

How Technology Tripped Up the Mantell Coverup: Proof of the Oxygen Deception by Mantell's Homebase

© by Brad Sparks, January 6, 2020

On January 7, 1948, Capt Thomas Mantell chased a UFO, as he flew with his two wingmen in F-51 propeller fighter planes over the State of Kentucky. But Mantell crashed and was killed, the first fatality of the modern UFO era. The Air Force claimed Mantell flew too high without oxygen – sounding a bit like the Icarus legend of the ancient Greeks – then lost consciousness and crashed.

It has now been proven that Mantell's homebase, Standiford Field (Air Force Base), Louisville, Kentucky, lied to the accident investigators on January 9, 1948, about not having oxygen supplies at the base to supply Mantell's group of planes for what was falsely insinuated to be over a week without oxygen at the base right up to January 9. The no-supply claim was in an accident report missed by UFO researchers until now.

In fact, Mantell's wingman resupplied his plane at Standiford with *oxygen* minutes after Mantell crashed on January 7 – so we know Standiford *did* have oxygen supplies. This resupply was necessary for that wingman to go back up in the air to search for the UFO. We know all this because of overheard chatter between bases and aircraft on what was called the Plan 62 interbase intercom system, which was recorded and/or transcribed by the Air Force's official Project Sign UFO investigators unbeknownst to the Air Force crash investigators who were separate and independent of Project Sign.

Standiford's false oxygen-supply story was designed to back up the official story being developed that Mantell recklessly flew too high without oxygen as he supposedly knew he (supposedly) had no oxygen supplies on board his fighter plane and (in later embellishments of the coverup story) was not even equipped with an oxygen system aboard his F-51 fighter and that that caused his fatal crash. This was contrary to the accident investigation that established that Mantell's plane *did* have the "*oxygen system*" inside, and it was found by the forensics examination after the crash to be intact and in "*working order*" (Mantell Accident Report, p. 2, sec. "I") (emphasis added here and elsewhere including capitalization) (page numbering is from handwritten sequential pagination from -1- through -53- in lower right of the main documents, though nearly 70 other pages, mostly redundant copies, are unnumbered).

Standiford Field falsely claimed to the aircraft accident investigators, Major Robert J. D. Johnson and Capt Robert R. Rankin, who flew in from the HQ USAF Air Inspector's Flying Safety Division based in Virginia, that Standiford had no oxygen supplies, that they only had them on order and were in process of being sent. Nothing was said about these oxygen supplies ever being received, as of the date of the interviews Jan. 9, 1948, two days after Mantell's crash, when the Air Inspector team was at Standiford gathering evidence and taking statements. Thus it was falsely insinuated that Standiford had been without oxygen for its planes for well over a week since about the day before the last servicing of Mantell's plane by Standiford on Dec. 29, or even earlier. (Accid. Rpt., p. 37, para. 13 "ff") (no mention of Standiford's actual receipt of oxygen

here in the Accident Report, or anywhere else within the USAF Air Inspector Report of Special Investigation, or within Standiford Accident Investigating Board report Form 14, or in any attached documents) (the Air Inspector investigators were at the crash site on Jan. 8 taking statements, then Marietta base, Jan. 8, then at Standiford Field, Louisville, on Jan. 9, 1948).

Standiford misleadingly claimed that it had “received” (no date given) a “bill of lading” showing oxygen was “*being sent*” to Standiford (NOT “*had been sent and received*”) – as if nothing else but that paperwork had been “received” as of Jan. 9 since nothing was said about the obviously more important issue of the *oxygen supply itself* actually being “received.” One cannot fill an aircraft oxygen tank with a piece of paper. Oxygen was still “being sent” as of Jan. 9, meaning the supplies were still in process and not yet delivered as of Jan. 9.

Strangely, there are no first-hand statements or testimony by any named or even unnamed Standiford officials about their purported oxygen supply problems, nothing on their thoughts or reasoning about (supposedly) not supplying oxygen to Mantell’s plane – evidently since it was not true. There is only the use of a silent laconic piece of paper intended to *insinuate* not directly state they had no oxygen for Mantell’s plane at his homebase. We can’t even double check the exact wording of the paper because conveniently no copy is presented, but standard bills of lading do not explain reasons *why* a shipment is needed only that a shipment order is made. (The madeup no-oxygen-supply excuse was also evidently intended to take advantage of the timing of the Christmas-New Year’s holiday to imply that on-order oxygen supplies had not come in yet at Standiford simply because of the holidays and imply that Standiford had run out, though not openly stated as being due to “holidays.”)

This oxygen supply issue was no minor detail but was at the very crux of the claimed cause of Mantell’s crash – lack of oxygen. It screamed to be documented and substantiated. The Air Inspector team’s devastating claim that Standiford had no oxygen to fill Mantell’s plane, is strangely undocumented – no witness statements, no documents, no interviews, no names, no dates, no details, just hearsay about an *undocumented document*. There were 100+ pages of accident reports and documents that could have substantiated this issue in detail – if it had been true. The issue of the exact date and time of Standiford’s alleged resupply as well as the exact date(s) and time(s) it suffered a purported lack of supply of oxygen are completely undocumented and unsubstantiated. Suspiciously there is *no Exhibit cited* (as there *is* an “Exhibit 2” cited to document *Marietta base’s* lack of oxygen supplies; but nothing, no Exhibit, for *Standiford*, the main center of the Mantell accident investigation).

The reported “bill of lading” (again, no copy presented, no “exhibit”) for oxygen supplies would not itself even prove that Standiford had ever run out of oxygen for its fighter planes because an order or “bill of lading” is merely for *more* oxygen and does *not* record or prove they had *run out* yet. A responsible aviation management would have ordered more oxygen in time and well before any oxygen supply ever ran out. It appears that someone at Standiford seized upon the “bill of lading” as a way to nevertheless suggest to the Air Inspector team that since more oxygen was coming in that they could use that to argue they *must* have run out of oxygen (even though

technically a non sequitur), and by keeping it vague through the leaving out of dates and details that would prevent easy refutation. Keeping names out of it prevented court-martial perjury charges – can't charge someone without knowing who to charge.

From the HQ USAF Air Inspector Report of Special Investigation, section 13, info collected on or about Jan. 8 and 9, 1948:

ee. The [Mantell] aircraft was not serviced with oxygen at Marietta as none was available at that station (Exhibit 2) [[← Notice an attached Exhibit document is cited here](#)]

ff. Standiford Field did not have oxygen available, however, a bill of lading had been received showing that oxygen was being sent to the 165th Fighter Squadron. [[← No Exhibit cited, no "received" date given, document is *undocumented*](#)]

No *named* Standiford official *testified* that they exhausted their oxygen supplies before Mantell's plane could be supplied on Dec. 29 or that it was still exhausted as of Jan. 9 as was insinuated (see quote above) in the Air Inspector special investigation report. Only this Air Inspector report mentions an alleged oxygen supply shortage and unavailability at the Standiford base, obviously based on unnamed sources at Standiford. There is no mention of this alleged problem at all in the *Standiford* Accident Board report (or in its attachments) where one would surely have expected it to be if it had actually happened. The Standiford Accident Board chose a narrower coverup claiming that Mantell knew he (supposedly) did not even have essential oxygen-system equipment on board his F-51 fighter thus was doomed even had there been oxygen in Mantell's tank. That would neatly moot the point about inadequacy of Standiford's oxygen supply logistics. More on this evolving coverup story below.

No one on the radio or on the Plan 62 interbase intercom, including Standiford base controllers and Mantell and his wingmen, ever mentions that Standiford had an issue with or a question about its oxygen resupply capability. None of Mantell's original three fighter-pilot wingmen mention awareness of any oxygen supply problem at their homebase at Standiford – pilots were required to conduct preflight checks and these three had flown with Mantell by transport to Marietta to do the preflights before flying the fighter planes back (more on this further on). (One original wingman Lt Hendricks did not join the UFO pursuit but headed straight to homebase, and thus only two wingmen were with Mantell on the UFO interception.)

The regulation-required mandatory Air Force Form 14 for Major Accident investigation demanded reporting of any "contributing factor" or "cause" in the crash such as "oxygen equipment" and airbase "facilities" with "inadequacies" (such as inadequate oxygen facilities) (Form 14, Sects. I and J, in *Accid. Rpt.*, pp. 2-3). No such "inadequacies" of Standiford base oxygen facilities were identified or mentioned by Standiford's Accident Investigating Board in its Form 14 report.

Thus, had Standiford really truly run out of oxygen supplies and thus caused or "contributed" to a *fatal air crash*, then it would have been reported in the Major Accident

report and the Air Inspector would have prepared orders requiring stricter base maintenance of oxygen supplies at fighter bases such as Standiford's. Yet no such orders or recommendations for orders were made (as was done on pilot safety on oxygen) – clearly because the supply shortage claim was completely made up, never happened.

And had Standiford received more oxygen supplies before the Jan. 9 on-site Air Inspector investigation at Standiford, this would have been noted instead of saying only that oxygen was still “being sent,” the only significance of which was to insinuate no oxygen had ever been received at any time up to Jan. 9 let alone in time for Mantell's plane. Documenting serious delays and inadequate oxygen supply at the base – if it had actually occurred (it did not) – would have indicated a broader problem in USAF aviation supplies and logistics, mandating immediate action by the USAF Air Inspector. And no Standiford official is quoted explaining their oxygen situation, which again shows that base oxygen supplies were not in fact ever an issue, but was a madeup hearsay in an early version of a coverup before it was realized that Mantell must be loaded with the blame personally not Standiford Field.

Ordinarily, Standiford would have or could have supplied Mantell's F-51 with oxygen *before* it was flown to Marietta airbase on Dec. 29, 1947, for maintenance work a week before Mantell flew it back or tried to (Marietta base itself reportedly had no oxygen supplies but we have no proof that was false like we do with Standiford: Accid. Rpt., p. 37, para. 13 “ee”; p. 41, Durey statement).

To defend against charges that Standiford should have loaded Mantell's plane with oxygen but didn't, Standiford tried to suggest it had had no oxygen on hand over the Christmas-New Year's holiday around say Dec. 25-29 (and even up to Jan. 9, which would demonstrate the severity and extent of its lack). Thus, the argument would go, Standiford tried to get more oxygen supplies but ran out, so they could not possibly have filled Mantell's oxygen system with oxygen on Dec. 29, that the plane's oxygen tank had to be left low or empty, so therefore Mantell had little or no oxygen onboard and Mantell's crash was not Standiford's fault.

But someone must have realized that this did not go far enough, it still left Standiford vulnerable to the argument that it should have not run out of oxygen in the first place. Thus it was an even better defense if Standiford could claim, based on hearsay rumor treated as “evidence,” that Mantell was missing an oxygen mask or other oxygen equipment (which we know is false, all the oxygen equipment was found in the crashed plane), then all the Standiford oxygen supplies in the world would not fix that problem.

Probably the final excuse dreamed up to exonerate Standiford was the claim that Mantell's flight was merely a “low-altitude ferry mission” and therefore *did not need* oxygen for high altitudes – *so why then talk about oxygen supplies at all, or lack thereof, at Standiford and Marietta bases??* This is just more evidence of desperate grasping at straws to come up with a convincing coverup story to obfuscate the causes of the tragedy, which was unsuccessful at consistency as they kept tripping themselves up with contradictions.

The Air Inspector report, based on the last on-base data collection on Jan. 9, 1948, knows nothing about and makes no mention of any “low-altitude ferry mission,” evidently because the “ferry” story hadn’t even been invented yet (first mention seems to appear in Standiford investigator Capt Tyler’s Jan. 12 report: *Accid. Rpt.*, p. 7). The Standiford Accident Board slipped into its narrative account (p. 4) the claim that Mantell himself told Godman Tower in his first radio communication that he was on a “ferrying” mission – but no one heard that on the radio and no evidence is cited, let alone nothing in the officially filed and signed Flight Plan. No one in Godman Tower or eavesdropping on the Plan 62 intercoms heard Mantell or anyone say they were on a “ferrying” mission, and there is nothing about “ferrying” in the Godman Tower’s *verbatim transcript* of those initial radio communications with Mantell (*Accid. Rpt.*, p. 11, Blackwell transcript). More on this dubious “low-altitude ferry” story below.

Standiford evidently realized it needed to shift the blame for the crash onto the dead pilot Mantell, who could not defend himself from the accusations, and away from placing any blame on the base. As the Air Inspector investigation coldly put it, “Inasmuch as the pilot [Mantell] was killed in the accident, it was impossible to obtain a Statement of Rebuttal regarding pilot error.” A deficiency in base oxygen supplies would still put considerable fault on Standiford whereas shifting the blame to a purported missing oxygen mask in Mantell’s plane would make the pilot (Mantell) seem mostly or entirely at fault. And again Mantell could never refute the phony charge since he was dead. (The accident investigators and wingmen tried to load quite a number of unsubstantiated false claims of alleged mistakes, supposed misjudgments, and purported strange or erratic behaviors onto Mantell in order to discredit him as reckless or suffering from hypoxia oxygen deprivation, or both, and thus pin *all* the blame for the accident on him. These were all false charges, many of which were completely fabricated out of whole cloth or embarrassingly absurd or tripped up by the actual radio chatter overheard on the Plan 62 system unbeknownst to them. More on this in future reports.)

Had the extra oxygen in fact arrived at Standiford on say Dec. 30 (or any date up to say Jan. 9), thus too late to supply Mantell’s plane on Dec. 29 before it took off for Marietta, that would have been reported to the Air Inspector team on Jan. 9 at Standiford – instead of fixating vaguely on the movement of a paperwork “bill of lading” and omitting to note the far more important matter of the *movement of the oxygen supplies*. Aircraft oxygen tanks cannot be filled with a promise or a piece of paper.

Also, Mantell and his wingmen all flew together with Standiford mechanics on a C-47 transport to Marietta Field on the morning of Jan. 7, 1948, to pick up and return the four F-51’s to Standiford and for all these pilots and mechanics (along with Marietta’s mechanics) to preflight check the F-51’s before the fateful mission that day. If Standiford had had a problem with running out of oxygen supplies at the base, the Standiford pilots and Standiford mechanics would surely have all heard about it and informed each other. Yet there is no mention by any of the pilots or mechanics of any such oxygen supply deficiency at their home base even after the crash that was widely believed due to hypoxia, lack of oxygen. Mantell’s wingmen Lts Clements and Hendricks were questioned by the Air Inspector team and Standiford’s accident investigator, yet there is no mention of Standiford base having oxygen supply problems

even though everyone knew oxygen was an issue in some major way in Mantell's crash. (Accid. Rpt., pp. 13-14, 42-44.)

In fact, Standiford Field did have oxygen, a fact we know because Mantell's homebase Standiford was in radio contact with Mantell's wingman Lt Clements on Jan. 7 and they were overheard on the Plan 62 interbase intercom system, monitored by Godman Tower, stating that he (Clements) was returning to Standiford and then to return to the air to look for the UFO. Clements said he had to land to get more fuel "*and oxygen*" from Standiford and then did so (Godman Operations Officer Capt Carter statement, and Godman Tower Commanding Ofcr. Lt Orner statement, in Project Sign BB files). This was not something misheard, because Clements did in fact land at Standiford, did resupply with fuel *and oxygen*, and did proceed to fly 100 miles up to 33,000 ft for close to ½ hour at an altitude where oxygen is absolutely essential and he could not possibly have flown without oxygen (AF regulations, we are endlessly reminded, required oxygen be used above 14,000 feet). Thus, it is *proven* that Standiford Field officials lied to accident investigators about not having oxygen at their base as of Jan. 9, 1948, including no oxygen in the preceding week-plus.

Let that sink in.

Once the official oxygen coverup is established here with Standiford AF and ANG officials lying about oxygen then the rest of the lies about Mantell and oxygen collapse like falling dominos. There are many recorded lies about Mantell and oxygen, this Standiford lie being the most blatant, although the Accident Board's repeated lies denying the forensic evidence inside Mantell's crashed F-51 that he did indeed have an intact "Oxygen system ... in working order" come a close second in blatant outrageousness. On the no-oxygen supply claim, as we showed above, Standiford was tripped up by the Plan 62 interbase intercom system revealing Standiford indeed had oxygen supplies on hand and had replenished Mantell's wingman Clement's F-51 with oxygen.

Standiford evidently did not realize that Project Sign UFO investigators had collected the overheard radio comm and Plan 62 interbase comm reports from Godman Field (as well as other bases listening in), which reports were never sent to the 5-man Standiford (Mantell) Accident Board. Standiford knew what their own base said and did and what oxygen supplies it did or did not have, but may not have realized, at least initially, how many others at other bases linked by Plan 62 intercom knew of their oxygen resupply of Mantell's wingman, which exposed as a sham their early coverup story about having no oxygen supplies. There might have been ways around the embarrassing oxygen refill by the Mantell wingman – perhaps suggesting bad luck "coincidence" or "bad timing" they had no oxygen for Mantell but did for Mantell's wingman – but the excuses were probably deemed too complicated as well as opening up too many new and incriminating questions.

Thus technology, in the form of the Plan 62 inter-base intercom system tripped up the Mantell coverup and not just on the existence of Standiford's oxygen supplies, but on many issues of the UFO pursuit which multiple air bases overheard on the Plan 62 intercom. We can't get into those at this time, but must be reserved for a later report.

As for why the Standiford oxygen-coverup board didn't just falsify the accident report to *not* say Mantell had an oxygen system in working order, they slipped up. It got through their coverup, or they were afraid to falsify forensics evidence because of possible perjury court-martial charges and wanted to use trickery to evade the facts instead – tricks that would dodge direct perjury. They may not have been able to control the forensics investigation mechanics who tested Mantell's oxygen system who were apparently under a different chain-of-command not under their direct control. They seemed to have decided to use a legal trick of cherry-picking the "facts" that they liked – even *false* hearsay "facts" – and ignore the rest (like the forensics), which would in effect bury the one line of truth in a mass of repetition of the chosen narrative saying Mantell had "no oxygen ... no oxygen no oxygen" again and again.

Here is how that trick worked: One wingman lied and claimed Mantell had no oxygen mask or equipment, without explaining how he knew that from percipient observation, thus it was hearsay (thus he couldn't be charged with perjury) and also it was false of course (mask was part of the intact "oxygen system" thus it was another oxygen lie). But the Standiford accident board chose to repeat the wingman's false hearsay and ignore what the forensic evidence showed inside Mantell's crashed fighter plane – an intact "Oxygen system ... in working order," a system that of course included the oxygen mask. Had there been the slightest *legitimate* doubt about the presence or absence of the oxygen mask in Mantell's plane *they could just simply have looked inside the recovered Mantell F-51*. Or checked the photos undoubtedly taken of the inside of Mantell's cockpit (which photos have disappeared and are never referenced; plenty of photos of the outside of Mantell's F-51 are in the file, but strangely none from inside).

Standiford and Marietta bases together thoroughly inspected Mantell's plane on a regular or frequent basis and never noticed that Mantell was missing an oxygen mask from his plane. The four F-51's were there at Marietta for special maintenance work beyond routine, yet no one mentioned a missing oxygen mask or equipment. No one ever questioned the Standiford or Marietta maintenance crews about what would have been a major oversight – if in fact the oxygen mask or other oxygen equipment was really missing (again, oxygen mask and equipment were found in the plane after the crash). But in fact the oxygen mask/equipment was not missing, so that is obviously why no such inquiry was made. The USAF Air Inspector would have issued Air Force-wide *maintenance* orders specifically for all *maintenance crews* (separate from the flight crews) to check fighter planes and other high-altitude aircraft for missing oxygen masks and equipment if that *maintenance* oversight had actually occurred, but did not because it did not occur. (Standiford's Accident Board issued orders for *pilots at their base* to carry oxygen masks but said nothing explicitly about *maintenance* crews who would have to supply the masks, again making it appear it was only *pilot error* involved in the Mantell crash. Accid. Rpt., p. 4.)

In another line of evidence refuting the no-mask story, Mantell's wingman Clements reportedly radioed Mantell near the end of the UFO chase to tell him that the other wingman Lt. Hammond "had no oxygen and was getting dizzy," but *did not warn Mantell* that he (Mantell himself) was supposedly known to be missing an oxygen mask and had no oxygen (Accid. Rpt., p. 8, Tyler informal accident report). We must conclude

Clements did not warn Mantell because Mantell was *not* missing an oxygen mask or other oxygen equipment and *did* have oxygen.

When Clements lied in his official statement with his hearsay that it was “known” somehow in some vague unexplained fashion that Mantell did not have an oxygen mask or equipment, he neglected to make his lies consistent. Clements forgot to add a lie to also claim he warned Mantell by radio about *Mantell* (allegedly) lacking an oxygen mask when he discussed *Hammond’s* lack of oxygen with Mantell, when the subject of oxygen danger should naturally and obviously have been brought up if Mantell was in danger too (Accid. Rpt., p. 8) – because, again, Mantell was not in obvious danger and Mantell’s oxygen system was in “working order” since he did *not lack* an oxygen mask or hoses or tanks or gauges.

Before anyone realized a need for an oxygen coverup story, Mantell wingman Clements also spilled the truth over the radio about Standiford having oxygen supplies. Godman Field Operations Officer Capt Cary (not Gary) W. Carter was in the Godman Tower at the end of his 8-4 shift and witnessed the Mantell UFO pursuit. Carter said they “heard” (over the interbase intercom Plan 62 undoubtedly) that one of the planes in Mantell’s group “had landed” (past tense) at Standiford to “get fuel *and oxygen* to resume the search” for the UFO (Carter statement, Sign-BB files). We know that was Clements’ F-51 that landed at Standiford at 3:40 PM. Carter left Godman Tower at the end of his shift at about 4:00 PM and was not there when Clements started his futile search. Clements took off from the Standiford runway at 4:05 PM and reached the last known vicinity of Mantell and the UFO at around 4:20-4:30 and saw nothing, and saw no Skyhook balloon either, which should have been about 40-60 miles away at that time (the Skyhook balloon has become the accepted explanation for the Mantell UFO even though too far away to have been seen at 140 miles from Godman or even 40-60 miles). So much for the Skyhook’s long-distance visibility, it was not visible beyond about 30 miles and this proves it again. Carter was not in Godman Tower when word came in at about 4:45 PM (long after Carter’s 8-4 shift had ended) reporting that Mantell had crashed (crashed at 3:18 PM).

Similarly the Commanding Officer of Godman Tower, in charge of the AACS Detachment 733-5 operating the control tower, Lt. Paul I. Orner, reported in his official statement (Sign-BB files):

“NG800 and other wing man returned to Standiford Field.

[NG800 was Capt Mantell’s wingman Lt Clements, the other was Lt Hammond, NG737.]

“NG800 [Lt Clements] gassed up and *got more oxygen* [from Standiford] and flew a second mission on the same heading of 210° to a position of about 100 miles south of Godman Field to an altitude of 33 thousand [33,000] feet and did not sight the object. At about 1645 [4:45 PM] CST when NG800 reported not seeing the object I left the [Godman] Control Tower.” (Orner statement, pp. 1-2, Sign-BB files)

To return to what was probably the final oxygen coverup story, the supposed “low-altitude ferry mission” excuse, made by unstated innuendo, for supposedly not *needing* even to supply oxygen to Mantell’s plane at all: The Standiford Accident Board claimed that: “This flight had been *planned* and *scheduled* as a *ferry* and navigational trip at *low level*.” (Accid. Rpt., p. 4) The Board cites no Exhibits or actual documented documents here – again it is an *undocumented document*. But in fact, the official signed Flight Plan, signed by Mantell and clearance authorized by the Marietta base Commanding Officer Col. Robert C. Paul, and attached to the Board Report, makes no mention of “low altitude” or a “ferrying” mission (or for that matter anything about a “navigational” training exercise).

Nor is any low-altitude height restriction given in the ALT (Altitude) spaces on the Flight Plan form. (Flight Plan, Form 23 sect. D: Accid. Rpt., p. 20) If it was quote “scheduled” as such then where is the copy of the “*schedule*” saying that? Once again, why even talk about oxygen supplies, or lack thereof, at Standiford and Marietta bases if none were needed for a supposed “low-altitude ferry-only” mission?? At best, the investigators could have said that it was informally understood Mantell to be on a low-altitude ferry mission, but to say that that alleged fact was documented on a (nonexistent) “*schedule*” is a lie. Again, no one actually stated *explicitly* that Mantell’s plane was left unfilled with oxygen for the reason that his plane supposedly did not need oxygen for a low-altitude-only, ferry-only mission. It was just left to inference and innuendo, probably off paper in hushed conversations. If no-oxygen-needed-for-ferrying was the reason for the crash then it should have been discussed, but instead there is no discussion of it at all as the cause or contributing factor in the crash.

As for what *did* cause Mantell’s crash, it seems his oxygen mask or hose leaked or failed at high altitude, which investigators on the ground could not detect at sea level as they did not have high-altitude chambers to test Mantell’s oxygen equipment nor did they have a way to fly the system up to 20,000-25,000 ft to test. At sea level it appeared to be in “working order.” Oxygen mask failure remains a major problem for air forces right up to the present day. A study of hypoxia incidents in the Royal Australian Air Force in 1990-2001 found 63% due to failure of the mask or regulator, or a mask leak (RAAF Institute of Aviation Medicine, *Aviat. Space Environ. Med.*, Feb. 2003). In 2017 and 2018 the USAF grounded its entire fleet of T-6 prop-aircraft trainers for apparent oxygen system failures causing dangerous hypoxia-like Unexplained Physiological Episodes (UPEs) as they were termed (*Aviation Week*, April 16, May 8, 2018).

Mantell’s full power climb (but not at maximum war emergency power) was likely a spiral climb beneath the higher altitude UFO, trying to get closer to identify it (he and his wingmen had earlier carried out a similar spiral climb over Godman Tower at the start of the chase). Then he apparently turned the spiral climb into a spiral descent perhaps just before he lost consciousness, sensing something was wrong. Mantell had throttled back aircraft power (it was found at ¼ power setting in the crashed remains) but it was too late. It is possible Mantell briefly regained consciousness at around 10,000 to 15,000 ft where there is more oxygen and pulled the F-51 out of its catastrophic spiral dive, but too late. The F-51 had reached the Mach compressibility speed zone and parts broke off, then went into a flat spin and impacted the ground hard on its belly,

mostly intact, contrary to witnesses and the AF who exaggerated the event as a mid-air “disintegration” or “explosion,” disproven by the physical evidence on the ground.

The USAF Air Inspector report (Mantell Accid. Rpt. p. 37, para. 13bb) claimed: “Parts of the ailerons fuselage [sic – ailerons and fuselage are two different parts], empennage and glass from the canopy, were scattered over an area of 1/4-of [sic] a mile. (Exhibits 10 and 11)” Those Exhibits say no such thing. Only the tail was found ¼ mile away. Parts of empennage, fuselage and glass canopy were found together 300 yards away from main wreckage, not ¼ mile. The horizontal stabilizer was found 6/10 mile away. That’s it. These do not demonstrate a mid-air “explosion” or “disintegration,” only mid-air damage to the weakest parts of the aircraft from Mach compression speeds reached in the speed dive. The AF claimed that the Mantell plane’s “disintegration” at 10,000 to 20,000 feet was supposedly proven by the left wing breaking off even though that is only one large part of the aircraft, the wing itself had not “exploded” or “disintegrated” but was an intact wing (look at the photos on the ground in the Accident Report and news reports).

In fact, the left wing could not possibly even have broken off at 10,000-20,000 ft (as the AF claimed) and then land only 20 yards away from the fuselage, it is an absolute impossibility. Aerodynamics of a broken-off wing are radically different from a fuselage, with half its wings intact, supposedly falling from 10,000-20,000 ft. Clearly the left wing broke off just before impact, not at 10,000-20,000 ft, but possibly from the aircraft hitting a tree, and thus landing only 20 yards from the main wreckage.

To sum up: Mantell’s oxygen mask or hose evidently leaked or failed, through no fault of his own, in the UFO chase, and he lost oxygen, passed out and crashed. Mantell’s homebase Standiford Field at Louisville floated a number of false stories to explain away the crash as not the fault of negligent base personnel. Standiford personnel lied about having no oxygen to supply Mantell’s plane, lied about Mantell not having an oxygen mask or equipment, then lied about not even needing to supply Mantell with oxygen because he was supposedly restricted to *only* low altitudes where oxygen was not needed, a “low-altitude ferry” mission to move aircraft back to home base. These proven AF lies cast doubt on the rest of the official story about Mantell’s flight and the UFO aspects of the mission. More on this in future reports.

Something unexplained was seen in the skies over Kentucky on that day in January 1948. Hundreds of military personnel and civilians saw it. Captain Thomas Mantell lost his life trying to identify the object, the UFO, while on an assigned air defense mission in service to his country. Mantell’s home base misled accident investigators with an evolving series of coverup stories to avoid responsibility for the crash and to pin all the blame on Mantell who could not answer back because he was dead. Newly uncovered evidence establishes Standiford AFB’s role in the coverup of the crash and the broader Air Force policy in its early days of avoiding responsibility for such a crash in order to avert public embarrassment and potential Congressional investigations.

“COVER UP” SIDE NOTE

Mantell crash investigator Major Robert J. D. Johnson has a troubling role in an “Air Force ... cover up” of another aircraft crash in 1948, done as a matter of AF-wide policy, thus raising questions about the Mantell case earlier in 1948. It was called an AF “cover up” and documented in a major 2013 law review article by the dean and law professor of Cardozo Law School, since the case eventually made it up to the US Supreme Court in a landmark decision that created the “state secrets” privilege (*U.S. v. Reynolds*, 1953, 345 U.S. 1, 73 S.Ct. 528). Nine of 13 crew including civilian electronic engineers from RCA were killed in a fire and explosion of a B-29 aircraft on Oct. 6, 1948, near Waycross, Georgia. They were testing secret components for a future unmanned drone B-29 bomber under AMC (Air Materiel Command) Project Banshee MX-767. This was barely 9 months after the Mantell crash on Jan. 7, 1948, in the same region of the Southeastern U.S.

The 117-page Cardozo law review concluded that “the Air Force’s first reaction to the crash was to *cover up* the facts and circumstances surrounding the crash so as to avoid any public embarrassment or humiliation that might result from a searching investigation.” (Rudenstine, *Cardozo Law Review*, 2013, vol. 34, pp. 1283-1399, emphasis added here and below; special thanks to Bob Klinn for uncovering this review and major case.)

This AF “first reaction” to the B-29 crash, to “cover up,” was to send Major Johnson from the Air Inspector’s office of the AF Inspector General to the site, and separately convene a 5-man board of investigation at the home base, just like with the Mantell case several months before. But unlike the Mantell case, Johnson put each military witness under oath and read them their rights under the 24th Article of War (a military rendering of Constitutional Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination).

No such military oaths were administered to Mantell case AF witnesses by Major Johnson or his partner Capt Rankin or by the Mantell Accident Board, from any evidence seen in the record, which meant that the Mantell AF witnesses were freer to pass on hearsay and speculation and even to risk lying with impunity. Interestingly, the Mantell Board investigator Capt Richard Tyler had no problem administering sworn oaths to *civilians* in affidavits on the Mantell crash – just *not* to *military* witnesses (Accid. Rpt., pp. 15-18, 49, civilians Glenn Mayes, Mrs Phillips, Wm. Mayes, Booker, affidavits sworn before Capt Tyler). In fact, they went to the effort of getting civilian William Phillips to swear under oath that none of his buildings were damaged “in any way” by the crash of Mantell’s plane on his property (Accid. Rpt., p. 18, sworn before Capt Tyler and with a witness to the oath). (By the way, Maj. Johnson and others signing “certified true copies” of witness statements are just certifying trueness of photocopies or typed copies and are not legally the same as the *witnesses* swearing oaths certifying the truth of *their own statements* and such copy-certification is worthless as testimony on the event itself. It is *not* a sworn oath of *witnesses* as in affidavits saying “Sworn to and subscribed before me this X day of January 1948.”)

The Cardozo review found that the AF’s investigation in the Waycross accident was “sharply curtailed” because the AF “had had no interest in finding out the real causes of the crash or learning any information about the crash that would embarrass the Air Force, undermine its public standing, stir up any opposition to its various programs that

required Congressional ... funding, or cause ... Air Force [contractors] to lose any trust or confidence in the safety” of AF aircraft.

The law review ticked off a list of deficiencies in Major Johnson’s interviews of Warner Robins AFB witnesses to the B-29 crash:

- “Johnson did not question [witnesses] about the cause of the fire ... or its spread....
- “He did not inquire into the plane’s spinning and subsequent explosion and crash....
- “He did not inquire into whether the plane’s engines had the [required] heat shields [to prevent] fires....
- “Johnson did not ask about the timing of the opening of the bomb bay doors and the failure of the pilot to quickly take the plane to a lower altitude which might have given all the passengers more time to escape....
- “Nor did Johnson ask the three surviving servicemen ... why they did not take any steps to assist the civilians’ escape.”

Likewise the Cardozo review found that the Warner Robins Accident Board team did not “so much investigate the accident as chronicle it, ... and its report failed to state that the civilian engineers were not briefed on emergency procedures, [failed] to explain why the plane went into a spin, [failed] to point out that the plane lacked heat shields and was thus out of compliance with a technical order” regulation requirement, and failed to investigate the cause of the aircraft fire.

The Cardozo review points to an institutional AF policy at least in 1948 of failing to conduct, or withholding, full investigations of embarrassing aircraft accidents in order to protect the service from Congressional and public inquiries. The Mantell case in 1948 certainly fits this profile of AF procedure and policy of “cover up” of AF aircraft crashes, a crash that made sensational headlines nationwide and embarrassed the AF as unable to control the skies.

Major Johnson subsequently disappears into the shadows. One possibility is that Johnson went into AFOSI, AF Office of Special Investigations, a sister agency under the AF Inspector General.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Fran Ridge and his NICAP legacy team for keeping the Mantell case alive and in public view. Also thanks to Kevin Randle for hypoxia studies and some sharp questions about the official narrative. Special thanks to Jim Klotz and Bob Klinn for their unceasing FOIA and investigative efforts into the backgrounds of Major Johnson and Capt. Rankin. My apologies if I have overlooked anyone on the oxygen aspects of the case.

///