucky this 7th day of January 1948.

Signed by Harry W. Booker

Sworn to and subscribed before me
this 7th day of January 1958.

Richard L. Tyler
Captain Ky ANG
Summary Court Officer

Anoxia/Hypoxia

The last part of the accident summary suggested that Mantell had lost consciousness due to anoxia. This was the actual cause of the accident. The accident investigators seemed to be quite sure of the explanation. The question that came to mind was if the effects of anoxia could come on that quickly, and if so, why hadn't they affected the wingmen as they did Mantell?

According to the Internet website of the [National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke](#) (NINDS) and to www.neuroskills.com anoxia is defined as a

"condition in which there is an absence of oxygen supply to an organ's tissues although there is adequate blood flow to the tissue...Anoxia... may be caused by a number of events, such as heart attack, severe asthma, smoke or carbon monoxide inhalation, high altitude exposure... In severe cases of anoxia... from any cause, the patient is often stuporous or comatose... Seizures, myoclonic jerks (muscle spasms or twitches), and neck stiffness may occur."

Another Internet resource, The [HealthLink](#) website, clarifies the definition by reporting,

"Specifically, anoxia is a condition in which there is an absence of oxygen supply to an organ's tissues although there is adequate blood flow to the tissue. Hypoxia is a condition in which there is a decrease of oxygen to the tissue in spite of adequate blood flow."

In technical terms, it seems that although Mantell could have suffered from anoxia, he probably suffered from a type hypoxia known as hypoxemic which, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica is "encountered in pilots, mountain climbers, and people living at high altitudes, where the barometric pressure results in a decrease in the amount of breathable oxygen."

Taking all of this one step further, Dr. Stanley R. Mohler, writing in Flight Safety Foundation - Human Factors and Aviation Medicine, reported, "In older literature, the term 'anoxia' may be found. The literal meaning is 'without oxygen,' and the term rarely is used today because most oxygen deficiencies occur along a scale of decreasing levels of oxygen in the body, rather than a total absence of oxygen."

In other words, it is not unreasonable to believe that Mantell had climbed to 25,000 feet and was overcome by hypoxia. The effects can be devastating and certainly can lead to unconsciousness. The critical question here is at what altitude would these symptoms begin to manifest. According to the [MEDLINE plus Medical Encyclopedia](#):

"Acute mountain sickness Reduced atmospheric pressure and a lower concentration of oxygen at high altitude are the causes of this illness [hypoxemic hypoxia]. It affects the nervous system, lungs, muscles, and heart. Symptoms can range from mild to life-threatening.

In most cases the symptoms are mild, but in severe cases fluid collects in the lungs (pulmonary edema) causing extreme shortness of breath and further decreasing oxygenation. Swelling may also occur in the brain (cerebral edema) causing confusion, coma, and if untreated, death.

The likelihood and severity of altitude illness is greater with increasing rate of ascent, higher altitude (emphasis added), and higher levels of exertion.

Approximately 20% of people will develop mild symptoms at altitudes between 6,300 to 9,700 feet, but pulmonary and cerebral edema are extremely rare at those heights. However, above 14,000 feet (emphasis added), a majority of people will experience at least mild symptoms, while approximately 10% and 1.5%, respectively, of unacclimatized people staying at this altitude will develop pulmonary or cerebral edema."

In the prevention section of the website, it was recommended that

"Mountaineering parties traveling above 9,840 feet (3000 meters) should carry oxygen supply sufficient for several days."

What this tells us is that symptoms, though mild, can begin as low as 6,300 feet, or just slightly higher than Denver, Colorado, and that people traveling above 9,840 (or just under 10,000 feet and well below the 14,000 feet that required the use of oxygen in aircraft according to Army regulations in 1948) should have supplemental oxygen. Mantell was well above those altitudes.

The Swift Onset of Hypoxia

The last question to be asked was how rapid would be the onset of the symptoms. Would Mantell have been susceptible to hypoxia (hypoxemic) after only minutes at altitude. After all, the wingmen reported they had followed him to 22,500 feet before they turned back because one of them didn't have oxygen equipment. Neither man lost consciousness and crashed.

The crash of golfer Payne Stewart's Lear 35 (private jet) provides some information about the rapidity of hypoxia at high altitude. According to an [Associated Press story](#),

"Controllers last talked to the pilots when they confirmed an instruction to climb to 39,000 feet as the plane flew from Orlando, Fla., to Love Field in Dallas. If pressure was lost at that altitude, everyone would have been incapacitated almost immediately."

Ed Ruppelt, the former chief of Project Blue Book, in his book, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, wrote,

"In high altitude indoctrination during World War II, I made several trips up to 30,000 feet in a pressure chamber. To demonstrate anoxia, we would leave our

oxygen masks off until we became dizzy. A few of the more hardy souls could get to 15,000 feet, but nobody ever got over 17,000. Possibly Mantell thought he could climb up to 20,000 in a hurry and get back down before he got anoxia and blacked out, but this would be a foolish chance." (Ruppelt, 1956, 53)

Most telling is a chart found in *Quick Response by Pilots Remains Key to Surviving Cabin Decompression* written by Mohler. According to his chart which he adapted from Fundamentals of Aerospace Medicine, at 20,000 feet, Mantell could expect to remain "usefully conscious" for ten minutes; at 22,000 feet he would have remained conscious for six minutes; at 24,000 feet, three minutes and at 26,000 feet, two minutes. Extrapolating from the table, if Mantell had climbed to 25,000, he would not have had the ten minutes of useful consciousness required for his self-defined search. At best, he would have had only two and a half minutes.

There is one area of confusion and that is the altitude where the wingmen left Mantell. The accident report seems to suggest that they followed him to 22,000 feet, and that he had reported he would climb on to 25,000 feet before he abandoned the intercept. Ruppelt, however, suggested that the wingmen followed him only to 15,000 feet and that Mantell's intention was to climb to 20,000 feet for ten minutes.

The discrepancy might be an outgrowth of the violation of regulations. All the pilots involved, including Mantell, knew that they were prohibited from climbing above 14,000 feet without supplemental oxygen. They knowingly violated those regulations. To protect those who survived, it might have been suggested to them that they report they had not flown above 20,000.

It should also be noted that, according to the file,

"At 22,500 feet Clements told Mantell they were getting too high, Clements [sic] wingman, Lt. Hammond had no oxygen and was getting dizzy... When Clements had reported to Mantell that he was turning back, Mantell told him they would go to 25,000 feet, level off, fly for ten minutes as [sic] then go down. When Clements broke off with his wingman at about 23,000 he called Mantell and informed him he had left and Mantell's reply was garbled."

The official files do little to resolve this conflict. It is unclear from the documentation, or from the statements filed by the various wingmen, at what altitude they left Mantell, at what altitude he was when they received his last transmission, or what his exact intentions were. All that is of little importance because it is clear that he continued the intercept beyond 20,000 feet. At that point he would have remained conscious, at best, for ten minutes.

Conclusion of the Accident Investigation: It's clear from the reports and documentation available that the cause of the accident was Mantell's violation of the regulations and his climb above 25,000 feet. It is also clear from the documentation, including the affidavits collected within hours of the crash, that the aircraft broke up while still airborne. The stresses on the airframe had exceeded those for which it was designed. Once it began to disintegrate, those forces began stronger, ripping the plane apart.

Contrary to what some writers have suggested, there were no mystery wounds on Mantell's body, the aircraft was not riddled with nearly microscopic holes, or that outside forces knocked the plane from the sky. Mantell had made a tragic mistake by climbing too high too fast. The lack of oxygen and oxygen equipment is what killed him.

THE UFO INVESTIGATION: Although there was a logical, if not spectacular explanation for the crash and Mantell's death, there was no clear explanation for what Mantell had chased, at least in the beginning. That would be the second prong of the official investigation.

Eyewitness Statements

Within forty-eight hours, Air Force investigators collected statements from the military witnesses who had been in Godman Tower on January 7. This gave them a clearer picture of what had happened and who had seen what. First was the statement of TSGT Blackwell [all statements contained in the Project Blue Book files on file in the National Archives, microfilm T-1206, Roll 2] in which he noted:

9 January 1948

STATEMENT OF T SGT QUINTON A BLACKWELL

I, T Sgt Quinton A Blackwell, AF18162475, was on duty as chief operator in the Control Tower at Godman Field, Ky. on the afternoon of 7 January 1948. Up until 1315 or 1320 matters were routine. At approximately that time I received a telephone call from Sgt Cook, Col Hix's office, stating that according to Ft Knox Military Police and "E" Town state police, a large circular (sic) object from 250 to 300 ft in diameter over Mansville, Ky. and requested I check with Army Flight Service to see if any unusual type aircraft was in the vicinity. Flight Service advised negative on the aircraft and took the other info, requesting out (sic) CO verify the story. Shortly afterward Flight Service gave Godman Tower positions on the object over Irvington, Ky. then Owensboro, Ky. of about the same size and description. About 1345 or 1350 I sighted an object in the sky to the South of Godman Field. As I wanted verification, I called my Detachment Commander, 1st Lt Orner, to the Tower. After he had sighted the object, he called for the Operations Officer, Capt. Carter, over the teletalk box from the Traffic Desk. He came up stairs immediately, and looked at the object through field glasses in the Tower. He then called for the CO, Col Hix. He came to the tower about 1420 (appx) and sighting the object immediately. About 1430 to 1440 a flight of four P-51s approached Goldman Field from the South, enroute to Marietta, Ga. to Standiford Field, Ky. As they passed over the tower I called them on "B" channel, VHF and asked the flight leader, NG 869, if he had enough gas and if so, would he mind trying to identify an object in the sky to the South of Godman Field. He replied in the affirmative and made a right turn around with two planes and proceeded South from Godman Field. The fourth plane proceeded on to Standiford Field alone. The three ship formation proceeded South on a heading of 210 [degrees], climbing steadily. About 1445 the flight leader, NG 869, reported seeing the object "ahead and above, I'm still climbing". To which a wing man retorted, "What the Hell are we looking for"? The leader reported at 15,000 ft that "The object is directly ahead of and above me now, moving about half my speed or faster. I'm trying to close in for a better look. This last contact was at about 1515. About 5 min. afterward, the other two ships in the flight turned back. As they passed over Godman NG 800 reported "It appears like the reflection of sunlight on an airplane canopy". Shortly afterward, the same pilot and plane took off from Standiford and resumed the search. He went to 33,000 feet one hundred miles South and did not sight anything. I left the Control Tower shortly afterward.

The foregoing statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. Signed by Quinton A. Blackwell.

"CERTIFIED A TRUE COPY"
JAMES F. DUESLER, JR., CAPT., USAF

In the tower at the time of the initial telephone call was PFC Stanley Oliver. Blackwell pointed the object out to Oliver who was also spotted it. Two days later, he offered the following:

9 January 1948

STATEMENT OF PFC STANLEY OLIVER

I, Pfc Stanley Oliver, was on duty in the Control Tower at Godman Field on the afternoon of 7 January 1948. When first heard of the object in the sky about 1320 CST, we received a phone call from Colonel Hix's office that a large object was sighted at Mansville, Kentucky, the supposed object was supposed to be 250 feet to 300 feet in diameter at 1330 CST or more.

Sgt Blackwell sighted an object to the southwest of Godman Field and he asked me if I saw it. I saw the object but thought I was imagining I saw it and Sgt Blackwell told me to look again. This time I was really sure I saw an object and then we called Lt Orner, who came to the Control Tower and he too saw the object. Lt Orner then called Captain Carter who, called Colonel Hix who came to the Control Tower and he too saw the object. We all then attempted to figure out just what it could be and to me it had the resemblance of an ice cream cone topped with red.

At or about 1445 CST we sighted five (5) P-51 aircraft coming on from the southwest and as they came over the Control Tower someone suggested contacting the aircraft. Sgt Blackwell contacted them on "B" channel (VHF) and aircraft acknowledged his call. Someone suggested they try to overtake the object and we requested the planes to try and the flight leader stated he would. The call sign of this ship was NG869. They turned around and stared toward the southwest again. One pilot in the formation told the flight leader that he would like to continue on to Louisville with the flight leader giving his permission to do so. We kept in contact with the flight leader for about twenty-five (25) minutes. The last contact we had with the flight leader was when one of his wingmen called and said "what the hell are we looking for". Flight leader stated had the object in sight and he was going up to see what it was. He said at present he was at 15000 feet and was still climbing. Those were the last words I believe we heard from him. Other pilots in the formation tried to contact him but to no avail.

In about another ten or fifteen minutes another P-51 took off from Standiford Field to look for the object. He gave me a call and asked if we still had the object in sight. He was told that at present the object was behind a cloud formation but he said he would try and locate it and in the meantime he tried contacting his flight leader but was unable to do so. He then reported he was unable to see the object and was coming back in when he came over the Control Tower.

I received a call from Standiford Operations that the plane had crashed and the pilot was killed at Franklin, Kentucky. He then sighted the object again and to my belief the object was a great distance from Godman Field and it was so far I couldn't tell if it was moving or not.

At 2:07 p.m. on January 7, Captain Gary Carter, the operations officer was called and he went to the control tower. Later he provided Air Force investigators with a written statement of his experiences and observations. He wrote:

9 January 1948

The undersigned was on duty at Godman Field 7 Jan 48 as Operations Officer.

At approximately 1400 hours and 7 minutes, 7 Jan 48 I received a call from Lt. Orner, AACS Detachment Commander, that the Tower had spotted an unidentified object and requested that I take a look. Lt. Orner pointed out the object to the southwest, which was easily discernible with the naked eye. The

object appeared round and white (whiter than the clouds that passed in front of it) and could be seen through cirrus (sic) clouds. After looking through field glasses for approximately 3 or 4 minutes I called Co. (sic) Hix's office, advising that office of the object's presence. Lt. Col. Wood and Capt. Duesler came to the tower immediately. Col Hix followed them.

About this time a flight of four P-51 aircraft were noticed approaching from the south. I asked Tec. Sgt. Blackwell, Tower Operator to contact the planes and see if they would take a look at the object for us. The planes were contacted and stated they had sufficient gas to take a look. One of the planes proceeded on to Standiford, the other planes were given a heading of 230 [degrees]. One of the planes said he spotted the object at 1200 o'clock [directly in front of him] and was climbing toward it. One of the planes then said, "This is 15,000 ft., let's level out". One of the planes, at this point (apparently the plane who saw the subject) estimated its speed (the objects') at 180 M.P.H. A few seconds later he stated the object was going up and forward as fast as he was. He stated that he was going to 20,000 feet, and if no closer was going to abandon the chase. This was the last radio contact I heard. It was impossible to identify which plane was doing the talking in the above report. Later we heard that one plane had landed at Standiford to get fuel and oxygen to resume the search.

The undersigned reported to Flight Service a description, position of the object while the planes searched for it.

Signed by Gary W. Carter

"CERTIFIED A TRUE COPY"
JAMES F. DUESLER, JR.
CAPTAIN, USAF

Also in the tower was Lt. Orner, who was later interviewed by Air Force investigators. In his written statement, he reported:

9 January 1948

STATEMENT OF LT PAUL I ORNER

Following is an account of the sighting of unknown objects from the Control Tower on 7 January 1948 at Godman Field:

On the above date at approximately 1400 CST a report came in to the Control Tower through M Sgt Cook of a report of an unidentified object flying at terrific speed in the vicinity of Maysville. This call was cancelled minutes later by the Military Police at Fort Knox who had instructions from the Kentucky State Police

Very soon thereafter several reports of the same nature came from Flight Service saying this object was over Irvington and Ownesboro, Kentucky. At the same time an object was reported by T Sgt Blackwell, Chief Control Tower operator on duty. I was in the office of the Commanding Officer checking the call from the Fort Knox Military Police at this time. When the call was cancelled I was returning to the Control Tower to see the object sighted by them. I immediately went to the Control Tower and saw a small white object in the southwest sky. This object appeared stationary. I was unable to tell if it was an object radiating its own light or giving off reflected light. Through binoculars it partially appeared as a parachute does with bright sun shining on the top of the silk but there also seemed to be some red light around the lower [part] of it.

The Commanding Officer, Operations Officer, S-2 and Executive Officer were called immediately. Several minutes after the object was sighting a flight of four (4) P-51's came over the field from the south. I instructed T Sgt Blackwell to call flight leader and ask if they had seen any evidence of this object. The flight leader answered negative and I suggested to the Operations Officer that we ask them if they had enough gas to go look for this object. The Tower operator was instructed to call the flight leader and he answered "yes" to this question. One (1) P-51 had permission from the flight leader to break formation and continue where he landed several minutes later on their original flight plan. The flight leader and two (2) other planes flew a course of 210 [degrees] and in about five (5) minutes sighted the object. At first the flight leader reported it high and about one-high his speed at "12 o'clock". Shortly thereafter the flight leader reported it at about his speed and later said he was closing in to take a good look. This was the last message from NG869, the flight leader. NG800 shortly thereafter reported NG869 disappeared. From pilots reports in the formation NG869 was high and ahead of the wing man at about 1515 CST to 1530 CST when he disappeared. NG800 said he was breaking off with other wing man to return to Standiford Field due to lack of gas. This was about 1525 CST to 1530 CST. From messages transmitted by the formation it was estimated the flight leader was at 18 to 20 thousand feet and the wing man at approximately 15 thousand feet wide formation when flight leader NG896 disappeared. NG800 and other wing man returned to Standiford Field.

NG800 gassed up and got more oxygen and flew a second mission on the same heading of 210 [degrees] to a position about 100 miles south of Godman Field to an altitude of 33 thousand feet and did not sight the object. About 1645 CST when NG800 reported not seeing the object I left the Control Tower.

At about 1735 CST I returned to the Control Tower and a bright light different than a star at a position of about 240 [degrees] azimuth and 8 [degrees] elevation from the Control Tower. This was a round object. It seemed to have a dark spot in the center and the object moved north and disappeared from the horizon at a point 250 [degrees] from the Tower. The unusual fact about this object was the fact that it remained visible and did not disappear until it went below the level of the Earth in a manner similar to the sun or moon setting. This object was viewed and tracked with the Weather Station theodolite from the hangar roof.

Relevant Witness Testimony

Boiled down to their essence, these statements provided a glimpse about Mantell and what he had seen. Questioned on several points within days of the sighting, these men reported what they remembered Mantell saying. While the exact wording was lost, and no tower recording was made, the meanings were quite clear. From Mantell, each of these witnesses reported:

Info taken from reports of radio conversation between Control at Godman and Ng 869 essentially as follows:

Col Hix's account. NG 869: "Object traveling at 180 MPH - half my speed.

Lt Orner's account. NG 869: "high and traveling about ½ my speed at 12 o'clock position."

Later: "Closing in to take a good look"

No further word heard by Orner.

T/Sgt Quinton A. Blackwell: NG 869: At 1445. "Object traveling at 180 MPH Directly ahead & above me now and moving at about ½ my speed."

Later: "I'm trying to close in for a better look"

At 15,000 ft: "Object directly ahead of and above me now and moving about ½ my speed. It appears to metallic of tremendous size. I'm trying to close in for better look"

No other word heard by Blackwell from NG 869.

Capt Gary W. Carter: NG 869 "Object going up and forward as fast as he was" - approx 360 MPH

"Going to 20,000 feet and if no closer will abandon chase."

No further contact heard by Capt Carter - Apparently last word ever received from NG 869.

These same witnesses, who watched the object for more than an hour, sometimes through binoculars, offered a range of descriptions that, in the end, matched more or less. Their words might have been different, and they searched for their own comparisons, but they all described the same basic object. They reported:

Col Guy F. Hix: "It was very white and looked like an umbrella."

"I thought it was a celestial body but I can't account for the fact it didn't move."

"I just don't know what it was."

He said it was about 1/4 size of the full moon and white in color. Through the binoculars it appeared to have a red border at the bottom at times and a red border at the top at times. It remained stationary (seemingly) for 1 - 1 ½ hours.

Capt Carter: "Object appeared round and white (whiter than the clouds that passed in front of it) and could be seen through cirrus (sic) clouds."

From interview with Duesler (accompanied by LTC E. G. Wood):

Wood said that the object appeared about 1/10 the size of a full moon, if the thing were a great distance away, as compared to the diminishing size of the P-51's flying toward it, it would seem that it was at least several hundred feet in diameter.

After dark, another or the same object appeared in approx 234 [degrees] from Godman at 6 [degrees] elevation. This body moved to the west (259 [degrees]) and then down. The shape was fluid but generally round with no tail, the color changing from white, to blue, to red to yellow and had a black spot in the center at all times.

NOTE: Later, an astronomer was contacted who attempted to account for this phenomena as wither Venus or a comet. (?)

PFC Stanley Oliver: "resembled an ice cream cone topped with red."

Lt. Orner: (Through binoculars) "Could not determine of (sic) object radiated or reflected light. Thru binocs (sic) it appeared partially as parachute with bright sun reflecting from top of the silk, however, there seemed to be some red light around the lower part of it.

THEORIES AND EXPLANATIONS: What is interesting here is the descriptions all suggest something with a rounded top and then a long and tapering underside. The weather balloons, with which they would have been familiar in 1948 all would have been about 15 to 20 feet in diameter and would have been round, or ball like. Clearly these descriptions do not fit with a weather balloon, but do fit with that of a Skyhook balloon.

Venus

On that document was one of the first mentions of Venus as the possible culprit. Looking at only the direction of the object in the sky, and given the time of day, Air Force investigators, or in this case, Air National Guard investigators, noticed that Venus would have been occupying that part of the sky. According to the astronomical charts available, at the time of the initial UFO sighting, Venus could be seen in the daylight sky in the approximate location of the UFO. A few of the investigators thought that Venus, if seen by Mantell, might explain the sighting.

Astronomers consulted acknowledged that Venus would have been visible, but doubted that a random search of the sky would have found it. Although bright enough to be seen in the daylight, it would have blended easily into the surrounding sky. If there was even the lightest of haze, Venus probably wouldn't have been visible to those on the ground. Or, in other words, Venus was not an acceptable explanation, and the cause of the sighting would have to be found elsewhere.

In the official files, one of the reports goes into depth about Venus.

"However, under exceptionally good atmospheric conditions and the eye shielded from the direct rays of the sun, Venus might be seen as an exceeding tiny bright point of light. It can be shown that it was definitely brighter than the surrounding sky, for on the date in question, Venus has a semidiameter of six seconds of arc... While it is thus physically possible to see Venus at such times, usually its pinpoint character and large expanse of sky makes its casual detection very unlikely."

They were, in effect, saying that Venus was visible but they didn't think it was the answer.

The Air Force investigator was not finished with the Venus, however. He wrote,

"The chances, of course, of looking at just the right spot are very few. Once done, however, it is usually fairly easy to relocate the object and call the attention of others to it. However, atmospheric conditions must be exceptionally good."

Venus and Balloons

Venus was no longer the preferred answer. The official report said,

"It had been unofficially reported that the object was a Navy cosmic ray balloon. If this can be established, it is to be the preferred an explanation."

But this report was anything but consistent. Having said that it was Venus, that it wasn't Venus, and that it was a balloon, the investigator now explained why it wasn't a balloon.

"If one accepts the assumption that reports from various locations in the state refer to the same object, any such device must have been a good many miles up... 25 to 50... in order to have been seen clearly, almost simultaneously, from places 175 miles apart."

Now, having run through all sorts of explanations, the investigator wrote,

"It is entirely possible, of course, that the first sightings were of some sort of balloon or aircraft and that when the reports came to Godman Field, a careful scrutiny of the sky revealed Venus, and it could be that Lieutenant [sic] Mantell did actually give chase to Venus."

Having gone through all that, the investigator now explained why he believed that Mantell had chased Venus. It did not appear to move away from him. Of course, if the object was, in fact, an extraterrestrial spacecraft, it might be that it was maneuvering to avoid the close approach of Mantell's fighter. That idea didn't seem to cross the mind of the Air Force investigator, and that says something about the mindset of the military as they were writing their reports.

Finally, the investigator wrote, again, that it was Venus, but for that explanation to work properly, he needed a balloon and one other object as well. Given these three items, though there is no evidence that all three existed, he believed he could explain the case. He wrote,

"Such a hypothesis [that is, Mantell chasing Venus] does still necessitate the inclusion of at least two other objects."

All of this suggests something about the investigations as they were being carried out in that era. It was a search for labels, but not necessarily a search for solutions. They were willing to accept nearly anything as an answer as long as they could remove a mysterious case from the files. And Mantell's case, because of the sensational aspects, as well as the public interest, was certainly one of those to be solved at all costs.

By late 1948, the Air Force became disgusted with the idea of UFOs. In the reports Air Force officers created, they explained as many of the cases as they could and suggested the remainder could be explained if there was sufficient information. They found nothing to suggest that UFOs were real. The problem, if ignored, would go away.

In 1952, a major magazine wanted to print an article about how spectacular UFO sightings had been explained through proper research and investigation. Because the spin of the article was that flying saucers did not exist, the Pentagon cooperated with the writer and the magazine. High-ranking Air Force officers assured the magazine editors that Mantell had chased Venus. In a move that was sure to anger the reporter and the magazine editor, week after the magazine was published, the Air Force released a new answer. Mantell had chased a balloon.

Speed of the Balloons

Donald Keyhoe, who examined the Mantell case carefully and who used it as an example of the Air Force coverup, suggested in his 1950 book, *The Flying Saucers Are Real*, reported, "The fast flight from Madisonville, the abrupt stop and hour-long hovering at Godman Field, the quick bursts of speed Mantell reported make it impossible. To fly the 90 miles from Madisonville to Fort Knox in thirty minutes, a balloon would require a wind of 180 m.p.h. After traveling at this

hurricane speed, it would then have had to come to a dead stop above Godman Field. As the P-51's (sic) approached, it would have had to speed up again to 180, then to more than 360 to keep ahead of Mantell (Keyhoe, 41).

The evidence, as provided by the eyewitnesses, tends to nullify much of Keyhoe's arguments. He believed that the balloon, to be seen, would have been at a low altitude, but these were Skyhook balloons made of polyethylene which had a metallic sheen to it. Reflecting sunlight gave them the appearance of an internal luminescence and made them visible to those on the ground, even when the balloon was close to its upper limit of more than nineteen or twenty miles.

Second, Keyhoe, as have others, assumed that the reports of the balloons from various locations indicated when the object first appeared over those locations. These researchers then measured the distance between the two, and divided it by the time to come up with a speed. There are several problems with this, not the least of which is assuming that all the clocks were synchronized to the same time. If the clocks were off by five or ten minutes, then the speed is reduced.

Keeping with that, no direction for the sightings are supplied, so that people in one location might have not been looking at the balloon directly overhead, but seeing it to the west, while those in another western town, might have been looking to the east. If that is the case, then the speed is significantly reduced.

If a Skyhook balloon was drifting slowly, halfway between two locations separated by 90 miles or more and was twenty miles high, then witnesses in those two locations could have seen the object between them and the timing is irrelevant because the Skyhook would have been high enough, bright enough and big enough to be seen in those locations at the same time.

Third, there is testimony from a number of witnesses that suggests the object was drifting slowly, about ten miles an hour. Keyhoe believed that many would have reported the balloon, or reported the object as a balloon, but since they didn't, the balloon answer is eliminated. Unfortunately for Keyhoe's theory, there were those who saw the balloon and reported it as such with a slow, balloon-like speed.

Skyhook Balloons

In the early 1950s, the UFO project was reorganized, and cases that had been "solved" were again examined. Ed Ruppelt, seeing that the Mantell case was one of the thickest, asked for a microfilm copy of it. Unfortunately, something had been spilled on part of it, so that it was difficult, if not impossible, to read.

Ruppelt had one advantage that those who had made the original investigations didn't. He knew of the Navy's high altitude research using huge balloons that were called "Skyhook." He tried to find records that would prove that Skyhook was responsible, but could find nothing that would put one of the balloons over Godman Field at the right time. Because he had no conclusive evidence, he left the case listed as a "probable balloon."

Ruppelt did try to find the evidence. He gathered wind charts that showed if a balloon had been released from Clinton Air Force Base, Ohio on January 7, 1948, it might have been in the right position to cause the sighting over Godman Army Air Field on that date. But Ruppelt could not confirm it.

In 1956, Ruppelt published a book about his experiences as the chief of Project Blue Book. Because he was seen as an insider, when he drew conclusions, they carried some weight. When

he said that he could find no records that proved a Skyhook balloon, or any other balloon was responsible, people listened.

Later, the controversy continued to rage. Dr. J. Allen Hynek, who was the scientific consultant for Project Blue Book, said that he didn't believe that Mantell was chasing Venus. He did say, however, "It is possible that Venus was also a cause to this sighting, and was observed by some of the witnesses on the ground. However, the prime culprit is believed to have been the Skyhook balloon released by the Navy. Captain Mantell was attempting to close in on one this balloon which was still more than 40,000 feet above him."

Research conducted by Robert Todd, Charles Moore and Barry Greenwood, and reported by Jerry Clark in his UFO encyclopedia (Clark, 1998, 606) reported, "thought the Skyhook identification is surely correct, the claim that it was launched from Clinton County airport is certainly mistaken. According to Charles B. Moore, who conducted balloon experiments for the government in the late 1940s, no Skyhook flew from the airport before July 9, 1951. As investigation conducted in the early 1990s by ufologists Barry Greenwood and Robert G. Todd identified the balloon as one set off from Camp Ripley, Minnesota, at 8 A.M. on January 6, 1948 ("The Mantell UFO," 1994).

The Balloon on Radar

When the Air Force ended the barrage of answers, the civilian UFO community was only too ready to pick up. Many of those writing about the Mantell case have suggested that the object was first spotted on radar. There are no accounts of radar sightings in the official records. Ruppelt makes no mention of it. In fact, the earliest reference to radar is in a book published in 1956. After that book appeared, others have picked up the idea that radar confirmed the UFO.

The Truth about Thomas Mantell

Others have claimed that Mantell was a World War II ace. Military records show that Mantell was a transport pilot during the war and therefore couldn't have shot down the five enemy aircraft necessary to become an ace. This doesn't mean that Mantell wasn't a good pilot or that he was a careless pilot. It merely proves that he wasn't a fighter pilot and didn't shoot down enemy planes.

In fact, he seemed to have been a very brave man. According to a letter sent to me by Mantell's sister, Bettye Mantell Risley,

"Tommy was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his calm and courageous action on D-Day [that is, the Normandy Invasion on June 6, 1944]. On that day he was ferrying a glider plane to a designated point behind German lines. His instructions were to cut the glider loose and return to base if attacked. Tommy was attacked but proceeded to [his] destination where men in the glider would be with others for mutual safety. He was then able to get his badly damaged plane back to his base in England."

But the problem here is that Mantell had only recently transitioned into the P-51. As a transport pilot, he normally flew below ten thousand feet because the transports were not pressurized and those riding in them would suffer the same effects from high altitude as pilots. According to the available records, Mantell had a total flight history of 2167 hours that included training time and co-pilot time. He was credited with 107 hours of combat flying time but he had only 67 hours in fighters.

Further Rumors

Almost before the aircraft hit the ground, there were rumors circulating about what had happened. Many of the reports from UFO books and magazine articles contain the essential information, and for the most part, report it accurately, there are always one or two paragraphs added that suggest something extraterrestrial.

Coral Lorenzen (Lorenzen, 1966, 23) reported,

"The latest to reach me [Lorenzen] was from a captain in the USAF Reserve who claims he took part in the investigation of that incident, including the location and inspection of the crashed F-51. He supports the old theory that the 'spaceship' removed Mantell from his ship and then allowed it to crash. The captain says Mantell's body was never found."

The truth here, based on the information available is that Mantell's body was inside the aircraft. There are affidavits confirming this fact and there are even some gruesome descriptions of the body based on the original sketches from the classified investigation.

Jenny Randles (Randles, 1987, 25) reported,

"A more interesting, yet dubious claim comes second-hand via someone who was a friend of this wingman [meaning the wingman, though unidentified, who had caught a glimpse of the object and who said that it looked like a 'teardrop' and 'seemed fluid']. He supposedly was informed 'confidentially' that the airman had seen the UFO more clearly. As explained to investigator Leonard Stringfield, it had seemed to release a beam that struck Mantell's F-51! The reality status of this uncorroborated account must remain in doubt, although Stringfield regards it as sincere."

T. Scott Crain, Jr. (Crain, 1986, 13) added to the Stringfield notation. Crain wrote,

"Stringfield writes, 'My informant preferring anonymity, related that he had talked with Mantell's wing man, who witnesses the incident. The pilot stated that Mantell pursued the UFO because he was the only pilot with an adequate oxygen mask. The pilot also related that he saw a burst of 'what appeared to be tracer' fired from the UFO, which hit the P-51 and caused it to disintegrate in the air!..."

First, here is another anonymous witness providing second-hand testimony (though Crain identified him as 2nd Lt. Buford Hammond). There is no way to verify the information, even if Stringfield did believe it to be sincere.

Second, the accident record (also cited by Crain) makes it clear that Mantell had neither an oxygen mask with him nor oxygen in his aircraft. It is quite clear that the reason Mantell crashed was that he passed out to hypoxia.

Third, there were those on the ground who watched the accident as it happened, watched at the aircraft began its power dive, and watched as it broke up in mid-air. There were no reports of a beam or "ray" from any of them, and the destruction of the aircraft has been identified as the external forces that pulled it apart.

Further, Crain (1986, 13) reported that he had contacted Stringfield about the reliability of this information. Stringfield responded,

"Hard to say. He seemed sincere and knowledgeable in his profession, but that is not enough to pass a qualified judgement... What he did say was contrary to the known facts, I'm sure the Air Force would never admit it."

Over the years there have been quite a few statements attributed to Mantell that would lead to the belief that what he chased was something of an extraterrestrial origin. There have also been statements attributed to him that suggest what he saw was something mundane.

George Hunt Williamson, who would gain some fame in the contactee field, reported that Mantell's last words were, "There are windows and I can see people in it! (Captain, 1954, 4)."

Richard Miller, (1953) in a privately circulated "Prologue," reported that he had been in the Air Force in January 1948 and that he had been stationed at Scott Air Force Base near Belleville, Illinois. Like Albert Pickering (see Lockbourne sighting in part four of this report), he had been listening to the intercept over the closed communications link. Miller reproduced the inter-plane and the communications with the tower accurately, suggesting,

"At 3:15 P.M., ... Mantell called in again and said, 'It's still above me making my speed or better. I am going to 20,000 feet. If I'm no closer then, I'll abandon the chase.'"

Miller than added,

"This is where the official Air Force account ends. However, there was on further radio transmission from Mantell at 3:18 that afternoon. His last statement has been stricken from all of the official records. He said, 'My god (sic). I see people in this thing.'"

There is, of course, no corroborated record of Mantell ever having said anything like either of these two statements. The official record, now available to UFO researchers, was originally classified, and had Mantell uttered anything like that, it would have been included in that file. Air Force investigators would have expected the file to remain classified and would have had no reason to censor themselves. These sorts of quotes, and stories, created without proper foundation, while interesting, add nothing to the understanding of the case. They should now be expunged from the record.

Air Force Responsibility

The solution to this case would have come much sooner had the Air Force not been interested in disproving UFOs but had been interested in finding answers. Clearly Venus has nothing to do with this sighting. The fact that it was in the sky near the right location at the time is irrelevant and has confused people for much too long. Then too, was the Air Force insistence, even in the face of evidence to the contrary, that Venus was responsible, if not for all the sightings, at least in part for the Mantell side of the case. Venus, as a culprit, has been eliminated from the case.

Second, there is no need to create a number of balloons or other unidentified and unreported aircraft in the area to find a solution. All the talk of another balloon or object is also irrelevant.

Given the descriptions provided, the fact that Skyhook balloons were being launched, and given the size and shape of those balloons, it seems reasonable to believe that Mantell chased a Skyhook. Neither he, nor anyone else at Godman Army Air Field, would have been familiar with the Skyhooks. They were classified in 1948. They certainly would have been huge, fluid, and would have looked metallic because they were made of polyethylene.

When the file is carefully studied, when the descriptions are considered, there is but a single conclusion. This was a Skyhook balloon.

LOCKBOURNE SIGHTING: JANUARY 7, 1948

In a report that might not be related to the Mantell incident but that is mentioned in the Project Blue Book file on Mantell, and which took place on the same day and some three hours after Mantell had crashed, three witnesses at Lockbourne Air Base near Columbus, Ohio, watched an object seem to land. These witnesses were well trained members of the civilian air traffic control at Lockbourne. The men were interviewed by officers from Project Sign, though according to the documentation available suggests those interviews were conducted at their home station by officers assigned there rather than members of Sign and at Wright Field. Contrary to what one of the witnesses believed and suggested, there is no evidence of interrogations that took place at Wright Field.

Witness Statements

According to reports given to Project Sign, these witnesses first sighted the brightly glowing object at about 7 p.m. when it broke through the overcast. Albert R. Pickering, who was manning the direction finding station about a mile from the tower, in his written statement, reported on January 14, 1948:

On Wednesday January 7, 1948 at about 1925 Eastern time I observed in the sky an object which I could not identify. It appeared to hover in one position for quite some time, moving very little. It disappeared once for about a minute and I assumed it entered the overcast, which was about 10,000 feet. After descending again below the overcast it circled one place for the duration of three 360 degree turns, then moved to another position to circle some more. Turns required approximately 30 to 40 second each, diameter estimated about two miles.

In moving from one place to another a tail was visible or approximately five times the length of the object. Not knowing how close or far the object was from me at the time, I could not estimate the size very accurately, but it appeared as large or larger than one of our C 47 planes, and of a different shape. Either round or oval shaped. Just before leaving it came to very near the ground, staying down for about ten seconds, then climbed at a very fast rate back to its original altitude, 10,000 feet, leveling off and disappearing into the overcast heading 120 [degrees]. Its speed was greater than 500 mph in level flight. It was visible to me for a period of twenty minutes. No noise or sound could be detected. The color was amber light but not sufficiently bright to cover or obscure the outline of the configuration which was approximately round. During up and down movement no maneuvering took place. Motions was same as an elevator, climbing and descending [sic] vertically. Exhaust trail was noticeable only during forward speed. It appeared as a thin mist approximately same color (amber) as the object.

Length about 5 times length of object.

During descent it appeared to touch the ground or was very near to touching it. It was approximately 3 to 5 miles away from Lockbourne Air Base in immediate vicinity of COMMERCIAL POINT. It positively was not a star, comet or any astronomical body to the best of my knowledge of such things. I also rule out the possibility of it being a balloon, flare, dirigible [sic], military or private aircraft.

I am 26 years old and in good health and have excellent vision. I have been actively engaged in aviation for 6 years. I have a private pilot license and spent 3 years 10 months in the U.S. Army Air Corps as a Sergeant link trainer instructor, instrument flight observer.

The statements made herein are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and may be used for any official purpose as deemed necessary.

ALBERT R. PICKERING
VHF/DF Operator
CAF

Pickering's observations were confirmed by other members of the civilian crew including the tower operator, Alex A. Boudreaux, who report, also on January 14, 1948:

On Wednesday January 7th between 1915 and 1930, there appeared in the sky a bright glowing object which I could not identify. At first I assumed it to be a star but the sky being overcast, I knew definitely that it was not a star nor an aircraft because the only aircraft flying in the local area was landing at the time. It was not any aircraft flare nor a balloon because it appeared to be enormous in size. I then observed it through binoculars. It appeared to be cone-shaped, blunt on top and tapering off toward the bottom. I could not distinguish the attitude in which the object appeared to be. It was glowing from a bright white to an amber color with a small streak trailing. It was at a distance between 5 and 7 miles from the control tower at an altitude of approximately 2000 to 3000 feet bobbing up and down and moving in a south-southwesterly direction at a speed exceeding 500 miles per hour. Also the wind at the time was blowing from east to west and if it had been a balloon or lighter-than-aircraft it would have drifted in the direction the wind was blowing. There was no sound or unusual noise. Its performance was very unusual and the light emitting from it seemed to fade out at times. Just before it disappeared beyond the horizon the light changed to a sort of red color. The same object was later sighted in the vicinity of Clinton County Air Field by the operators on duty in the control tower.

I have actually engaged in aviation as an Air Traffic Control Tower Operator and a Private Pilot for a period of 5 years and thus for in all my experience, I have never encountered an optical illusion or any physical defect that would disqualify my possessions of such ratings.

Alex A. Boudreaux
Air Traffic Controller
CAF-6

The final man on the ground was Franklin Eistle, who also provided a written statement about his observations. On January 13, 1948, he reported:

At approximately 1940 hrs. Jan. 7th the Control Tower operator advised he observed an extremely strange bright light in the south west. However by the time I reached the operation steps at the entrance the light faded out. About two minutes later the Tower advised that the phenomenon [sic] was visible again. This time I saw the object at about 15 degrees above the horizon to the west south west of Lockbourne. The object was extremely bright, more so than [sic] any star, I would say about as large as and as bright as one of the runway lights at

full intensity as viewed from the Control Tower. It appeared to have a tapering tail about 5 diameters [sic] long and predominantly was of a ruddy red color changing to an amber-yellow at different intervals.

The position of the object in the sky and the fact that we were reporting A [sic] high overcast at the time added to the mystery.

UP [sic] until approximately 1950 hrs the object appeared to be motionless, at this time, however, it descended to the horizon in an interval of about 3 or 4 second, hovering there for 3 or 4 seconds and then ascended to its' [sic] original position in an interval of about 3 seconds. It then rapidly began to fade and lower in the sky and disappeared about 1955 hrs.

AF9944 xntd [sic] a position report to me at 1953 hrs over Columbus at 5,000 ft on round robin out of Wright Field to Washington and return, and reported a mysterious bright light to the west south west of his position, appearing like an oversized beacon[.]

Further information on reports from other stations observing the phenominon (sic) can be obtained from flight service at Patterson.

Franklin Eislle

There were three additional witnesses to the sighting, the pilots in two different aircraft. They were also interviewed by the investigators and provided the following.

Air Force investigators decided that Venus was an appropriate answer because the men had seen the object southwest of the field and hovering close to the horizon. Air Force investigators learned that, contrary to what all the men believed, the overcast had begun to break up about dusk so that they weren't aware that some parts of the sky had begun to clear. To the Air Force, the answer, Venus was obvious.

Jerry Clark, in his massive UFO encyclopedia discussing Mantell, as well as the Lockbourne case, noted, that the pilots:

All estimated that it [the amber light] was at 3000 feet. They described it as a stationary amber light in the west-southwest sky, resembling a "large star or planet." this object may have been Venus. Possibly it would not have been noticed had the pilots not been alerted to the UFO scare going on at the base. Pickering remembered only three other witnesses, all of them at the tower (Jones, op. cit.) Whatever those four observers saw, it could not have been Venus.

Pickering Re-interviewed

On April 12, 1977, Ohio UFO researcher William E. Jones, interviewed Pickering about his sighting. The story that emerged was slightly different, and if the details were accurate, then the Air Force explanation of Venus was wholly unsatisfactory. Pickering told Jones:

This night the overcast was 1200 feet. I remember this just as though it was yesterday. I know what the weather was - 1200 feet, heavy overcast, with a 10 mile-per-hour southwest wind. It was dark.

Inside the shack, I never turned the lights on because the illumination of all the dials, meters, and everything was sufficient for just sitting in there listening to the radio.

The only time I'd turn the lights on would be when an aircraft would be in trouble and call me for an emergency. Then I'd turn the light on so I could be sure to given him the right reading.

So I was laying there on my back just looking out the window. Practically right over my head - it was at a 30 degree angle from vertical - down through the overcast came this great big, round, red object. The instant I glimpsed it - I was looking in that direction - I thought it was an aircraft falling in flames. So I jumped off of the box and started to reach for the mike of the telephone, and I see that it isn't an aircraft. I know by the time 2 seconds has passed that it is no aircraft. The tower called me even before I had a chance to call him and said, "What the hell is that out there over your station?" I told him I don't know. I said it's just a great big round red ball.

I tell him to call airways... He calls the airways operator and him and the captain, the meteorologist that night - they come to the door and they look at it.

It stops just as it comes through the overcast and hovers there in the air. There's no sound that you can hear at all. It don't stand perfectly stationary. It maneuvers around and goes a hundred feet or kinda circles. It just is maneuvering around in the air without any great distance. After it's been there for about five minutes - and all the time I'm trying to contact another aircraft on the radio and so is the tower. We've got different frequencies so we're trying to call an aircraft to take a passe through there and tell us what it is.

Well, it starts from an absolute perfectly stationary position and makes a circle of the entire base. Now, the north/south runway is 1 mile long and there's at least 3/4-mile from the end of the runway to the limits of the base at the north. And there's about a quarter mile of so, maybe, to the south. So this makes this object make a circle of better than 6 miles, since it's 2 miles in diameter, it has to be more than 6 miles.

It does that, and we timed it (I did). It accelerated to a speed of an (sic) excess of a thousand miles an hour. It comes back and stops instantly. It don't slow down... and coast to a stop. It stopped like it run into a wall.

(Q) How many times did it circle the base?

Just once. Just one big circle. When it comes back it's still right over my head. It has drifted to the Southwest.

(Q) So you're at the south end of the runway?

Yeah. I'm on the east side of the runway about - I'll say - two maybe 300 ft. This object has drifted. When it came back, it stopped... It wasn't really drifting. It just had moved southwest. Not that's against the wind, since the wind was from the Southwest. When it got down nearly to the edge of the base, just a little past the end of the runway, it descended to the ground vertically. It just came to the ground and stayed at the ground 10 maybe 15 seconds. [It] rose vertically back up to just under the overcast.

We had gotten in contact with an airplane, by that time, that was coming from Wright Field. He said he couldn't see anything. He was too far out yet.

Well, this is an assumption, but I think the object itself detected this airplane approaching Lockbourne because, just before the airplane arrived at Lockbourne, it went back up into the overcast and disappeared.

(Q) You never saw it again?

No!

It didn't change color. Other than the fact... if it did get dimmer it was wisps of clouds that was going between me and it. I didn't see the thing get dimmer and brighter as some people have described them.

I eliminate first... you couldn't have seen the full moon had it been out. It can't be the moon or the planet Venus, or some other astronomical objects that they're talking about... It can't be a balloon because a balloon would not drift against the wind. It can't be a light because, if it has been a light when it made the circle of the base, it would have elongated as it got out away from me. It didn't change shape other than the fact I attribute to an optical illusion. It went so fast it looked like - you know your eye retains an image for an instant... it went fast enough that your eye retained a little of that image behind it.

There was no exhaust.

My estimate as to the size of it I base on the fact that I know how high it was. I know how far it was away from me - 1200 feet. If I hadn't had the weather report in front of me and it had been a clear night, I couldn't have told you how big it was. But, since I know it was 1200 ft., plus a very little, since it was at a 30-degree angle, it wouldn't be much more than 1200. Then I can tell you reasonably close to how big it was. It was bigger than a one-car garage and it wasn't as big as my two-car garage.

The object when it came down to the ground was even closer than 1200 ft. I would estimate it was a little less than half that because if you take a 30-degree angle from here to the ceiling is 8 ft. If you drop a string from that 30-degree angle, it's going to hit out here, not quite half 8 ft. So it was a good bit closer to me when it came to the ground than when I first sighted it.

But I went out and looked to see if the grass was burned, mashed, or if there was prints where it landed, and there wasn't.

It is at this point, if this statement as provided to Jones is accurate, that the Venus explanation is eliminated. Pickering gave the impression here that the object had circled all around the field, that it had not only been in the southwestern sky, and that there was a solid overcast that came down to 1200 feet.

The discrepancy is that Pickering's original statement gives the impression that the UFO had circled an area, to the southwest, and that it had stayed in the southwest. He also suggested that the sky during the day had been overcast, but the overcast had been at 10,000 feet and not 1200.

If the earlier statement is true, and if the Air Force report that the overcast had begun to break up is true, then Venus, as the culprit, is still viable.

Nobody that I know of - maybe the Army did, or the Air Force - [took] radioactive measurements, but not while I was there...

They flew us to Wright Field three different times for interviews when this Project Blue Book was on. They wouldn't tell us anything...

(Q) How many witnesses were there, then?

There would be four, total. The Captain [identified from records as Charles E. McGee], which was the meteorologist. And Frank Isley [Eisile], which was in airways that night... the fella that was in the tower [Alex A. Boudreaux]. In fact, I've forgotten the names of nearly all of them... that's been almost 30 years ago.

(Q) Who did you talk to at Wright Field?

I don't remember whether it was Ruppelt or not, now. [*In January 1948, it wouldn't have been Ruppelt*] In fact, we talked to at least five different individuals, all officers... You'd talk with one awhile and go out. Then you would sit there... and another would come in and talk with you...

It's rather simple as far as I'm concerned. I saw it. It came down through the overcast. It made those, if you want to call them erratic maneuvers in the air. Didn't seem to be erratic from the standpoint of intelligence. It looked to me like the thing was intelligently controlled... it wasn't a haphazard performance it put on...

(Q) How long did it take to go around the base?

I forget the seconds it took, but the thing you do... you count [like you learn to count as a pilot to time a turn]... We calculated at the time that it wasn't less... than 1000 mph.

(Q) What time did this happen?

It was about 10 after 7 in the evening. Five to 10 after when it first appeared. And it was visible for a little better than twenty minutes.

(Q) Was it light at that time or was it dark?

It was dark.

(Q) Completely dark?

Yeah! After 7:00 in the winter time it's dark.

(Q) You say it was exactly the day of the Mantell case. So you know what day it was... You're sure it was the night of the day Mantell had his accident?

Yeah!

(Q) How could you pin that down?

Because we heard Mantell's death. All of it was on our communications.

(Q) That night?

That day, after it happened.

(Q) So you heard it... on the same day?

Yeah!

(Q) So you had that on your mind, I take it?

I didn't have it in mind at the time I seen this. I mean, I wasn't thinking about it.

I figured after the event that it [*was*] possibly the same object that he was chasing...

(Q) Could you describe the object a little more?

Perfectly round. Just as round as a basketball. Perfect sphere.

(Q) It was a sphere and not a disc seen...

If it was a disc, it always kept either the bottom or top side to us, and was sitting on edge. Now, I couldn't say for sure that it wasn't, but it would have to of have been sitting on edge with its flat side facing me at all times. It certainly wouldn't do that with its maneuvering around and its complete circle of the whole base and coming down to the ground...

(Q) [Did it illuminate the ground when it came down?]

I don't know whether it did or not because I was at the same level as it and it being down at that distance, I didn't see any illumination on the ground. Had I been higher... maybe I could have seen some illumination on the ground...

(Q) Did the object... pass behind any other object?

No! It landed between me and a fence. There was a fence at the edge of the base. I couldn't see the fence [between me and the object. So it must have been between me and the fence.]

(Q) Could you describe the motion it made before it went around the base or after it came back?

The motion itself was like it wanted to mozzey [sic] around. [Drift a little in different directions, like it wanted to stay in that general area.]

(Q) No pattern that you could discern?

No pattern at all... this was a slow movement backwards and forwards.

(Q) From the time you first saw it, did it immediately begin these movements?

It stopped there dead... between 1 and 2 minutes. Then it started maneuvering around... they were curved lines... It stayed in an area less than a city block... [*Then it went around the base.*]

(Q) How long did it make the maneuvers [*before going around the base*], timewise [sic]?

If it was in sight for 20 minutes, it was visible stationary at the start for say 2 minutes, it made these maneuvers around for awhile. Stopped stationary again for a couple more minutes. So, it took it some time for it to come to the ground. Time to go back up. It was stationary after it went back up. So you would have to just guess. I didn't time it...

(Q) How long did it stay there...

Well, I'd guess 3 or 4 minutes before it came down to the ground. It stopped and stayed stationary and may have moved 20 to 50 ft at that time because it didn't necessarily look like it was screwed into position. When it did come down, it just started descending vertically... just perfectly straight like an elevator. I would definitely say 15 seconds would cover the length of time it was on the ground. And maybe 10 would... then rose vertically the same way.

When it went up into the overcast, the overcast - bottom side of it - was evidently thin in places because I saw it as it was going up into the overcast for say 3 lengths... I could see it that long. See it disappear gradually into the overcast even though it went up at a rate [pause] it went into the overcast. When it went into the overcast, I could see the overcast between me and it.

(Q) Did it reflect light on the overcast?

No! That was a little bit peculiar because had it been shining a light out from itself, as bright as it looked to me, it looked like that it would be illuminating something around it. All I could do was see it through the overcast...

It went up and stopped below the overcast and stayed there maybe 2 or 3 minutes and then went up into the overcast. And all this time I'm on the radio, telephone in one hand and microphone in the other... trying all frequencies... trying to contact an aircraft. that the only one we contacted, coming from Wright Field. He said he couldn't see anything because he was too far out...

(Q) Did you turn in a written report on this?

We signed a typewritten report that they made over there. We didn't write it ourselves.

(Q) Was it classified at any time?

It was classified... we was warned not to talk about it...

(Q) Do you remember the contents of the report circulated about Mantell that day?

The reports was that he ran out of oxygen. He exceeded the safe altitude and didn't have oxygen aboard and he was at [15,000 ft]...

Part of his transmission was - now this I won't say for sure - he either said it's gigantic and it's metallic or it's monstrous and metallic. But I think he said it's gigantic and metallic.

(Q) Was this in the report your read there that day?

I didn't read 'em. I heard part of 'em.

(Q) They were coming over the radio?

Yeah! Coming over the telephone and radio. There was an hour or so of discussion about it was over and when they found the wreckage, they determined 2 or 3 days after this that they had become unconscious and the airplane disintegrated in the air because it dived.

A P-51 don't disintegrate that easy, I don't think, in the air...

(Q) Was this normal radio transmission you were picking up of the search?

They was relaying it, evidently, from the tower in Kentucky, from the people in contact with him, through our tower at Columbus. How this was accomplished, I don't know. We had direct lines, at the time, everywhere. I could punch a button and call Cincinnati, direct line telephone.

(Q) Was this normal procedure for them to pipe in this sort of information over the...

No, we didn't do it very often, but... it was possible to do it. I think it was such an unusual situation was the reason they did it. We had written reports of the conversation that we got to read.

I don't remember now the exact wording of this here conclusion of the board of inquiry when they have an airplane loss... but I know the conclusion was that at 15,000 ft he ran out of oxygen.

The last words he said, "I'm closing in on the object. It's gigantic and it's metallic." Now, that's the last words he transmitted that we heard.

(Q) Did you actually hear his transmission?

Yeah!

... It [*the object*] was low when he first observed it. And it started climbing and he started climbing.

(Q) Were you there when this started?

Yeah! This was sometimes [sic] in the afternoon, I think... I was on duty. It must have been in the afternoon.

...There was confusion. Couple trying to talk at the same time. Probably excitement in their voices. After it was over, there was still some discussion going on. This direct line to Cincinnati, I talked to 'em down there and they was talking to Kentucky.

None of this am I clear on. None of that stuck in my mind [like my own sighting].

(Q) How long after... did you see the object?

It was that night. I just about forgotten all about it [Mantell]. In fact, that wasn't even on my mind. When I was laying there I was just listening to the radio and looking out the window... I kept an AM radio on all the time [but turned down so as not to drown out the official radio].

...He [Mantell] had crashed before the conversations terminated, because there were other aircraft flying. He was ordered not - I didn't hear this [but learned through channels later on] - to ease in with it. To breakoff [sic] at 10,000 ft.

He said he was at 15,000 ft and closing. It's gigantic. It's metallic. It was the last words he said.

(Q) You heard that?

Yeah! I don't know whether it was "gigantic" or "monstrous". I'm 99 percent sure it was "gigantic" - the word he used.

(Q) Were you aware at that time [of the skyhook balloon launchings, some of which were reportedly used for aerial photographic reconnaissance of Russia?]

Had he been an idiot, he might not have been able to tell a balloon. But a combat pilot with as many hours as he had... [it doesn't happen.]

(Q) Do you know what the shape of the object was that Mantell reported?

It was supposed to be the same as the one I saw. A perfect sphere. It was - he didn't say it that I heard it - [I learned it later.] They have tapes, I think, of his entire conversation.

Further Investigation

The Air Force investigation suggested early on that this sighting was of Venus. Weather records revealed that the day had been overcast, but that the cloud cover had begun to break up, in the west, about dusk. According to the records from the [Naval Observatory](#) Venus set at 1951 hours (that is 5:51 P.M.) and was nearly as bright as it ever gets. Astronomical twilight had been twenty minutes earlier, so the sky was in total darkness. Venus was, of course, in the Southwest, just as the witnesses claimed.

It seems clear here that these witnesses, believing the sky was overcast, saw Venus and couldn't readily identify it. That the object disappeared at the time Venus set, seems to be the final evidence. The Air Force got this one right.

AIR FORCE ANALYSIS

Investigators for the Air Force put together a report that encompassed their opinions about the sightings of January 7, 1948. Those analyses are illustrative of the Air Force thought processes and why they worked so hard to suggest that Venus had caused not only the sightings reported in the evening of January 7 but also that of those in the Godman Tower and of Thomas Mantell.

Following are those reports. Included at the end is an analysis of the Air Force investigation and of the conclusions drawn by the Air Force investigators.

Incident #30, a-c -- Lockbourne AAB, Columbus, Ohio -- 7 January 1948

Considering this incident with #23, 33, and 48, one is forced to conclude that the object observed from Lockbourne Army Air Base on the evening of 7 January 1948 was the planet Venus.

One report of the incident gives the location of the object as ESE-120 [degrees], or approximately opposite from that stated by other observers and that of Venus. Obviously, since the time of observation was the same, this means that one witness either was looking at a different object or had his directions mixed. Since the description otherwise agrees generally with the rest, and since it is assumed throughout the reports that all observers were viewing the same object, the latter interpretation seems preferable.

Witnesses state that the object "couldn't have been a star" (of course, it wasn't), because the sky was completely overcast. However, reports from the Columbus weather bureau indicate that, although the afternoon was cloudy, the sky was clear by 1900 hours. (This does not mean, of course, that there were no clouds near the western horizon.)

For possible explanation of the "tactics" reported by observers of this object, and further discussion of the incident, see report on #33.

The Air Force conclusion here makes some sense. The object reported was seen at about the location of Venus, it was seen as Venus reached toward its maximum brightness and the breaking up of the overcast caused confusion by the witnesses on the ground. Although, on the surface, it seems ridiculous to blame Venus for this sightings, when all the facts are examined, the Air Force explanation seems to fit.

Incident #48 -- Clinton County Air Field, Ohio -- 7 January 1948

This incident must be considered with #30, 32, and 33. Combine evidence shows that the object observed from Clinton County Air Field on the evening of 7 January 1948 was undoubtedly the planet Venus.

For discussion of erratic motion related by the observers of the object, and other details, see report on incident #33.

Incident #32 -- over Columbus, Ohio -- 7 January 1948

The evidence given in this incident fits the hypothesis that the object observed was the planet Venus, and, considered with incidents #30, 33, and 48, it is incredible that it could have been anything else.

See report on #33 for detailed discussion of sightings on 7 January 1948.

Once again, the Air Force explanation here makes sense. The object was seen over a wide area of Ohio and Kentucky at the same time. It faded from sight slowly, which is consistent with Venus setting. The most damning of the evidence, however, is that the object was reported to disappear at about 1950 hours and the astronomical evidence shows that Venus set at 1952 hours on January 7, was in the southwest part of the sky, and was bright enough to create the illusion that it was an object rather than a planet.

Incident #33, a-g -- Godman Field, Fort Know, Kentucky -- 7 January 1948 & discussion of all incidents reported for this date.

Incidents #30, 32, 33, and 48 all occurred on 7 January 1948, with #33 involving the death of Lieutenant (sic) Mantell. Detailed attention has therefore been given

to any possible astronomical body or phenomenon which might served to identify the object or objects concerned. The four incidents are considered together here.

Although the several reports differ considerably in regard to the bearing and motion of the object (assuming for the moment that the afternoon and evening sightings refer to the same phenomenon), they are generally consistent concerning time, manner, and place of its disappearance over the horizon. Hour and azimuth are given as 1906 CST, about 250[degrees] by observers at Godman Field; 1955 EST, west southwest, by those at Lockbourne Air Base; and 1955-2000 EST, about 210 [degrees], by those at Clinton County Air Base, (there are, as is to be expected, slight differences in individual reports). Using this for the focal point of the attack, one notes immediately that all these times and bearing agree closely with the time and place of the setting of Venus. Furthermore, all accounts except one agree that the object was low in the southwest before the time of disappearance. Reports vary as to details of its motion, but the overall motion was southwest and then over the horizon. Those facts taken together precluded any question of coincidence. Furthermore, simultaneous observation from scattered locations proves that the object had negligible parallax, or, in short, that it was a very great distance away. All other statements concerning the object must, it seems to this investigator, be weighed in terms of the overwhelming evidence of the manner of disappearance over the horizon.

The stellar magnitude of Venus on January 7 was -3.4, which makes it 20 times brighter than the bright star Arcturus. Venus, when as bright as this and shining through interstices in a host of clouds, could very easily give the effect of a flaming object with a tail. Concerning the erratic motion reported by some witnesses, this can be said" motion of clouds past the object could give the illusion of rapid movement, as when clouds scud by the moon; or the effect could have been a psychological illusion; a third possibility, remote but based on a rarely-observed phenomenon, is that owing to thermo-inversion in the atmosphere, stars near the horizon have been know to jump about erratically through arcs of two or three times the moon's apparent diameter. Venus, when very close to the horizon, has been know to twinkle brilliantly with rapidly changing colors.

It appears to the present investigator, in summing up the evidence presented, that we are forced to the conclusion that the object observed in the early evening hours of January 7, 1948, at these widely separated localities, was the planet Venus. To assume that a terrestrial object could be located so high as to be visible simultaneously over a wide area, could be of such intrinsic brightness (of incredible brightness, far surpassing any known man-made light), and would be placed essentially at the very position of Venus in the sky over an interval of more than half an hour, would be incredible.

Incident #33 is the only one of the four that includes the daytime observation of presumably this same object. The importance of the incident is, however, paramount, for it was in tracking down the mysterious object that Lieutenant Mantell lost his life. Again it is possible that the object observed was the planet Venus, although the evidence is by no means as definitive as that for the sightings made later that day. First, the bearings of the object as reported by various witnesses differ considerably; where one says southwest, another says south, for the same instant. However, integrating all the evidence, one is again struck with the coincidence of the object's position with that of Venus. The following short table of sightings vs the position of Venus shows the general agreement of the two in azimuth:

CST	Object	Venus
1330 (PFC Oliver)	SW of field	Almost due S 174 [degrees]
1345 (Sgt. Blackwell)	S of field	178 degrees

(PFC Oliver)	SW	
After 1400 (Lt. Orner)	SW	from due S (180 [degrees] at 1400 Moving westward
1445 (Capt. Mantell)	210 [degrees]	195 [degrees]
(Col. Hix)	215 [degrees]	

A more pertinent question is that of whether it would have been possible to see Venus in the daytime on that day. All that can be said here is that it was not impossible to see the planet under those conditions. It is well known that when Venus is at its greatest brilliancy, it is possible to see it during the daytime when one knows exactly where to look, but on January 7, 1948, Venus was less than half as bright as it is when most brilliant. However, under exceptionally good atmospheric conditions and with the eye shielded from the direct rays of the sun, Venus might be seen as an exceedingly tiny bright point of light. It can be shown that it was definitely brighter than the surrounding sky, for on the date in question Venus had a semi-diameter of 6 seconds of arc, or a total apparent surface area of approximately 125 square seconds. Assuming that a square second of sky would be a trifle brighter than the fourth magnitude, a portion of the sky of the same area presented by Venus would be about -1.4 magnitude. Since the planet, however, was -3.4, it was 6 times brighter than the equivalent area of sky. While it is thus physically possible to see Venus at such times, usually its pinpoint character and the large expanse of sky makes its casual detection very unlikely. If, however, a person happens to look toward a point of the sky that is just a few minutes of arc from the position of Venus, he is apt to be startled by this apparition and to wonder why he didn't see it before. The chances, of course, of looking at just the right spot are very few. Once done, however, it is usually fairly easy to relocate the object and to call the attention of others to it. However, atmospheric conditions must be exceptionally good. It is improbable, for example, that Venus would be seen under these circumstances in a large city.

It can be said, there, that a possible explanation for the object sighted in the daytime in incident #33, a-g, is that it too was the planet Venus. In the absence of exact measures, however, it is impossible to establish that it was or was not. (It is unfortunate that theodolite measures of the afternoon observations were evidently not made.)

It has been unofficially reported that the object was a Navy cosmic ray balloon. If this can be established, it is to be preferred as an explanation. However, if one accepts the assumption that reports from various other locations in the state refer to the same object, any such device must have been a good many miles high -- 25 to 50 -- in order to have been seen clearly, almost simultaneously, from places 175 miles apart.

It is entirely possible, of course, that the first sightings were of some sort of balloon or aircraft, but that when these reports came to Godman Field, a careful scrutiny of the sky revealed Venus, and it could be that Lieutenant (sic) Mantell did actually give chase to the planet, even though whatever object had been the source of the excitement elsewhere had disappeared. At the altitudes that the pilot reached, Venus would have been very much more easily observed than from the ground, and it might even be that he did not actually pick it up until he was at considerable altitude. The one piece of evidence that leads this investigator to believe that at the time of Lieutenant (sic) Mantell's death he was actually trying to reach Venus is that the object appeared stationary (or moving steadily away from him) and that he could not seem to gain on it.

In summing up, this can be said: the evening sightings reported in incidents #30, 32, 33, and 48 were undoubtedly of the planet Venus. Regarding the daylight sightings from Godman Field and other places in Kentucky, there seems so far to be no single explanation that does not rely greatly on coincidence. IF all reports were of a single object, in the knowledge of this investigator no man-made object could have been large enough and far enough away for the

approximately simultaneous sightings. It is most unlikely, however, that so many separate persons should at that time have chanced on Venus in the daylight sky. It seems, therefore, much more probably that more than one object was involved: the sightings might have included two or more balloons (or aircraft); or they might have included both Venus (in the fatal chase) and balloons. For reasons given above, the latter explanation seems more likely. Such a hypothesis does, however, still necessitate the inclusion of at least two objects other than Venus, and it certainly is coincidental that so many people would have chose this one day to be confused (to the extent of reporting the matter) by normal airborne objects. There remains one possible, very plausible explanation for this fact, however: was the original report by any chance broadcast by local radio stations? If so, with the general public on alert, even the commonest aircraft might suddenly have appeared to be strange celestial objects.

In any event, since it seems possible that at the time of Lieutenant (sic) Mantell's death, he was actually giving chase to Venus (and since, certainly, during the evening sightings, persons assumedly well acquainted with objects of the sky were alarmed by the appearance of the planet), it might be wise to give information about this incident wide circulation among air force personnel, so that tragic mistakes will not occur in the future.

It is obvious from this report that the writer was not happy with the Venus explanation for the Mantell sighting. What seems to have confused him is that Venus was clearly the answer in the other sightings and it was all tied up in a neat package. With Mantell and the Godman Tower sightings, Venus could be seen in the general area where the object was, but Venus was not a satisfactory answer. He wanted something that would make sense to him.

The note about Navy cosmic ray balloons is interesting, but also revealed that he didn't understand what they were. He didn't know that they could be traveling as high as 25 miles and that was sufficient altitude to explain the widely separated sightings. Nor was he familiar with polyethylene which could give the balloon the metallic sheen that Mantell had reported. Finally, when he thought of a balloon, he thought of something like the weather balloons that had become a standard in weather forecasting. He thought of a ball of brownish rubber about fifteen to twenty feet in diameter. It was not consistent with the descriptions supplied by those in the Godman Tower.

Those descriptions, however, make it clear that the Godman tower crew was watching a Skyhook balloon. It hovered in place for more than an air and finally drifted out of sight. Mantell thought that he was getting closer, and than that it was moving away from him because he didn't understand that this balloon was 60 or 70,000 feet above him. He thought in terms of an object much closer.

In the end, the Air Force ruined their own credibility. They had a good answer for most of the January 7 sightings but then tried to force fit the Venus explanation into the Mantell sighting. Had they been candid and reported that they had no real answer for Mantell, then when the Skyhook balloon answer surfaced, there wouldn't have been such resistance to it.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the evidence as seen in the accident investigation reports, the Project Blue Book files, and the analysis available from such diverse sources as Jerry Clark, Edward Ruppelt and Len Stringfield, it seems likely that Thomas Mantell violated the regulations in effect at the time and climbed above 20,000 feet. Reports from his wingmen indicate that Mantell was still climbing when they broke away due to the affects of hypoxia as reported by Lt. .

Although there is discrepancies in the official records, it is most likely that Mantell planned to climb to 25,000 feet and circle for ten minutes, attempting to acquire the object. If he failed, then he was going to land at Standiford as had been planned. Studies, such as that conducted by Stanley R. Mohler, show that above twenty thousand feet, Mantell could have expected to remain conscious for only ten minutes. Above that, and at 25,000 feet, Mantell would have had under three minutes of useful consciousness. There is little doubt that he blacked out between 22,500 feet and 25,000 feet.

His aircraft, trimmed to climb, continued to do so until it reached approximately 30,000 feet. Engine torque then pulled it to the left, and the aircraft entered into a power dive. Somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 feet, the aircraft, because of the high speed, began to disintegrate. Witnesses on the ground saw the aircraft enter the dive and saw it break apart. The wreckage fell to the ground, and Mantell, still strapped into the cockpit was killed on impact.

There would have been no pointed questions about this accident had there not been the corresponding UFO sighting. Given that Mantell was attempting to intercept an object that had remained, for the most part, unidentified, speculation about the cause of the accident, and the identity of the object began to run wild.

Although the majority of the participants, whether members of the flight that Mantell commanded, or military personnel on the ground, saw an object, most failed to identify it. The high altitude, and the unusual nature of the object contributed to that failure.

The descriptions, as provided by those same witnesses, seem to be fairly conclusive. These included:

Col Guy F. Hix: "It was very white and looked like an umbrella."

"I thought it was a celestial body but I can't account for the fact it didn't move."

"I just don't know what it was."

He said it was about 1/4 size of the full moon and white in color. Through the binoculars it appeared to have a red border at the bottom at times and a red border at the top at times. It remained stationary (seemingly) for 1 - 1 1/2 hours.

Capt Carter: "Object appeared round and white (whiter than the clouds that passed in front of it) and could be seen through cirrus (sic) clouds."

From interview with Duesler (accompanied by LTC E. G. Wood):

Wood said that the object appeared about 1/10 the size of a full moon, if the thing were a great distance away, as compared to the diminishing size of the P-51's flying toward it, it would seem that it was at least several hundred feet in diameter.

After dark, another or the same object appeared in approx 234 [degrees] from Godman at 6 [degrees] elevation. This body moved to the west (259 [degrees]) and then down. The shape was fluid but generally round with no tail, the color changing from white, to blue, to red to yellow and had a black spot in the center at all times.

PFC Stanley Oliver: "resembled an ice cream cone topped with red."

Lt. Orner: (Through binoculars) "Could not determine of (sic) object radiated or reflected light.

Thru binocs (sic) it appeared partially as parachute with bright sun reflecting from top of the silk, however, there seemed to be some red light around the lower part of it.

There is nothing in any of these descriptions that would disqualify a Skyhook balloon as the culprit. Col. Hix's description of it looking like an umbrella, Orner's suggestion that it appeared as a parachute, and Oliver's comment that it resembled an ice cream cone are particularly persuasive given that a Skyhook would resemble those. It means that there was a large, round object on top that tapered to a near point on the bottom.

The evidence, reported by Jerry Clark in his encyclopedia, from Barry Greenwood, Charles B. Moore and Robert Todd, also seems persuasive. I will note that neither Moore nor Greenwood responded to my requests for verification of their research on the matter. Clark seemed convinced of its authenticity, and, the descriptions offered seem to bear out the Skyhook identification.

Given what we now know, and that we have been able to access the accident records, that we know more about altitude sickness and hypoxia, and with the descriptions of the object available, it is clear that Mantell chased a Skyhook balloon. He climbed above the proscribed altitude without oxygen equipment, lost consciousness, and died in the resulting aircraft accident.

His fighter was seen to enter a power dive and was seen to break up about ten thousand feet above the ground. He died in the impact with the ground.

The other sightings, from Clinton County, Lockbourne, and Columbus, as well as the later sightings in Kentucky, appear to have been Venus. The description of the object as a bright light, its visibility over such a wide area, and the disappearance that coincides with Venus setting, all argue for that conclusion.

All of this suggests that the Mantell case, and the attached sightings, should be removed from the lists of UFOs. Mantell is explained by the Skyhook balloon and the other sightings by Venus. UFOlogy has solved this one.

REFERENCES

Adamski, G. (1955). *Inside The Space Ships* - NY: Abelard-Schuman.

Captain Mantell's Last Word - (1954). C.R.I.F.O. Newsletter. 1,9. 4.

Clark, J. (1998). *The UFO Encyclopedia* (Second Edition) Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, Inc. 603-607.

Crain, T. S. (1986). *A Mantell Diary* - MUFON UFO Journal. 217 9-13,17.

Emenegger, R. (1974). *UFO's Past, Present & Future* - NY: Ballantine Books. 28-36.

Gillmor, D. S., ed. (1969). *Scientific Study Of Unidentified Flying Objects* - NY: Bantam Books.

Greenfield, I. A. *The UFO Report* - NY: Lancer Books. 66-74.

"*I'm Still Climbing...*". (1967). *Flying Saucers UFO Reports*. 1,1.22-23.

Jones, W. E. (1990). *Historical notes: Thomas Mantell* - MUFON UFO Journal. 264 18-19.

Keyhoe, D. E. *Aliens From Space* - Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company. 15-16, 45, 135, 302.

----- (1950a) *The Flying Saucers Are Real* - NY: Fawcett Publications.

----- (1950b) *The Flying Saucers Are Real* - True. 11-13,83-87.

Klass, P. J. (1974). *UFO's Explained* - NY: Random House. 7, 34, 37-39.

Lorenzen, C. E. (1966). *Flying saucers: The Startling Evidence Of The Invasion From Outer Space* - NY: New American Library.

Mantell Accident Report. (1948). *Project Blue Book* files - National Archives: Washington, D.C. Microfilm roll T-1206-2.

Mantell Case File No. 136. (1948). *Project Blue Book* files - National Archives: Washington, D.C. Microfilm roll T-1206-2.

Miller, R. (1953). *The Story Of Richard Miller* - Washington,D.C: NICAP. 2

Mohler, S. R. (2000). *Quick Response By Pilots Remains Key To Surviving Cabin Decompression* - Human Factors & Aviation Medicine. V47 No1. 1-8.

Peebles, C. (1994). *Watch The Skies!* - NY: Berkley Books. 21-25.

Randle, K.D. (1997). *Project Blue Book - Exposed* - NY: Marlowe and Company. 46-59.

----- (1989). *The UFO Casebook* - NY: Warner Books. 19-27.

Randles, J. (1987). *The UFO Conspiracy* - London: Javelin Books. 25

Ruppelt, E. J. (1956). *The Report On Unidentified Flying Objects* - Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company.

Saunders, D. R. and Harkins, R. R. (1968). *UFO's? Yes! Where The Condon Committee Went Wrong* - NY: World Publishing Company.

Steiger, B. (1976). *Project Blue Book: The Top Secret UFO Findings Revealed* - NY: Ballantine Books.

Stringfield, L. H. (1977). *Situation Red, The UFO Siege!* - Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company.

Story, R. D. (1980). *The Encyclopedia Of UFOs* - Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company. 220-221

Strong, B. R. (1975). *The Truth About The Mantell Crash* - Official UFO 1,6. 20-21, 45-47.

Wilkins, H. T. (1954). *Flying Saucers On The Attack* - NY: Ace Books. 83-86.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the course of creating this article many people lent time, expertise, assistance, and copies of their private files. In no particular order, these included CUFOS and Frank John Reid, Jerry Clark, William E. Jones, Robert Young, and Robert Todd. A special thanks should go to Errol Bruce-Knapp who kindly offered to act as the focal point for [comments](#) and for posting the report, and to John Velez for provided an additional forum for posting.

Kevin Randle