

The Mantell UFO Sighting: A Reevaluation – 2018

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ABSTRACT: On January 7, 1948, Captain Thomas F. Mantell, Kentucky Air National Guard fighter pilot, crashed his P-51D¹ Mustang fighter near Franklin, Kentucky. He crashed and was killed while chasing a large object that residents of Kentucky, members of the Kentucky State Police and military officers claimed to be a flying saucer or unidentified flying object (UFO)². There were multiple witnesses to the object including, Colonel Guy F. Hix, the commanding officer at Godman Army Air Field, five members of the Godman Tower crew, and the three wingmen with Mantell. Hix, along with three witnesses in the air and a dozen on the ground, described the UFO to Air Force investigators. The Air Force investigators concluded that Mantell died in an aircraft accident caused by his attempt to intercept the object at a high altitude. Air Force investigators first identified the object as Venus, then a weather balloon, and finally a combination of Venus and two weather balloons. Early analysis gave rise to speculation about the object as well as evidence that the Air Force was unreasonably promoting the Venus solution. Air Force Officers concluded that Mantell had violated regulations by climbing above 14,000 feet without supplemental oxygen available and died in the resulting crash. They eventually concluded that the object Mantell chased was a cosmic ray research balloon known as a Skyhook.

This paper presents a reevaluation of the case using records using records that were once classified but have been opened for public scrutiny including, the accident investigation report and the classified balloon research data. Unclassified sources including newspaper reports written at the time were accessed through Internet sources. In a few cases, interviews with the principals made in 1948, have been recovered and used as an aid in the re-examination of the event. This paper concludes that the unidentified flying object chased by Captain Mantell was a Skyhook research balloon, that the ancillary sightings were Venus, and recommends that the Mantell incident be removed from the classic list of unsolved UFOs.

Part I

1.1 THE INCIDENT: As frequently reported in UFO literature, the incident began at 1320 hours (1:20 p.m.). That afternoon, the Kentucky State Highway Patrol received calls about an object flying over Maysville, Elizabethtown and Madisonville, Kentucky. The Kentucky State Highway Patrol informed the military police about the calls. The military police, in turn, informed Technical Sergeant (T/SGT) Quinton Blackwell, working in the tower at Godman Army Air Field at Fort Knox, Kentucky. (Clark, 1998; Peoples 1995; Project Blue Book microfilm, roll no. 2, case no. 138). Blackwell used the information from the Highway Patrol to locate the object to the southwest of the airfield. Blackwell, informed the base operations officer, the intelligence officer and finally the base commander, Colonel Guy F. Hix. No one knew what the object was.

¹ The designation of P-51, which stood for pursuit, was changed in June, 1948, to F-51 for fighter. Unless a quoted document uses F-51, all references to the aircraft will begin with the "P".

² There is a difference between UFO and flying saucer. A UFO is an unidentified flying object that isn't necessarily an alien spacecraft, isn't necessarily flying and isn't necessarily an object. A UFO can be a natural phenomenon or a misidentified aircraft or even a delusion or hallucination. UFO has a variety of meanings. Many now refer to them as Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP). A flying saucer is, by definition, an alien spacecraft.

Although witness accounts vary, they all describe an object that was moved very slowly and at a high altitude. For about an hour and twenty-five minutes, dozens of people, including Colonel Hix, watched the UFO seemed to hang motionless in the southwestern sky. Witnesses in southern Kentucky, said the UFO drifted silently and slowly to the south. Other witnesses thought that the UFO hovered for a few minutes and then resumed its slow flight.



anged. A flight of P-51 Mustang approached Godman Army Air Field. With leader, Captain Thomas Mantell (See Figure 1), was asked if he would investigate. Mantell replied that he was merely ferrying the aircraft but that he would attempt to intercept the object. He began a spiraling, climbing turn to 220 degrees and 15,000 feet.

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

The records are unclear about the altitudes that the various pilots reached. Mantell and two of his wingmen reached 15,000 feet. Some of the documentation suggests that all three aircraft eventually reached 22,000 feet, where the two wingmen, Lieutenant A.W. Clements and Lieutenant B.A. Hammond turned back. The oxygen equipment in one of the fighters failed and the others were without a charged oxygen system, which violated military regulations. Those regulation required that oxygen to be used above 14,000 feet. Hammond radioed that he and Clements were abandoning the intercept, but Mantell, who had no charged oxygen equipment on his aircraft, continued to climb. Mantell did not acknowledge the message from Hammond.

By 3:10 p.m., Mantell was the only pilot still attempting the intercept the unidentified object and he was alone at 20,000 feet. Some of the documentation found in the Project Blue Book files suggest one of two things happened. Either Mantell told his wingmen that he was going to climb to 20,000 and if he could get no closer he would end the intercept. Alternatively, Mantell said he was going to 25,000 feet for ten minutes before abandoning the intercept if he could get no closer.

The last that anyone saw of him, he was still climbing toward the object. He 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.

A search for Mantell began. Just after 5:00 p.m. On a farm near Franklin, Kentucky, search teams found the remains of Mantell's P-51 scattered over about a half a mile. Mantell's body was inside the broken cockpit. His watch had stopped at 3:18 p.m. Evidence suggests 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. Additional information and analysis about the incident exists including speculation, testimonies involved parties, (both on the ground and in the air) and on the available documentation.

As required by military regulations an accident investigation began immediately. It was a two-pronged investigation. First to determine what happened to Mantell and why he had crashed. In other words, it was investigated as a standard aircraft accident. Second, to identify the object, or objects, that he chased. This was one of the first UFO investigations, the officers of Project Sign made.³

Part II

2.1 The Accident Investigation: Accident investigators, unconcerned with the reports of the object, attempted to learn why Mantell crashed. They looked at the testimonies of the other pilots, interviewed those in the control tower at Godman AAF, examined the wreckage of the aircraft, reviewed Mantell's experience as a military pilot and the details relating to the flight to include the specifications of the manufacture of his aircraft. According to the Army Air Forces Report of Major Accident, Mantell's aircraft (aircraft number 44-65869) was built on December 15, 1944. It crashed 3.5 miles from Franklin, Kentucky on January 7, 1948. The narrative section of the report 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.

³ Technically, Project Sign did not exist. Although LTG Nathan Twining had ordered the creation of a project to investigate the sightings of the flying disks, the project would not officially begin until January 22, 1948. Prior to that, sighting reports had been collected by various military commands and eventually much of that material would be sent to Project Sign. Sign would morph into Project Grudge, which, in turn, would become Project Blue Book. Public investigation into UFOs would end in 1969 when it was announced that Project Blue Book would close.

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.

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. 60-16.⁴

The accident investigators and the Air Force officers reviewing the accident report recommended that pilots receive additional briefings on oxygen equipment usage and the effects that lack of oxygen has on the human body and mind.

2.2 Destruction of Mantell's Aircraft

A number of witnesses offered affidavits as supporting documentation of the accident. A witness on the ground, William C. Mayes, saw the aircraft as it circled at a high altitude. He then watched as the aircraft fell from the sky and broke 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

⁴ All documentation referenced here can be found on the Project Blue Book microfilm, roll no. 2, case no. 136, at the NICAP Site at <http://www.nicap.org/mantellcomp.htm>, Fold3 website at <https://www.fold3.com/> (search Project Blue Book listings, and Steiger, Brad (ed). Project Blue Book, Ballentine Books: New York (1976) pp. 43 – 62. Other documentation will be identified by source.

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 plane 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

Glenn Mayes signed a similar statement on the same day. There is little difference between what these two eye witnesses said they saw as Mantell's plane began to break up above them.

2.3 Time of Impact

Because it likely stopped on impact, Mantell's watch established the exact time of the crash. The Franklin County Coroner completed an affidavit that 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

2.4 Anoxia/Hypoxia

The last part of the accident summary suggests that Mantell lost consciousness due to anoxia. The accident investigators were certain that this was the actual cause of the accident. The questions that arose about this conclusion include the following: Can the effects of anoxia develop that quickly? If so, why did anoxia not affect the wingmen as they did Mantell?

According to health line⁵ anoxia is “happens when your body or brain completely loses its oxygen. Anoxia is usually a result of hypoxia. This means that a part of your body doesn’t have enough oxygen... Hypoxia can be a consequence of many conditions. These include:

- Low oxygen at high altitudes
- Significant blood loss
- Carbon monoxide and other poisonings
- Breathing difficulties that lower oxygen supply
- Low blood flow to organs
- Sudden injuries

When hypoxia turns to anoxia, the parts of your body that need oxygen to function can stop working properly.”

Another Internet resource, Centre for NeuroSkills clarifies the difference between anoxia and hypoxia 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.”⁶

In technical terms, it seems that although Mantell could have suffered from anoxia, he probably suffered from a form of hypoxia known as hypoxemic. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains that hypoxemic 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.”

Furthermore, Dr. Stanley R. Mohler, reported in *Flight Safety Foundation - Human Factors and Aviation Medicine*, “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 climbed to 25,000 feet and suffered hypoxia. The effects can be devastating and can lead to unconsciousness. The critical question here is at what altitude these symptoms begin. According healthline.com⁷:

It typically occurs at about 8,000 feet... above sea level. Dizziness, nausea, headaches and shortness of breath are a few symptoms of this condition. Most instances of altitude sickness are mild and heal quickly. In rare cases, altitude sickness can become

⁵ <https://healthline.com/health/anoxia>, accessed July 9, 2018

⁶ <https://www.neuroskills.com/brain-injury/anoxia-and-hypoxia.php>, accessed July 9, 2018

⁷ <https://www.healthline.com/health/acute-mountain-sickness>, accessed July 9, 2018

severe and cause complications with the lungs or brain.

The FAA warns pilots about the dangers of hypoxia:

But hypoxia – by its nature, a grim deceiver – makes you feel confident that you are doing a better job of flying than he has ever done before... Regardless of his acclimation, endurance, or other attributes, every pilot will suffer the consequences of hypoxia when he is exposed to inadequate oxygen pressure...

Flying above 12,500 feet without oxygen is like playing Russian roulette – the odds are than [sic] you may not get hurt, but it's a deadly game! At 20,000 feet your vision deteriorates to the point that seeing is almost impossible. The engine sounds become imperceptible, breathing labored and the heart beats rapidly. You haven't the vaguest idea what is wrong, or whether anything is wrong. At 25,000 feet you will collapse and death is imminent unless oxygen is restored.

No one is exempt from the effects of hypoxia... Some pilots may be able to tolerate a few thousand feet more of altitude than others, but no one is really very far from average. Remember this: Serious trouble is waiting for the pilot who tries to test himself to prove how much higher he can fly or how much longer he can function without supplemental oxygen.⁸

In the prevention section of the FAA website, it is recommended that "... by following these simple guidelines you will be able to reduce your chances of experiencing hypoxia during flight. If pressurization is not an option and supplemental oxygen is not available, limit your exposure time to less than 1 hour between 10K feet and 14K feet, including not more than 30 minutes between 12K and 14K feet."

What all this tells us is that symptoms, though mild, can begin as low as 6,300 feet, or which is slightly higher than Denver, Colorado. It also tells us that people traveling above 9,840 should have supplemental oxygen. At the time, Army regulations required the use of oxygen in aircraft flying above 14,000 feet. Mantell was well above those altitudes.

2.5 The Swift Onset of Hypoxia

Another question to consider is how rapidly symptoms of hypoxia develop? Was Mantell susceptible to hypoxia (hypoxemic) after minutes at altitude? After all, the wingmen reported they had followed him to 22,500 feet before they turned back because one of the didn't have oxygen equipment. Neither of the wingmen lost consciousness or crashed.

The crash of golfer Payne Stewart's Lear 35 (private jet) provides information about the rapidity of hypoxia at high altitude. According to an Associated Press story as reported in *USA Today*⁹, "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

⁸ https://www.faa.gov/pilots/training/airman_education/topics_of_interest/hypoxia/, accessed July 9, 2018

⁹ www.usatoday.com/sports/ and specifically in <http://www.usatoday.com>golf/stewart/stewfs05.htm>

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. Mohler adapted the from *Fundamentals of Aerospace Medicine*.

Altitude (feet above sea level)	TUC
40,000	15 seconds
35,000	20 seconds
30,000	30 seconds
25,000	1 minute
20,000	2 minutes
15,000	3 minutes
10,000	6 minutes
5,000	10 minutes
0	Indefinite

Source: Adapted from *Fundamentals of Aerospace Medicine*
Sheffield, Paul, Henrichsen, R. "Respiratory Physiology," Chapter 8
in *Fundamentals of Aerospace Medicine*, edited by DeHart, Roy,
University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, U.S.;
Williams and Wilkins, 1986.
Sheffield, Paul, Deaf, R. "Protection in the Pressure
Environment: Cabin Pressurization and Oxygen Equipment,"
Chapter 8 in *Fundamentals of Aerospace Medicine*, edited by
DeHart, Roy, University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,
U.S.; Williams and Wilkins, 1986.

feet, Mantell could expect to remain “usefully conscious” for ten minutes; at 20,000 feet, three minutes, and at 25,000 feet, two minutes. From the table, if Mantell climbed to 25,000, he would not have had the time required for his self-defined search. At best, he would have had overlooked the fact that he flew above 14,000 feet for several minutes, and that the climb to 20,000 and then onto 25,000 took additional time.

One area of confusion about the incident is at which altitude the wingmen left Mantell. The accident report suggests that the wingmen followed Mantell to 22,000 feet, and that he had reported he would climb on to 25,000 feet before he abandoned the intercept (Project Blue Book files). 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

(Ruppelt, 48).

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.”



Clements’s own statement, found in the Project Blue Book files, and is at variance from other documentation available in that file, said, “I called Capt. Mantell and told him I could see the object but suggested that since we did not seem to be making a gain on the object, that it would be better if we leveled off and tried to pick up some speed and possibly get under the object. His transmissions were garbled but he mentioned something about going to 25000’ for about 10 minutes and then if we were unable to make any further progress towards the object, we could drop down.”

In his analysis, Brad Sparks, a private UFO researcher who extensively

reviewed the Project Blue Book file, wrote, "Here Clements insinuates that Mantell's radio transmission was 'garbled' due to the effects of hypoxia..." (Ridge 2010).

Sparks wrote that Mantell's transmissions were not garbled. However, Sparks wrote that, according to information gathered by personnel in Godman Tower, Mantell's transmissions were not garbled. Clements's account about garbled transmissions might refer to problems with his radio because others were able to hear the transmission clearly.

Sparks also noted that Godman tower personnel reported that Mantell climbed from 15,000 feet to 20,000. Both T/SGT Blackwell and Captain Carter, heard Mantell report that he was at 15,000 feet. Carter heard Mantell say, "...going to 20,000 feet and if no closer will abandon [the] chase."

Clements, however, said that at approximately out 18,000 feet, Mantell did not reduce his power settings, and continued the climb. Mantell pulled away from the others and Clements had to use maximum power to keep up with him. He said, "At about 22,500, realizing that it was too high to n, I broke off the flight ... and Capt. Mantell disappeared, ... I called him and informed him that we were breaking off the flight and returning to Standiford Field, but he did not acknowledge."



Lieutenant Buford A. Hammond, who was the second wingman provided a statement adding to the confusion over the altitude. He said, "By the time I hit 22,000 I was seeing double. I pulled along side Clements and indicated with gestures that I didn't have an oxygen mask." (*Courier*, January 9, 1948).

The official files do not resolve this altitude conflict. Based on the documentation and on the statements filed by the wingmen and the Godman Tower personnel, it is unclear at what altitude the wingmen left Mantell. It is also unclear at what altitude Mantell was when the wingmen and tower personnel received his last transmission. It is clear, however, that he continued the intercept beyond 20,000 feet. At that point, he would have remained usefully conscious, at best, for ten minutes.

2.6 Mantell's Oxygen Equipment

To understand how the crash happened, it is critical to understand that Mantell's aircraft had an oxygen system. Given he was flying a P-51 with a service ceiling of 42,000 feet, this is not surprising. Without that equipment, a pilot would survive a flight over 20,000 feet without that equipment for mere minutes. At 30,000 feet or above, a pilot would lose useful consciousness in a matter of seconds. Without supplemental oxygen, hypoxia would kill the pilot.

The accident investigation, determined that system on Mantell's aircraft was functioning properly. Because of this finding, some researchers concluded that hypoxia was not a factor as claimed in the Air Force accident investigation of the crash. However, the documentation available provided an answer.

According to that documentation, the aircraft was in Marietta, Georgia, for maintenance for over a week. The alert crew conducted a preflight on January 6, 1948. Mantell and his crew conducted another preflight the next day before they took off.

A document dated January 8, 1948, and signed by Major Howard M. Durey, "Subject aircraft was fully serviced with 100/130 octane fuel – right, left and fuselage tanks were serviced. Oil was checked on all aircraft and those serviced requiring same."

The first paragraph in this short letter contains an important detail. "Aircraft were not serviced with oxygen as none was available at this station."

Interviews with pilots suggest that the oxygen systems leak oxygen for a variety of reasons, including deteriorating rubber hoses and connections and flaws in the system. No records are available that identify the last servicing date of the oxygen equipment in Mantell's aircraft. It is possible the system was empty or only partially charged at the time of the flight. The mission was scheduled to be flown at 5,000 feet, meaning the lack of a fully charged system would not be of importance.

Other information, in the Project Blue Book files, suggests that Mantell and Hammond did not have their oxygen masks with them. A functioning oxygen system would have been of no use to them without the masks.

According to a Louisville newspaper on January 8, 1948, only Lieutenant Clements had oxygen. However, his available oxygen was a "bail-out" bottle which is not the same as a fully charged system. Having oxygen available have enabled Clements to remain at altitude longer without suffering from hypoxia.¹⁰

It is important to understand how the accident happened. Mantell was a transport pilot during the Second World War. As a transport pilot, he would not have been flying over 10,000 feet and most of his flight experience would have been at lower altitudes. This means that his experience flying at higher altitudes was limited to nonexistent.

It is also important to understand that in 1948, the rapid onset of hypoxia was not fully understood. Mantell's training might not have provided him with the necessary information. Captain Richard Tyler, the operations officer at Standiford Field, wrote a key sentence in the accident report. He said, "If some outside force did not cause his death, I think he passed out too quickly." (Ridge, 2010,).

By noting that Mantell had passed out too quickly, Tyler's comment suggests that pilots and other crew members were aware of the effects of hypoxia. His comment also suggests that they did not know how quickly they could lose useful consciousness at high altitudes without supplemental oxygen. If Mantell reached 20,000 feet, he had already been flying in the thin air for a number of minutes. If he did climb to 25,000 feet as had been reported by some of those on the scene, he would have lost consciousness in seconds rather than minutes.

2.7 Conclusion of the Accident Investigation:

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

It should also be noted that Mantell had a reputation for being aggressive. His friend, Richard Tyler, mentioned in the accident report that, "My personal opinion of the accident is that Mantell, an aggressive pilot attempted to pursue the object as long as possible."

He also wrote, "He loved the F-51... and flew ... [ellipses in original] not carelessly but like an aggressive

¹⁰ <http://nicap.dabsol.co.uk/mantell7.htm>

fighter pilot.”

In the years that followed, a few UFO researchers and UFO writers suggested, there were mystery wounds on Mantell's body and his aircraft was riddled with nearly microscopic holes. They alleged that outside forces knocked the plane from the sky. These were the real reasons for Mantell's death.¹¹ Documentation that is now available, including the accident report and photographs of the wrecked aircraft, that were declassified decades after the crash show Mantell made a tragic mistake by climbing too high too fast. The violation of regulations and the lack of oxygen and improperly charged oxygen equipment is what killed him.

PART III:

3.1 The UFO Investigation: Although there was a logical explanation for the crash and Mantell's death, there was no clear explanation for what Mantell chased. The identity of that object became the second prong of the official investigation.

3.2 Eyewitness Statements

Within 48 hours of the crash, Air Force investigators collected statements from the military witnesses who had been in Godman Tower on January 7. These statements gave investigators a clearer picture of what happened and who saw what. First was the statement of T/SGT Blackwell. All statements are contained in the Project Blue Book files on file in the National Archives, microfilm T-1206, Roll 2 or at the Fold3 website at <https://www.fold3.com>.

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 [sic], 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

¹¹ <https://www.mufon.com/mantell-case---1948.html>

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 from 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 also saw it. Two days later, Oliver offered the following statement:

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, [sic] 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) [sic] 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 NG 869. 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 he 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.

Air Force investigators interviewed Lt. Orner, who was in the control tower. In his written statement, Lt. Orner 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 Owensboro, 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 [Intelligence Officer] and Executive Officer were called immediately. Several minutes after the object was sighted 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.

At 2:07 p.m. on January 7, Lt. Orner called Captain Gary Carter, the operations officer, to tell him about the object. Upon receiving the call, Carter went to the control tower. As did the others, he provided Air Force investigators with a written statement of his experiences and observations within two days of the accident. 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, AACCS 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

3.3 Relevant Witness Testimony

These statements provide a glimpse of Mantell and what he saw. Investigators questioned these witnesses within days of the sighting. Although there is no tower recording or record of Mantell's exact wording, these witnesses reported what they remembered Mantell saying. The following information is reproduced as it appears in the Project Blue Book files.



Although there is no tower recording or record of Mantell's exact wording, these witnesses reported what they remembered Mantell saying. The following information is reproduced as it appears in the Project Blue Book files.

Info taken from reports of radio conversation between Control at Godman and Ng 869 [Mantell's aircraft number] 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, more or less align. The wording in their descriptions might have been different, but they all described the same basic object. In document found in the Project Blue Book files, reproduced here, 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 either 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.

3.4 Theories and Explanations

There were many theories about the identification of the object that those on the ground, in the town, and Mantell chased. An astronomer observed that Venus was in the sky, in the approximate location witness reported. Although Venus was bright enough to be seen in the afternoon sky, investigators believed that it was unlikely that anyone saw the planet. With that, the search for an alternative began. Some type of balloon was suspected though weather balloons were deemed too small to be seen over a wide area. Eventually, given the distances between sightings and the times of those sightings, a new solution was created. The final answer, in 1948, was that Venus and a combination of weather balloons was the answer. The solution wouldn't be seriously tested until classified research documents were available to both official government, military and UFO researchers.

3.5 Venus

In several documents found in the Project Blue Book files there is the suggestion Venus as the possible culprit. The direction of the object in the sky, and the time of day, helped Air National Guard investigators, to realize that Venus would have been occupying that part of the sky. According to the astronomical charts available, at the time and location of the initial UFO sighting, Venus could be seen in the daylight sky. 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 it could be randomly sighted in sky. Although bright enough to be seen in the daylight, Venus would have blended easily into the surrounding sky. If there was even the lightest haze, Venus probably would not have been visible to those on the ground. In other words, Venus was not an acceptable explanation. The cause of the sighting needed to be found elsewhere.

In the official Project Blue Book 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.

This report claims that, although Venus had been visible, it is unlikely that it explains any of the sightings from Godman Tower and the surrounding area.

The Air Force investigator 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."

A classified document written on November 10, 1948, ten months after the crash, formally dismissed Venus. Albert Deyarmond, the Assistant Deputy for Technical Analysis in the Air Materiel Command Intelligence Department, wrote that the Mantell case was "Unexplained." He wrote, "It is apparent, from the data given above, that the object sighted at Godman Air Force Base on 7 January 1948 was not the planet Venus. Therefore, this sighting must be considered as unexplained." (Ridge, 2010, 2-11).

3.6 Venus and Balloons

With Venus dismissed as an explanation for the sighting investigators considered a new possibility. The Project Sign¹² final report, found in the Project Blue Book files numbered the sightings as "Incident #33A" (Mantell Case File, 1948 p. 5) 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."

This report was inconsistent. Investigators claimed it was Venus and then dismissed the theory. Next, they claimed that it was a balloon and then explained why it was not 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. (Mantell Case File, 1948 p. 5)"

After considering multiple 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. (Mantell Case File, 1948 p. 5)"

At this point in the report, the investigator explained why he believed that Mantell chased Venus. The object did not appear to move away from Mantell.

Finally, the investigator repeated his claim that it was Venus. However, for the Venus explanation to suffice, the investigator needed a balloon and one other object. 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. (Mantell Case File, 1948 p. 6)"

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

¹² Project Sign was the forerunner to Project Blue Book. They issued a final report but the project continued.

costs.

By late 1948, the Air Force became disgusted with the idea of UFOs. Officers assigned to Project Sign created what is known as an Estimate of the Situation. The document, prepared for the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, was classified as Top Secret. According to Ruppelt, "The situation was the UFO's; the estimate was that they were interplanetary." (Ruppelt, 1956, 58).

Vandenberg did not accept the conclusion of interplanetary craft. The report was "batted back down... The report lacked proof... The estimate died a quick death." (Ruppelt, 1956, 64).

"Project Sign was finished. [Albert] Deyarmond and [Lawrence] Truettner, [two of the authors of the Estimate], went back to AMC to write up the final SIGN report, notably not including the extraterrestrial hypothesis.... Within a month or two, all contributors to the SIGN project were reassigned to other duties." (Swords and Powell, 2010, 65)

The reports Air Force officers created explained as many of the cases as they could. The officers suggested the remainder could be explained if there was sufficient information. In January 1953, the CIA commissioned a panel, chaired by Dr. H. P. Robertson, to review the Air Force findings on UFOs. The panel found nothing to suggest that UFOs were any other than misidentifications, delusions, natural phenomena and hoaxes. The problem, if ignored, the believed, would go away. (Clark, 1998, 803; see also Air Force Regulation 200-2).

In 1952, a major magazine wanted to print an article about UFO sightings being explained through proper research and investigation, sometimes even years after the sighting. Because the spin of the article was that flying saucers did not exist, meaning they were not extraterrestrial spacecraft, the Pentagon cooperated with the writer and the magazine. High-ranking Air Force officers assured the magazine editors that Mantell chased Venus. A week after the magazine was published, the Air Force released a new answer that was sure to anger the reporter and magazine editor. Mantell chased a balloon.

3.7 Skyhook Balloons

In the early 1950s, the Air Force changed the code named of their UFO project to Blue Book. The project was reorganized, and cases that had been "solved" by earlier teams were reexamined. Ed Ruppelt, who took charge of Blue Book, noticed that the Mantell file was one of the thickest and 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 some of it, complicating the reinvestigation (Ruppelt, 50).

Ruppelt had one advantage that original investigators did not. He knew the Navy's high-altitude research used huge balloons called "Skyhook." He looked for records that would prove that Skyhook explained the sighting but no records placed one of the balloons near Godman Field at the right time. Because he had no conclusive evidence, he left the case listed as a "probable balloon."



In his search for evidence, Ruppelt gathered wind aloft charts. Some charts indicated that if a balloon was released from Clinton Air Force Base, Ohio on January 7, 1948, it

might have been positioned to cause the sighting southwest of Godman Army Air Field on that date. Ruppelt could not confirm this.

In 1956, Ruppelt published his book about his experiences as the chief of Project Blue Book. Because he was seen as an insider, his conclusions were considered credible. When he said a Skyhook balloon was probably the answer, people agreed.

Ruppelt wrote, "The group who supervise the contracts for all the skyhook research flights for the Air Force are located at Wright Field, so I called them. They had no records on flights in 1948 but they did think that the big balloons were being launched from Clinton County AFB in southern Ohio at that time. They offered to get the records of the winds on January 7 and see what flight path a balloon launched in southwestern Ohio would have taken..."

Wilmington, Ohio (Clinton County Air Force Base)

Time	Temperature	Dew Point	Humidity	Wind	Wind Speed	Wind Gust	Pressure	Precip.	Precip Accum	Condition
12:00 PM	30 F	21 F	59 %	W	8 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
12:00 AM	19 F	12 F	74 %	WNW	14 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
2:00 AM	17 F	8 F	68 %	W	10 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
3:00 AM	14 F	8 F	77 %	W	10 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
4:00 AM	12 F	5 F	73 %	W	10 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
5:00 AM	14 F	8 F	77 %	W	10 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
6:00 AM	13 F	8 F	80 %	SW	10 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
7:00 AM	12 F	6 F	77 %	SW	6 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
8:00 AM	17 F	14 F	88 %	SSW	5 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
9:00 AM	18 F	14 F	85 %	SSW	8 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Partly Cloudy
10:00 AM	24 F	20 F	84 %	SW	8 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
11:00 AM	28 F	22 F	78 %	W	8 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
1:00 PM	18 F	6 F	60 %	WNW	12 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
1:00 PM	31 F	21 F	67 %	SW	8 mph	0 mph	29.1 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
2:00 PM	34 F	23 F	64 %	SSW	10 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy
3:00 PM	34 F	23 F	64 %	SSW	10 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy
4:00 PM	34 F	25 F	70 %	S	10 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy
5:00 PM	33 F	25 F	72 %	S	10 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy
6:00 PM	32 F	26 F	79 %	S	12 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy
7:00 PM	31 F	16 F	54 %	S	10 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
8:00 PM	29 F	21 F	72 %	S	12 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Partly Cloudy
9:00 PM	29 F	21 F	72 %	S	10 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
10:00 PM	30 F	22 F	72 %	SSW	14 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
11:00 PM	32 F	20 F	61 %	SSW	14 mph	0 mph	29.0 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair

Figure 9 Weather data for Clinton County on January 7, 1948. The winds are blowing from the wrong direction to push the balloon to the south and west. Ruppelt's calculations are in error and a balloon launched from that site would not have drifted to Kentucky.

But the reconstruction, which suggested that a balloon launched on January 7 would be visible by those in Godman Tower about the times recorded in the Blue Book files, was imprecise. Ruppelt had no evidence that such a launch had taken place. He wrote:

Somewhere in the archives of the Air Force or the Navy there are records that will show whether or not a balloon was launched from Clinton County AFB, on January 7, 1948. I never could find those records. People who were working with the early skyhook projects "remember" operating out of Clinton County AFB in 1947 but refuse to be pinned down to a January 7 flight. Maybe they said. (Ruppelt, 1956, p. 56)

The controversy about the sighting persisted. In a document found in the Project Blue Book files, it was noted, that "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 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 Jerome Clark in his *UFO Encyclopedia* (Clark, 1998, 606) suggested, "though 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 another site where balloons were launched. This was Camp Ripley, Minnesota. (Clark, 1998; "The Mantell UFO," 1994)."

According to Greenwood, Moore provided a number of photographs taken at the launch site in Minnesota. Moore didn't know the precise dates of those balloon launches. However, the photographs were dated on the back. The launch was made at 8 A.M. on January 6, 1948. Moore provided additional information about that launch once they established the date (Greenwood, 1994a). The team in Minnesota tracked the balloon to near Clear Lake, Iowa. When they lost sight of the balloon, it was at 80,000 feet and 70 feet in diameter.

Greenwood wrote that Moore and those associated with the balloon project said that once they lost track of the balloons, they followed the course based on radio reports and to a lesser extent newspaper articles, of UFOs in the area.

Other research, some of it conducted by Brad Sparks, amended the information. According to Sparks, "It was not launched from Camp Ripley but from Milaca, Minnesota, almost 50 miles from Camp Ripley!!!" (Ridge, 2010, Part 2-6)

Sparks, using data supplied by Greenwood, postulated the balloon track. The balloon drifted nearly due south. In the late morning of January 7, 1947, it began to track to the southeast. It passed to the east of St. Louis and to the west of Scott Air Force Base in Illinois. By early afternoon, the balloon was over southwestern Kentucky. Reports of the UFO were phoned into the Kentucky State Police from Madisonville, Owensboro and Elizabethtown (Project Blue Book case file)¹³. The information was forwarded to the Godman Tower at Fort Knox. Those in the tower were also told that something had been spotted near Lexington, Kentucky at 1310. There are additional reports from Maysville and Irvine at 1400. This suggests a track to the northeast. Given the distances and directions, it is impossible for this to be the same object (Blue Book microfilm).

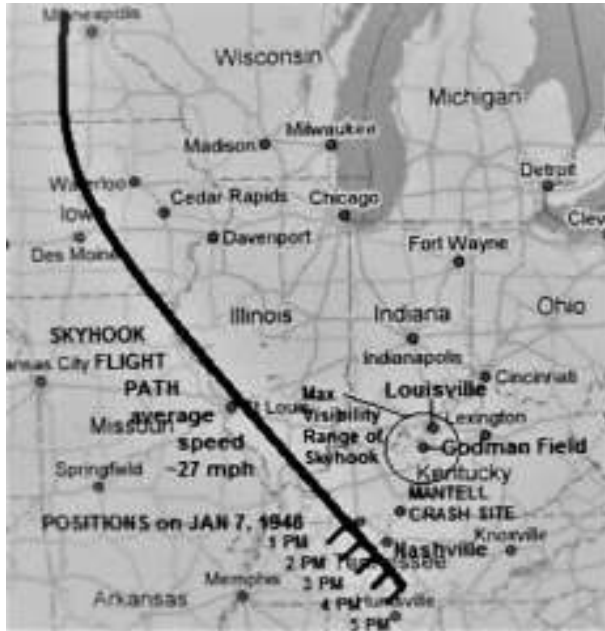
That information did not reach the tower crew until after the report from Elizabethtown. The tower crew began to search for the unidentified object to the southwest. According to Captain James Duesler, the tower crew had set up an elaborate system to aid in following the object.

In the centre [of the tower] was a console housing radio equipment. The console was about five to six feet square and about four feet tall. On the console was a broom handle pointing generally in a southerly direction with one end propped up with books. Jim [Duesler] was told to sight down the broom handle. The tower operators had stuck a small scrap of paper on the window and he was told to line up his sighting down the

¹³ Information found in the Project Blue Book files, Microfilm roll number 2, case number 136.

broom handle to the piece of white paper. (Dodd, 1999).

They eventually spotted it but it is unclear whether or not they used binoculars to find the object. The information from Duesler suggests that the object was small and difficult to see even when they knew exactly where to look. Colonel Hix, in his official statement said that he watched the UFO for four to six minutes using 8-power binoculars.



duced by both Sparks and Moore, raised a question about the human ability to see an object in the distance. “Could they have seen the balloon from the Godman Tower?” Sparks, using the reconstructed path, suggested the balloon would have been 140 miles from the tower. He wrote, “... (none of whom... could possibly have seen [the Skyhook] ... [It was] too far away at 140 miles).”

Sparks also said that the Skyhook, at 140 miles, would be invisible to the unaided eye, “based on respective angular sizes subtended at varying distances (human eye Minimum Angle of Resolution, MAR, being 1 arcminute, which is subtended by a 70 foot Skyhook at 45.6 miles.”

There are two arguments that refute this analysis. Sparks based his analysis on the final measured report from Clear Lake, Iowa, on the morning of

January 6. The Skyhook was at 80,000 feet and had a diameter of about 70 feet. Later information, some of it supplied by Sparks himself, suggested the Skyhook reached 89,000 feet and the diameter would have increased with the corresponding decrease in atmospheric pressure. The balloon envelop would have been larger than 70 feet.

A recalculation of the distances between the Godman Tower and Madisonville, provided by Sparks showed the line of sight as 110 miles. Sparks had calculated that this was still outside the visual range for those in the tower, if those numbers were accepted. David Rudiak supplied additional information. He wrote:

In principle a 70 foot Skyhook at 100 miles could be seen as a point of light in the sky – IF – it was significantly brighter than the daytime sky, which it probably would not have been... At best, maybe a Skyhook could have been BARELY seen at that distance if you knew exactly where to look, the sun was at just the right angle to be glinting off it, etc., but that his highly dubious. It would hardly have called attention to itself and triggered a spate of UFO reports or reports of large size.

Documentation in the Project Blue Book files provided times for the observations of the object. At 1300, it was seen near Elizabethtown. At 1310 there was a report from Madisonville. At 1400, reports came from Owensboro. At approximately 1320, PFC Oliver, spotted the object to the south of Godman Airfield. All the times and all the locations pass the object to the south or southwest of the field.

The information developed through close scrutiny of the Project Blue Book files, shows that the object

between Madisonville and Elizabethtown, at over 80,000 with a diameter exceeding 70 feet. The Skyhook would have been visible to those on the ground at both locations though they are separated by about 80 miles. That puts the balloon closer to Godman Tower and the men in the tower, using binoculars, knew where to look to spot the object. The law enforcement officers had provided the exact information.

While it is true that those in the Godman Tower wouldn't have been able to see the balloon as it passed near Madisonville, it is also true the State Police told them where to look. According to the documentation, the State Police, reported the object near Elizabethtown and ten minutes later near Madisonville. Another report, from Irvington, which is to the northeast of Madisonville and northwest of Elizabethtown, put the, the object less than 40 miles from the tower. The object would have been visible to them as a very small point of light without binoculars. With binoculars, it would have taken on the shape reported by those in the tower.

At 1445, Mantell's flight approached Godman Field. Although it had been written that Colonel Hix requested that they check on the object, the request came first, from one of the enlisted soldiers in the tower at the order of Captain Orner. Those in the flight could not see the object at that time requiring the tower personnel to vector Mantell toward it (Gillmor 1969, 505). Mantell was the first to spot it. The object was above him and to the south. The position was consistent with the tracks of the Skyhook as postulated independently by Sparks and Charles Moore and by those observers on the ground in southwestern Kentucky.

Rudiak, in his calculations, suggested, based on the times and locations reported, that the object would have been no closer than 40 miles to Godman. Both Sparks and Rudiak reported that the object would be visible, but that it would be difficult to spot. Rudiak did write that if the object was 300 feet in diameter, then, at that distance, it would be 1/6 the size of a full moon. An object that size would have been easily visible with the unaided eye. This was the size that two of the Godman Tower witnesses reported.

The flaw here is that those in the tower did not spot the object until after it had been reported to them. They began their survey of the sky based on what they had been told and eventually spotted the UFO to the southwest. That is in keeping with the projected path of the object that both Sparks and Moore developed.

Using the documentation gathered by the Air Force in 1948 and available in the Project Blue Book files, the information and photographs Moore supplied decades later documenting a launch on January 6, 1948, and the available winds aloft data, a solid track has been established for the Skyhook balloon. Observations recorded by the Air Force and the Kentucky State Police demonstrate a balloon in southwestern Kentucky at the times reported.

3.8 Speed of the Balloons

Donald Keyhoe, who examined the Mantell case carefully and used it as an example of the Air Force coverup, suggested in his 1950 book, *The Flying Saucers Are Real* that

... it could not possibly have been a balloon... 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 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 in order for the balloon to be seen, it would have been at a low altitude. However, these Skyhook balloons were made of polyethylene which had a metallic sheen to them. Reflecting sunlight made the balloons appear to have an internal luminescence. The sunlight also made them visible to people on the ground, despite being close to its upper limit of nineteen or twenty miles altitude.

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 approach, including the assumption 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.

Furthermore, Keyhoe made that mistake when he suggested the fast flight from Madisonville to Godman Field. Keyhoe assumed that the object was over Godman Field when it was first reported rather than southwest of the field. Those in Madisonville reported the object was moving to the southwest. This threw off Keyhoe's calculation because the object was never directly over Godman.

If a Skyhook balloon drifted slowly, halfway between two locations separated by 90 miles or more and was 20 miles high, then witnesses in those two locations could have seen the object between them. In this case the timing is irrelevant because the Skyhook would have been high enough, bright enough and big enough to be seen in both locations at the same time.

Third, testimonies from a number of witnesses that suggest the object was drifting slowly, about 10 miles an hour. Keyhoe believed that more people would have reported the balloon or reported the object as a balloon. Since there were no reports of that nature, Keyhoe believed the balloon answer is eliminated as an explanation. Unfortunately for Keyhoe's theory, there were those who saw the balloon and reported it as such with a slow, balloon-like speed.

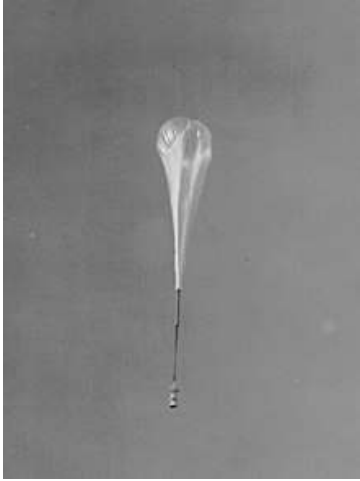
3.9 The Balloon on Radar

When the Air Force ended the barrage of answers, the civilian UFO community was only too ready to pick up. Many writers about the Mantell case suggest that the object was confirmed by radar. There are no accounts of radar sightings in the official Project Blue Book records of this case. Ruppelt did not mention of it. In fact, the earliest reference to radar involved in the Mantell sighting is in a book published in 1956. After that book appeared, other writers and UFO investigators have picked up the idea that radar confirmed the UFO. The truth is that there was no radar confirmation of the sighting.

3.10 Descriptions of the Object

The final aspect of this discussion is the descriptions provided of the object by those on the ground. As noted earlier, witnesses described the object in various ways. This summary, found in the Project Blue

Book files summarizes the information:



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."

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.

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.

These descriptions sound similar to descriptions a Skyhook balloon. One of the best descriptions is that it looked like an "ice cream cone." Pictures of the Skyhook balloons do resemble an ice cream cone (see Figure 11). The colors match as well.

3.11 The Truth about Thomas Mantell

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

In fact, Mantell seemed to have been a very brave man. According to a letter written by Mantell's sister, Bettye Mantell Risley, and dated July 18, 1995:

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.

According to Richard Tyler in his report, "Compiled Report Concerning Major Accident of T. F. Mantell, Jr. on 7 Jan," after Mantell finished flight training, he was sent to North Africa and then to England. Mantell participated not only in the invasion of France, but on the Holland mission, Operation Market-Garden and the crossing of the Rhine into Germany. He was apparently transitioning into B-24s as the war ended. When he returned from overseas, he taught Chinese student pilots in Louisiana. He was discharged on November 20, 1946.

He started a business in Louisville, Kentucky, the Elkins-Mantell Flying School. He was federally recognized in the Air Guard in February 1947.

Although Mantell flew transports during the war, he had only recently transitioned into the P-51. As a transport pilot, he normally flew below 10,000 feet because transports were not pressurized and would suffer negative effects from high altitude. According to the available records, Mantell had a total flight history of 2167 hours including training and co-pilot time. He was credited with 107 hours of combat flying time, but he had only 67 hours in fighters.

3.12 Further Rumors

Almost before Mantell's aircraft hit the ground, rumors circulated about what happened. Many of the reports from UFO books and magazine articles contain the essential information, and for the most part, report it accurately. However, there are one or two additional paragraphs that suggest something extraterrestrial.

Coral Lorenzen, the founder of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, 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 (Lorenzen, 1966, 23)."

Based on the information available this is untrue. Mantell's body was inside the aircraft after the crash. Affidavits confirm 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. 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 witnessed 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..."

Here is another anonymous witness providing second-hand testimony, although Crain identified him as 2nd Lt. Buford Hammond. There is no way to verify the information, even if Stringfield believed it was sincere.

The accident record, which Crain also cited, states that Mantell had neither an oxygen mask nor a charged oxygen system in his aircraft. It is clear that the reason Mantell crashed was because hypoxia caused him to pass out.

Witnesses on the ground, watched as the aircraft began its power dive, and as it broke apart in mid-air. No witnesses reported of a beam or "ray." Furthermore, it has been identified that the aircraft disintegrated because the external forces that pulled it apart.

Further, Crain (Crain, 1986, 13) reported that he contacted Stringfield about the reliability of the report of a ray hitting Mantell's aircraft. 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 people have made numerous statements. These attributions have created a belief that the object he chased was of extraterrestrial origin. Likewise, several statements attributed to him 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 in January 1948 he was in the Air Force in and stationed at Scott Air Force Base near Belleville, Illinois. Like Albert Pickering (see Lockbourne sighting in Part IV of this report), Miller listened to the intercept over the closed communications link, known as Plan 62. Miller reproduced the inter-plane and the communications with the tower, 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 then added, "This is where the official Air Force account ends. However, there was one 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 saying anything like either of these two statements. The official record, now available to UFO researchers, was originally classified. If 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 need to be expunged from the record.

3.13 Air Force Responsibility

If the Air Force had been interested in finding answers instead of disproving the existence of UFOs, the solution for this case would have come sooner. Clearly Venus has nothing to do with the sighting. It is irrelevant that Venus was in the sky near the time and place of the Mantell sighting, yet this has confused people for a long time. Then too, was the Air Force insistence that, even in the face of evidence to the contrary, Venus was responsible for the Mantell side of the case. Venus has been eliminated as a culprit for this specific sighting.

There is no need to create a number of balloons or other unidentified and unreported aircraft in the area to find a solution. Conjecture of another balloon or object is also irrelevant.

Given the descriptions provided, the launching, and size and shape of the Skyhook balloons, it makes it 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. The project was classified in 1948, and although Skyhooks were described in the newspapers of the era, they were relatively unknown. Skyhook balloons were huge, fluid, and would have looked metallic because they were made of polyethylene.

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

Part IV: Other January 7, 1948 Sightings

4.1 Lockbourne Air Force Base Sighting

There is a report that is not be directly related to the Mantell incident but is mentioned in the Project Blue Book file on Mantell. This report took place on the same day, approximately four hours after Mantell crashed. Three witnesses at Lockbourne Air Base (now Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base) near Columbus, Ohio, watched as an object seemed to land near the end of a runway. These witnesses were well-trained members of the civilian air traffic control at Lockbourne. Officers from Project Sign interviewed these witnesses. However, according to the documentation available, the Sign officers conducted those interviews at the witness's home station rather than at Wright Field. Contrary to what one of the witnesses believed and suggested, there is no evidence of any interrogations at Wright Field.

4.2 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, manned the direction-finding station about a mile from the tower. On January 14, 1948, Pickering reported, in his written statement to Project Sign:

On Wednesday January 7, 1948 at about 1925 [7:25 p.m.] 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 decending [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 7

Other members of the civilian crew including the tower operator, Alex A. Boudreaux, confirmed Pickering's observations. Boudreau also reported 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 Eisle, who provided a written statement about his observations. On January 13, 1948, he wrote:

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 phenominon [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 then [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 diametr[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 Eisle.

There were three pilots in two different aircraft who also witnessed the sighting. The investigators

interviewed these witnesses too. They 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.

Jerome Clark, in his massive *UFO Encyclopedia* discussing Mantell and 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. Whatever those four observers saw, it could not have been Venus (Clark, 605 – 606).

4.3 Pickering Re-interviewed

On April 12, 1977, Ohio UFO researcher William E. Jones, interviewed Pickering about his sighting (Jones, 1977; Gross, 1982). The story that emerged from this interview was slightly different. 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 give 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 [sic] 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 pass 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. Now 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.

If this statement as provided to Jones is accurate, then the Venus explanation is eliminated. Pickering gave the impression here that the object circled 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 circled an area and stayed toward the southwest of the field. 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 and if the Air Force report that the overcast began to break up is true, then Venus is still viable culprit.

The Pickering interview continued:

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 [Eislle], 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 [this is a reference to Plan 62].

(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 classified¹⁴... 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.¹⁵ 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, everyplace. 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.

¹⁴ Although the classification stamps have been marked through and these documents are now marked as "unclassified," it is clear they were once classified as "Restricted." At the time "Restricted" was the lowest level of classification.

¹⁵ This is a reference to Plan 62,

(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.

4.4 Plan 62

In the late 1940's the military developed a plan that would allow various military base and civilian towers to listen to air-to-air, air-to-ground and ground-to-air communications. This was known as Plan 62. This plan enabled that Pickering and others to listen to Mantell's attempt to intercept the object in Kentucky. According to Dan Wilson, at this time, January 1948, the plan had been in operation for about eighteen months. In a report found in *The Mantell Incident* (Ridge 2019), Wilson explained:

Plan 62 Military Flight Service Communications System (1946--1952) (was) designed to provide a permanent integrated network of Army Air Forces (AAF) centers connected via AT&T long line circuits to furnish all common purpose aeronautical communications services pertaining to aircraft dispatch, movement and visual flight control within the continental U.S. Plan 62 ensured that military authorities knew the whereabouts of every military aircraft operating in the U.S. at all times. Official operations began 1 Nov 46.

Military personnel were stationed at Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) Air Route Traffic Control Centers throughout the U.S. prior to development of this system, which consolidated military communications (AACCS), weather (AWS) and flight services (ATC) operations at nine regional flight service centers Olmsted Field, Pa.; Wright Field, Ohio; Maxwell Field, Ala.; MacDill Field, Fla.; Fort Worth AAB, Tex.; Lowry Field, Colo.; Hamilton Field, Ca.; March Field, Ca.; and McChord Field, Wash.

These centers were connected via interphone to regional CAA facilities, which retained control of all aircraft operating under instrument flight rule (IFR) conditions. Flying under visual conditions, pilots reported their positions to the military centers every 30 minutes and received necessary advisories; under IFR conditions, they first reported to the CAA centers, then to the military centers.

By the end of 1947, the regional centers were connected via interphone to every AAF facility and certain Navy, Guard and Reserve stations within their regions a total of 190 stations. By the end of 1948, MFCSC assumed responsibility for VFR flight plans and associated actions for 65 additional Navy, Marine and Coast Guard airfields. However, upgraded equipment and revised procedures allowed the Air Force to consolidate operations at several bases, thereby removing many of these additional stations by the close of 1950. Further equipment upgrades and procedural changes resulted in AACCS transferring responsibility for MFCSC to the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) in September 1952 there is no mention of MFCSC or Plan 62 in the histories after 1952.

4.5 Further Investigation

There are some problems with this sighting. Pickering originally described the object as amber but in the later interview, he said that it was red. Although not a major change it suggests that his memory in 1977 was not as clear as it might have been.

As noted, in his first interview, he suggested that he watched the object circle over part of the base to the southwest of his location. However, in 1977, he implied that the object circled all around the base, moving from a point in front of him to one behind him. If that latter description is true, then Venus is ruled out. Given his first description, it seems that the object did not leave from the position that in front and to the southwest of him.

Alex A. Boudreaux, in his statement, said “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

Time	Temperature	Dew Point	Humidity	Wind	Wind Speed	Wind Gust	Pressure	Precip.	Precip Accum	Condition
12:00 PM	27 F	23 F	85 %	W	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
12:00 AM	21 F	16 F	81 %	W	8 mph	0 mph	29.3 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
2:00 AM	15 F	11 F	84 %	SW	6 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
3:00 AM	13 F	10 F	88 %	SW	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
4:00 AM	14 F	11 F	88 %	SW	8 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
5:00 AM	17 F	14 F	88 %	SW	5 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
6:00 AM	13 F	10 F	88 %	W	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
7:00 AM	13 F	10 F	88 %	SW	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
8:00 AM	14 F	11 F	88 %	CALM	0 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Partly Cloudy
9:00 AM	18 F	14 F	82 %	CALM	0 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Partly Cloudy
10:00 AM	23 F	18 F	81 %	CALM	0 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Partly Cloudy
11:00 AM	26 F	22 F	85 %	W	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Partly Cloudy
1:00 AM	19 F	16 F	88 %	W	6 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Fair
1:00 PM	29 F	23 F	78 %	W	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
2:00 PM	29 F	24 F	82 %	SW	5 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
3:00 PM	30 F	25 F	82 %	SW	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
4:00 PM	32 F	26 F	79 %	SSE	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy
5:00 PM	30 F	29 F	96 %	SE	5 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
6:00 PM	30 F	26 F	85 %	SE	6 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
7:00 PM	30 F	29 F	96 %	ESE	6 mph	0 mph	29.3 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
8:00 PM	31 F	23 F	72 %	SE	3 mph	0 mph	29.4 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
9:00 PM	28 F	26 F	92 %	ESE	6 mph	0 mph	29.3 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Cloudy
10:00 PM	28 F	26 F	92 %	E	3 mph	0 mph	29.3 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy
11:00 PM	27 F	22 F	82 %	SE	3 mph	0 mph	29.3 in	0.0 in	0.0 in	Mostly Cloudy

Figure 12 Lockbourne weather on January 7. Although it does say cloudy, it doesn't provide any clue as to actual sky coverage. The weather from Wilmington for the same day does suggest clearing in the west. Venue would be visible close to the horizon.

landing at the time.” The problem with this idea is that, according to the weather records available, the cloud cover, in the west, had begun to break up (See Figure 9). That meant that a star, or Venus, could have been the culprit because there was no longer a complete cloud cover as Boudreaux had believed.

Further, in a “Restricted” statement found in the Project Blue Book files, Lt. C. W. Thomas and Lt. Sims, (the pilots mentioned by Pickering), made a cross country flight. According to the file, the Columbus Airways asked if they had seen an unusual object... “They could see a large bright light off to the west. They estimated it to be below them, or about 3000 feet. It seemed stationery. The light was amber and looked like a large star or planet.”

The suggestion that the object was below them is a common optical illusion. Two factors can cause this illusion: a) the altitude of the aircraft and b) the glowing star or planet being close to the horizon as Venus would be prior to setting that night. Given the cloud cover over part of the area, and the broken nature of it to the west, the illusion was even more convincing.

Finally, in a point that has been overlooked, Pickering said that he, among others, listened as Mantell attempted to identify the object spotted in Kentucky. This put the idea of flying saucers into their minds, especially when Pickering learned that Mantell crashed during his attempted intercept.

4.6 Other Sightings on January 7, 1948

Although the attention of those in the Godman Tower had been drawn to the southwest, the Kentucky State Police did report to them that an object was over Lexington, Kentucky. The first of those reports was made at 1310, at the same time as a report from Madisonville. Reports from Irvine and Maysville were made at 1400. The Godman Tower made none of the reports and were too far from those locations to have seen anything with the unaided eye. There is no other available information about these sightings other than the times and the locations.

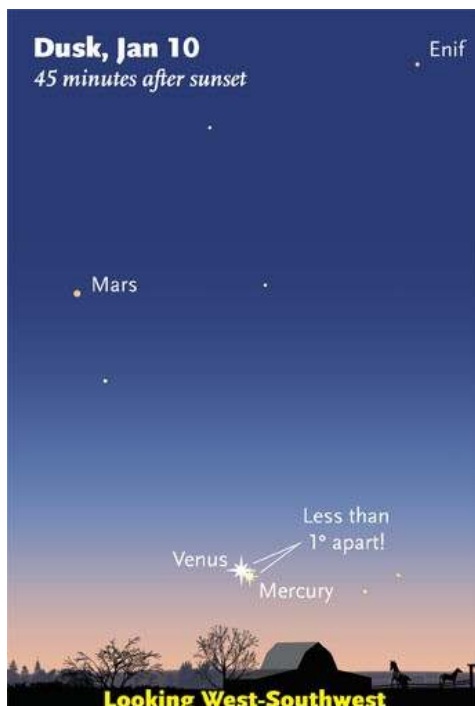


Figure 13 The brilliance of Venus in the west southwest just days after the Lockbourne

Another group of Air Force personnel, including a colonel, described a red, cone shaped object seen from the Clinton County Air Force Base control tower between 1920 and 1955 that evening. They reported that it moved with terrific bursts of speed but hung motionless for periods of time. They reported no sound, did not estimate the speed, and thought there was a gaseous green mist exhaust. They lost sight of it when it disappeared over the horizon. The narrative of the sighting said:

Object appeared to be moving up and down and from side to side. At one time the object was covered by a cloud but the light could be seen through the cloud. It was the same color as a star only very much brighter sometimes changing to a more reddish hue then turning white or yellow. At first it did not appear to be traveling at any speed. It seemed to go up and down and sometimes change off [sic] and go from side to side at what seemed to be a very great speed. It seemed pretty high in the air – too high to be any kind of light from the ground. There was no beam. No sound could be heard. A faint exhaust trail was discernible when it moved up or down or from side to side. Finally

it began to move away toward the SW at very great speed and disappeared over the horizon about 2000 [hours].

The other information that is important is the local report of cloud cover. According to a document in the Blue Book files, “The sky condition at the time was what I would say was clear to scattered.”

Clinton County AFB is located near Wilmington, Ohio, which is southwest of Lockbourne AFB. Given that there was no cloud cover over the base and its location, it is logical to believe that the clouds were breaking up to the west of Lockbourne. Although the weather records for Lockbourne show the sky was cloudy, or mostly cloudy, it was clearing to the west, as the Air Force had reported in 1948. Venus would be visible late in the evening in the southwestern sky. Venus, at its brightest, and close to the ground can be very deceiving. Given the circumstances, with the cloud cover to the west diminishing and Venus being at its brightest, this answer seemed to be logical.

Without additional information concerning those sightings reported east of Godman Tower, there is little research that can be attempted today. The Air Force records provide little in the way of additional detail. At best, these sightings should be labeled as “insufficient data for a scientific analysis.” These sightings have nothing to do with those surrounding Mantell crash other than being made in north and central Kentucky about the time that Godman Tower was searching the sky for the unidentified object. Those in Godman Tower did not report sighting that object. The tower crew was concerned with the objects seen to the south and west of them.

Part V:

5.1 Air Force Analysis

Investigators for the Air Force assembled a report that encompassed their opinions about the sightings of January 7, 1948. Those analyses illustrate of the Air Force’s thought processes and why they worked so hard to suggest that Venus caused not only the sightings by Mantell, those in the tower at Godman field and reported on the evening of January 7.

Following are those reports as they appear in the Project Blue Book files of the cases. They are in separate files on January 7, and grouped together in the Project Grudge report written in the early 1950s. Included at the end of this section is an analysis of the Air Force investigation and of the conclusions drawn by the Air Force investigators.

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

Considering this incident with #32, 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 they 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 Mantell case].

This Air Force conclusion makes sense. The object reported was seen at approximately the same

location of Venus. The object was also seen as Venus reached its maximum brightness. The breaking up of the overcast confused the witnesses on the ground. While it initially seems ridiculous to blame Venus for this sighting, when the facts are examined, the Air Force explanation seems like the best available.

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 makes sense here. Witnesses saw the object over a wide area of Ohio and Kentucky at the same time. The object faded from sight slowly, which is consistent with Venus setting pattern. The most damning of the evidence, however, is that the object was reported to disappear at about 1950 hours. The astronomical evidence aligns with this report: Venus set at 1952 hours on January 7, and was in the southwest part of the sky. Furthermore, Venus was bright enough to create the illusion that it was an object rather than a distant 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 serve 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 bearings 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 known 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 known 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 (sic) 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 174 [degrees]	Almost due S
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, therefore, 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 chosen 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.

This report makes it clear that the writer was unhappy 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. With the Mantell and the Godman Tower sightings, Venus could be seen in the same general area where the object was. However, Venus was not a satisfactory answer. The writer wanted something that would make sense to him and that would be plausible to the public.

There is an additional problem here. The statements found in the Blue Book files have been contaminated. It is clear that they were written in collaboration with one another. Detail that would not have been available to them all appear on several of those statements. There is even one attributed to Mantell who had died in the crash. Others give information that the witness could not have observed. Colonel Hix, on the report credited to him said the object was traveling at 180 miles an hour, said that it was in sight for five minutes and that it remained stationary for 1 to 1½ hours. No one questioned the discrepancy, or how an object traveling at 180 miles could stay in sight for five minutes, or why he reported it remained stationary for 90 minutes. Some of the information didn't come from his observations but were those Mantell reported.

Captain Gary Carter, in his report, said the object was in sight for 3 to 4 minutes and that it was traveling at 360 mph. He did note that the speed estimate was based on what Mantell had said. Lieutenant Paul Orner reported the speed as half that of a P-51, that the object appeared stationary but did not supply a time that it was visible. T/SGT Blackwell said the object was tremendous and that the speed was more than that of a P-51.

These statements are not based on their observations, but on what Mantell had reported. Although it was noted that some of the data had been provided by Mantell over the radio, not all of it was qualified

in that way. Without an understanding of the methods to gather the information, erroneous conclusions were drawn.

They note about Navy cosmic ray balloons is interesting, but also revealed that he did not understand what they were. He did not know that they could travel as high as 25 miles and that was sufficient altitude to explain the widely separated sightings. Nor was he familiar with polyethylene which could create the metallic sheen that Mantell reported. Finally, when he thought of a balloon, he thought of something like the weather balloons that became a standard in weather forecasting. Mantell thought of a ball of brownish rubber about 15 to 20 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 watched a Skyhook balloon. It hovered in place for more than an hour and finally drifted out of sight. Mantell thought that he was getting closer, and then thought it was moving away from him because he didn't understand that this balloon was 60 or 70,000 feet above him. Mantell thought the object was much closer.

The Air Force had a good answer for most of the January 7 sightings but then tried to force-fit the Venus explanation into the Mantell sighting. If they reported that they lacked a real answer for Mantell's sighting, such resistance to the Skyhook balloon answer might have been mitigated.

Part VI:

6.1 Conclusions

The evidence in the accident investigation reports, Project Blue Book files, and the analysis available from other diverse sources (such as Jerry Clark, Edward Ruppelt, Len Stringfield, Fran Ridge, Barry Greenwood and Brad Sparks) suggest a similar conclusion. It seems likely that Thomas Mantell violated regulations in effect at the time and climbed above 20,000 feet without a fully charged oxygen system on his aircraft. Reports from his wingmen indicate that Mantell continued to climb when they broke away due to the effects of hypoxia as reported by Lt. Henricks.

Despite discrepancies in the official records, it is likely that Mantell planned to climb to 25,000 feet and circle for 10 minutes, attempting to close with the object. If he failed, then he intended to land at Standiford as originally planned. Studies, such as that conducted by Stanley R. Mohler, show that at 20,000 feet, Mantell could have remained usefully conscious for about 10 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 a power dive. Somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 feet, the aircraft began to disintegrate due to excessive speed. Witnesses on the ground saw the aircraft enter the dive and break apart. The wreckage fell to the ground. Mantell, who was still strapped into the cockpit, was killed on impact.

Some speculate that Mantell might have regained consciousness and attempted to control his aircraft. Power settings did not indicate a high-speed climb at full power. It seems that his attempts were too late and the forces inside the aircraft made a recovery impossible.

There would have been no pointed questions about this accident had there not been the corresponding UFO sighting. Given that Mantell attempted 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 witnesses, including members of the flight Mantell commanded, and military personnel, law enforcement officers and civilians on the ground, saw the object, most failed to identify it. The high altitude, and unusual nature of the object contributed to that failure.

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

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.

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

Lt. Orner: (Through binoculars) "Could not determine if (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.

No part of these descriptions disqualifies 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 often resembles those objects. These descriptions indicate that the object was large and round on top that tapered to a point on the bottom.

Other testimony underscores the Skyhook explanation. According to the *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald* of

January 9, 1948, "Two Hopkinsville [Kentucky] pilots, James Garret and William Crenshaw, said they chased a flying object which they believed to be a balloon."

Several sources, including Ruppelt reported that a balloon was seen on the afternoon of January 8. Ruppelt mention astronomers in Madisonville who had reported a balloon. Ruppelt wrote:

Not long after the object had disappeared from view at Godman AFB, a man from Madisonville, Kentucky, called Flight Service in Dayton. He had seen an object traveling southeast. He had looked at it through a telescope and it was a balloon. At four forty-five an astronomer [Dr. Carl K. Syfert] living north of Nashville, Tennessee, called in. He had also seen a UFO, looked at it through a telescope, and it was a balloon, (Clark, 606; Ruppelt, 54).

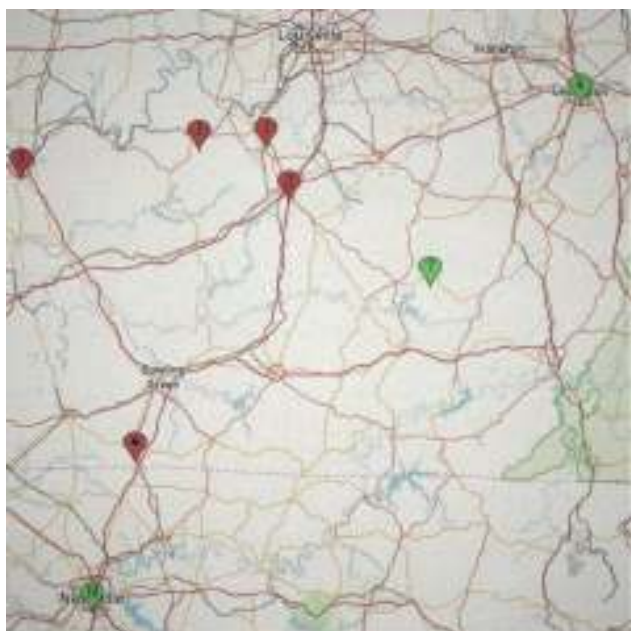
More information, suggesting a balloon appeared in the Louisville, Kentucky newspaper:

St. John T. Worful, Elizabethtown, said a cruiser had radioed from Madisonville that a saucer had been seen there.

"It was reported to look like an ice-cream cone with a little fire at the bottom." Worful said. "It appeared to be about 45 feet across the top and 100 feet long through a small telescope", he said. (Louisville Courier Journal.)

The evidence Jerry Clark reported in his encyclopedia, including evidence from Barry Greenwood, Charles B. Moore and Robert Todd, is also persuasive. Clark seemed convinced of its authenticity, and, the descriptions offered seem to bear out the Skyhook identification.

It must be noted that there are no records of a Skyhook balloon launch from Clinton County but that is no longer relevant. Brad Sparks and others claim that even had there been a launch, a Skyhook would not be visible from Godman Tower at the times indicated. Witness testimony also suggests that the object was to the southwest of the tower and not to the east, if the balloon came from Clinton County. The evidence now proves the balloon was launched under the auspices of Winzen Research in Minnesota, on January 6, 1948, with a track plotted by both Sparks and Moore. That information and corresponding track does put a Skyhook balloon southwest of Godman at the times recorded.



The timing and locations of the sightings suggest a high-flying object that was no more than 40 miles from the Godman Airfield Tower. Although the calculations made by several individuals including Sparks and Rudiak suggest spotting a Skyhook of approximately 70 feet in diameter at 80,000 feet is problematic, those who were closer certainly could have seen it. The documentation available proves that those in the Godman Tower did not randomly spot the balloon. The tower personnel had their attention drawn to the object by repeated telephone calls from Kentucky law enforcement and military personnel at Fort Knox. The tower crew's survey of the sky eventually found the balloon. Although there are reports

that it was visible to the unaided eye, the calculations suggest a mere point of light in the distance. This is underscored by the make-shift equipment used to direct attention to the balloon. Had it been easy to see, there would not have been the broomstick and scrap of paper taped on the tower windows to aid in spotting it.

Given what we now know, including access to the accident records, increased knowledge about altitude sickness and hypoxia, and the availability of the witness descriptions of the object, it is clear that Mantell chased a Skyhook balloon launched in Minnesota on January 6, 1948. The track of the balloon based on both the reported observations of those involved and as postulated based on the winds aloft data, place it in southwestern Kentucky at the right time. Although the speed has been reported as over 180 miles an hour, it was in sight from Godman for more than two hours. The speed is based on the miscalculation of Donald Keyhoe and Thomas Mantell. The high altitude and the slow speed demonstrated by the balloon remaining in the area for two hours suggest a balloon. Mantell, in violation of regulations, climbed above 14,000 feet without functioning oxygen equipment, lost consciousness, and died in the resulting aircraft accident.

Witnesses saw his fighter enter a power dive and break up about 10,000 feet above the ground. Mantell died either from hypoxia or in the impact with the ground. His body was recovered from the cockpit of his wrecked plane.

The sightings in northern and central Kentucky, reported at the same time, are of insufficient data for a scientific analysis. Given the distances from Lexington, Maysville, Mannsville to Godman, those in the tower could not have seen them. Their attention was drawn to the object to the southwest of the field. Although unidentified and occurring at the same time as the sightings from the tower, they are unrelated.

The cause of 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 a wide area, and the disappearance that coincides with Venus setting, point to 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 evening sightings by Venus. Ufology has solved this one.

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