

# A RE-VIEWING OF THE GREAT NOCTURNAL LIGHT

UFO fallout over New Zealand, December 1978

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THE humble "nocturnal light" has in recent years held little sway with most researchers and investigators. It was generally felt that by the nature of the beast, it lent itself towards considerable ambiguity, despite the fact that, in sheer weight of numbers, nocturnal lights outnumbered all the other extremes of UFO observations. Understandably the stuff of a thousand fruitless hours of investigation drew little enthusiasm from researchers, unless the lights were the precursor of a localised "flap"<sup>1</sup> or they were supported by photographs<sup>2</sup> and/or instrumented evidence.<sup>3</sup>

An inherent level of ambiguity and lack of finality in resolution exists in most *unexplained* nocturnal light cases. For example, even in events of suggested classic status, such as the Lakenheath and Bentwaters, England affair of 1956,<sup>4</sup> the RB-47 flight of 1957<sup>5</sup> and the Washington area flap of 1952,<sup>6</sup> the elusiveness of quality documentation is quite adequately demonstrated.

However, a complex series of nocturnal light sightings over New Zealand during late December, 1978 and early January, 1979, afforded us all a remarkable look at this thing — or these things. The affair provided researchers with an excellent scenario of events, characterising in sharp relief the problems that plague the whole UFO subject, and balancing the whole with a wealth of data.

We have in the New Zealand sightings, a collection of fascinating anecdotal accounts, supported in a number of cases by possible radar correlations and in one particular case, by TV footage of our prey. What followed was the inevitable sociological consequences of the current status of the phenomenon — the need to explain, to understand or to rationalise the reports, unfolded in a veritable "festival of absurdity." A colleague of mine<sup>7</sup> pointed out that by late January, 1979, there were at least 23 suggested explanations for what they were.

Some of these explanations should be endeared to history through these pages. They include:

- (a) top secret US military remote control drone vehicle (explanation by former RAF research specialist);
- (b) plasma or ball lightning (Duncan Lunan & Erik Tandberg. I must ask where was Phil Klass at this juncture? — B.C.);
- (c) reflections from (i) squid boats (crew of RNZAF *Orion* tracker aircraft), (ii) squid boats via mutton birds (NZ ornithologist J. Harrow); (iii) from moonlight via cabbage leaves (Mrs. Eru Pilcher of Kaikoura, NZ);

This contribution is a commentary on the UFO flap over New Zealand at the back end of 1978, and in particular on the case of the UFO filmed from a plane, which so shook the world on New Year's Eve. So far the event has been dealt with but briefly in the pages of *Flying Saucer Review*, in the Editorial "Spanners in the Works" in Vol. 24, No. 5, in an article by Paul Norman entitled "Debunking runs wild" in Vol. 25, No. 1, and in a letter from Mr. Ian Ridpath in Vol. 25, No. 3.

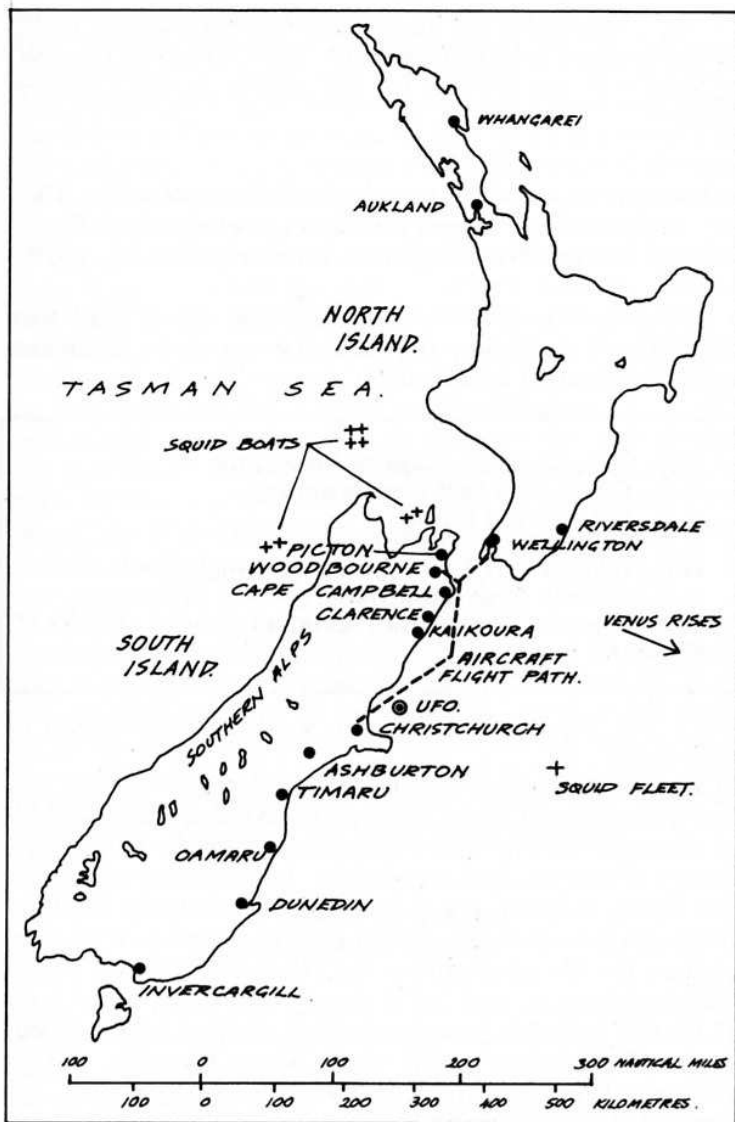
—EDITOR

- (d) a hoax (Sir Martin Ryle, Astronomer Royal);
- (e) meteorites (Sir Bernard Lovell, Adrian Berry & Prof. Ronald Brown);
- (f) Venus (Mt. Stromlo scientists; Norman Oliver; David Mabin, the head of NZ's Mt. St. John Observatory; Sq.Ldr. R. Charran, RNZAF & DSIR);
- (g) Jupiter (Robert Lanigan-O'Keefe,<sup>8</sup> Mt. Stromlo, and so on);
- (h) helicopters operating illegally at night (unnamed professional airmen);
- (i) a reflection, a balloon or an unscheduled aircraft (opted for by no less a keen mind than Patrick Moore — obviously hedging his bets);
- (j) "unknowns" (Quentin Fogarty, Captain Bill Startup, etc.), and
- (k) in keeping with the spirit in which a number of these suggestions were (or should have been) intended, my colleague suggested — wait for it — *Superman* ("after all why not? Everything else has been suggested and I'd hate to be unoriginal!").

Dr. Bruce Maccabee, prominent American scientist — an optical physicist — and UFO researcher for NICAP and Dr. Hynek's CUFOS whose visit to Australia was funded by the TV Company, mounted a thorough investigation. He provided possibly the best available documentation on phenomena of apparent "nocturnal light" status, supported by possible radar-visual correlations, multiple witnesses and an audio-visual record in the form of audio tapes, radar tapes and film footages of seemingly anomalous lights in the night sky.<sup>9</sup>

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**New Zealand, showing areas where the objects were seen and filmed. The point marked UFO on the map is the position of the spectacular return flight encounter.**

Maccabee's report, "What Really Happened in New Zealand," has appeared widely in various forms in the literature<sup>10</sup> and it was a solid rebuff to the, at best, premature findings of the RNZAF & DSIR issued soon after the initial media circus had subsided. The RNZAF report, released by the Ministry of Defence on January 25, 1979, stated that the visual sightings were attributed to lights from surface objects, or bright planets affected by atmospheric refraction and distortion. The unexplained radar sightings were "spurious returns." The report said: "It was significant that on the occasions a large light was being filmed by a television team on board an *Argosy* freighter, neither Christchurch nor Wellington radars reported any related sightings on their screens." The report also suggested that the light source from a large Japanese squid boat fleet could not be discounted as a cause for some of the sightings.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Maccabee's report deals exclusively with the complex December 31st sighting, which captured most of the media publicity. It provides a "detailed history of the technical aspects of these sightings." Maccabee likens his efforts in this affair (which constitute the *only* enquiry which has encompassed all aspects of the sightings) to the

following analogy:

"This one case is like sending a man to the moon: he brings back several pounds of rocks and those rocks keep scientists working for years to find out what the rocks mean to our understanding of the moon, the solar system, and cosmology in general."<sup>12</sup>

In studying about 28 separable incidents involving the Wellington radar, Dr. Maccabee concluded that there were 4 discrete events during the December 31st sightings that qualify as apparent radar-visual events, i.e. apparent coincident temporal and spatial correlations of nocturnal lights and radar returns. Another apparent radar/visual event, this time involving the aircraft's own weather radar for about 4 minutes continuously, occurred as the *Argosy* left Christchurch:

"...the object was picked up on radar as soon as the radar was warmed up, and the sighting line to the object was in the direction of the radar azimuth until the object was so far to the right of the plane that it went off the radar scope. The object was not detected on radar when the plane turned toward it, but at that time the depression angle (angle below horizontal) was quite large, so the object may have been below the radar beam."<sup>13</sup>

Since Dr. Maccabee's analysis appeared, the DSIR came out with a more detailed report, entitled "Unfamiliar Observations of Lights in the Night Sky" by Mr. W. Ireland, Physics and Engineering Laboratory, December, 1979. The report's abstract is quoted:

"This report examines the readily-available data relating to unidentified lights seen at night by many people in New Zealand between 20 December 1978 and 10 January 1979. It also examines the unidentified radar echoes, and refers to trans-Tasman radio communications at ultrahigh frequencies which occurred during the period.

"A brief introduction sets the sightings and other related events in chronological order. An historical perspective is provided by reference to previous New Zealand observations. The unusual atmospheric conditions prevailing at the time are discussed, and shown to be a significant factor to be considered in attempts to explain the observations. The unusual radar echoes should not have been unexpected. Each event is considered in detail, and a "most likely explanation" given.

"It is suggested that the lights were generally unusual views of either terrestrial sources, such as lighthouses, navigation beacons and city lights, or of the planets Venus and Jupiter, seen through an unusually clear atmosphere. In the most widely publicised case the most likely source was a squid boat seen under quite normal viewing conditions."<sup>14</sup>

The controversy has therefore polarised into 2 main camps, with the latest DSIR report sure to engender considerable criticism. The first salvo came from Quentin Fogarty.<sup>15</sup> Not only does it include some cogent criticisms

of the DSIR findings, but it also gives Dr. Maccabee's reply to Mr. Ireland's analyses. The present status of the controversy offers researchers the rare situation of readily accessible data (thanks to Dr. Maccabee in particular) of what appears at face value to be a most interesting phenomenon — anomalous nocturnal lights interacting with the human environment on a variety of levels, not the least of them being at instrumented, psychological and personalised levels.

Researchers would do well to give this interesting data much consideration. I for one cannot but help think that the New Zealand affair has considerable significance, particularly with respect to the sophisticated level and breadth of evidence, and its possible relevance to theoretical considerations recently drawn. I refer here to the Jungian orientated hypothesis drawn tentatively by Allan Hendry as a "non-revolutionary, alternative UFO theory."<sup>16</sup> Indeed I find some sympathy for Hendry's comment, "...there isn't one single UFO case whose implications are as important as those of the rich inferences that have grown around the sightings. The UFO reports address us not on a high intellectual plane, but at those primitive depths of the subconscious where fairies and demons retain their vitality, even in the twentieth century."<sup>17</sup>

The New Zealand affair provides us with a rich harvest of information, both at a technical and non-technical level. I have drawn to your attention the course of the technical debate. Following I have provided what in essence are some personal perspectives on this affair. Much of the coverage on these sightings has been largely impersonal and technically orientated. Thus when I had the opportunity to interview some of the principals of this case, the task was approached from the point of view of clarifying the appalling misinformation that punctuated the media's coverage of the incidents and to gain some personal perspectives as well. To this effect, I have given edited excerpts from two separate and lengthy interviews conducted with two of the principals in the NZ UFO film controversy. David Crockett, the camera-man

on the December 31st flight, was interviewed by David Reneke and myself during May, 1979. Quentin Fogarty, in turn was interviewed by the author during October, 1979.<sup>18</sup>

**Interviews with the members of the Australian TV team which filmed an object over the sea off South Island, New Zealand, on December 31, 1978.**

The separate interviews have been edited and then recombined to bring together the separate comments made by the two principals.

Key: Q.F.: Quentin Fogarty (reporter);  
 D.C.: David Crockett (cameraman);  
 B.S.: Bill Startup (pilot);  
 B.G.: Bob Guard (co-pilot);  
 N.C.: Ngaire Crockett (sound recordist);  
 D.G.: Dennis Grant (journalist);  
 Interviewers: B.C.: Bill Chalker, D.R.: David Reneke.

**B.C.:** The trip from Wellington was quite uneventful in retrospect. . .

**Q.F.:** Yes. Flying across Cook Strait, the only thing, it was just a weird flight being stuck on the back of a loading bay of a freight aircraft with no windows, just the noise. As a matter of fact that was a highlight. It was pretty incredible just flying 'freight.' It was an experience in itself. Nothing really happened until we went downstairs to do a piece to camera for the programme, and then Bill Startup (B.S.) called us up. . .

**D.C.:** We had only just got through the first take and Bill said: "You better come up." Then Quentin started yelling out. I didn't know what he was talking about. . . I kept insisting that we finish the stand up. Now that I think about it, it really was funny. So we finished the interview and then we rushed up top. . . I believe B.S. and B.G. . . waited till they got some radar confirmation of



**Some of the people involved in the filming of the UFOs on December 31, 1978, and Wellington Air Traffic Controllers. The occasion was the preview of the *Kaikoura UFO Documentary*. Seated (L to R): Capt. W. E. Startup, Alan Jervis (film narrator), David Crockett. Standing (L to R): Geoff Causer and Andy Herd (ATC Wellington), Ngaire Crockett, Co-pilot Bob Guard This photograph appeared in the newspaper *The Dominion* (April 23, 1979).**

what they were seeing first before calling us.

**Q.F:** I suppose the first highlight has to be the first time we saw them. . . A row of 4 or 5 possibly. . . bright lights. They were quite spectacular. They were a long way away, but they were still quite large to look at. (They) were just pulsating out from a pin point to a balloon full of glowing light. They were visible for quite a while and then faded down to a pinpoint, then another would come up alongside it, sometimes 4 or 5 together. Then maybe, one, then 2 or 3 would go out. . . There was no fear or anything. It was just incredible. . . They were large say in comparison to street lights. To me they looked like Chinese Lanterns strung out in trees. They appeared to be just above the lights of the town (of Kaikoura). . . The initial sightings were definitely between the aircraft and the land mass; below the height of the mountains. On the way further south that wasn't the case, as one was alongside. It was like it was their playground. (They were) so completely in control of whatever they were doing. It was spiritual or above the physical plane. . .

**D.C:** The Highlights to me, and I've been a cameraman and associated with films for years and years. . . and done all sorts of crazy things like sitting on the skids of helicopters and filming; and lying in rivers watching jet boats fly past and all those sort of things; but to hear through the headphones of the *Argosy* that you've got one of these things a mile behind you following you. What an experience. You can't see anything at this stage.

**“You have a target  
in formation with you. . .”**

**D.C:** We did a 360 degree turn, but couldn't see anything. Wellington radar confirmed that it was still in the area. . . Then radar said: “Sierra Alpha Echo. Your target has increased in size. . .” After they mentioned that, B.G. looked out his window and I was behind his seat with the camera and he went like that (pointing out the window) to me. . . So I ducked round there. The wing is out there, with the navigational lights right behind me. I tried to get the camera behind, but couldn't. So we all started looking and pushing too. Fortunately it was on Auto Pilot at the time. We looked down and here's this bright light and then there's the navigational lights. . . There was a jumble of lights there. . . Then B.G. (switched) off the navigational lights. . . (There was now) a big bright white light, very brilliant. . . I couldn't get it (with the camera) without telling Bob to get out of his seat. . . Immediately after we spotted it, Bob said we will do a turn, so we did a 360 degree turn, but by the time we came around. . . (we) could not see anything, but according to radar they said it was still there. . . in the vicinity. . . but had turned its lights off. . .

**B.C:** What was the reaction of the other people on the plane (to the report of a 'return' behind them)?

**Q.F:** David's wife had a 'drawn' back feeling. She could hear my voice through the headphones. Bill said it was quite natural on board an aircraft being crouched down to get a feeling of being drawn back. She was going through all sorts of hell. I did not know that until we landed. If you listen on the tape my voice is quite excited. You can hear me say: “We have one a mile behind us” and David's voice goes strange as well. My voice goes up about 3 octaves. . . I genuinely thought I was going to die. . . I

didn't turn to God. God was the last thing on my mind. It was Sue (his wife) and the kids. Maybe I convinced myself, I wasn't going to be hurt. . .

**D.C:** . . . There's no way you could have a tripod up for the camera (inside the plane) and on full zoom you just can't. . . hold it. . . and yet for 30 to 40 seconds of the film there it is dead centre. That's when I dropped it on to the back of the seat and finally managed to hold the thing. . . The whole thing was that this 'thing' was moving. People still don't realise this. . .

**“. . . Then of course they started talking about  
Valentich, of how he disappeared,  
and I thought to myself, 'Oh God!'”**

**B.C:** You landed at Christchurch. What sort of reception did you get? You had targets on the way down?

**Q.F:** Bob saw one on the way down alongside the aircraft (at one stage this behaved like a car light travelling along, except for when it passed over a river, where no bridge was located). . . (From the ground) there was one in the sky above us. . . (They — the local ground crew) said it was just the radio mast. . . I pointed out that the radio mast was to our left. . .

**D.C:** . . . There was this tremendous bright light. . . I actually plomped the tripod down and started putting the camera onto it, and one of the guys at the airfield, said: Oh no, that's the beacon. . . So I took the camera off the tripod again and took it in. . . (Inside we were) looking out of the window, and this thing had gone. I said, “Oh, your beacon has gone out,” and he said, “Oh. It can't have been the beacon. And there was this object I could have had a static shot at it from the ground.

(On the ground, news had already leaked out about the flight from Wellington to Christchurch. Ngaire Crockett refused to go on the return flight back to Blenheim. A local reporter known to Fogarty — Dennis Grant — joined the group in her place for the flight from Christchurch to Blenheim).

**D.C:** . . . I must admit that I was a bit stirred up. The two things that made me feel a bit concerned was when of course they started talking about Valentich, of how he disappeared; and I thought to myself, “Oh God”! (The second thing) was when Bill Startup said to Bob Guard on the return track: “How about taking off auto and heading towards it?”; and my comment (was) the same as Bob Guard's: He felt that we were closing in on the thing. . . but apparently it didn't come any closer than 5 miles. . .

**Q.F:** We took off so quickly. We were just out of Christchurch about 2 or 3 minutes (ca. 2.18 a.m. — B.C.) and there were 2 lights. The brighter one reflected on the cloud cover and as we got higher it came up with us. Dennis remembers 2 as well. There was no film taken of the second one. It was much further away below. We got the one big one on film. It wasn't the highlight to me. It just stayed there — an anticlimax. . .

**B.C:** But actually one manoeuvred and then disappeared?

**Q.F:** Yes, when we turned towards it. Its very difficult without a horizon line. When we made the turn (to starboard), there was a movement of the object in relation the aircraft. Bill said it went to the left side and under-

neath.\* Whether, because the plane was banking then, I don't know. It went off radar as we turned towards it, but Bob said we overflew it. . .

**“Without any further adjustment to the lens, this thing changed. . .”**

**D.R:** When you were looking at the light, even through the telephoto, when you closed up on it, what could you see? Could you see any difference in the shape of it? Or was it still just a round light to you?

**D.C:** That's what I saw (at this point D.C. showed us a drawing of a sphere with lines of "light" — like lines of latitude — around it — B.C.). . . These things (the lines — B.C.) were sort of spinning.

**D.R:** That's what you were seeing through the lens?

**D.C:** That's how I focussed it, but it came out to be that coppery coloured disc sort of thing. There seems now some criticism about that, whether it was something to do with the aircraft window, or whether it was an adjustment of the lens; could have been. But you know a cameraman has got his camera up against something through the lens and the first thing you do is to focus don't you? And that's how it focussed in (referring to the sphere with lines running around it — B.C.). Without any further adjustment to the lens, this thing changed. It went from this shaped object (sphere with lines) to this, to a dot. . .

**B.C:** So while you were looking at it through the lens, you were not making any adjustments, and yet, it was changing?

**D.C:** That's right.

**B.C:** What was the final action. . . before you landed (at Blenheim)?

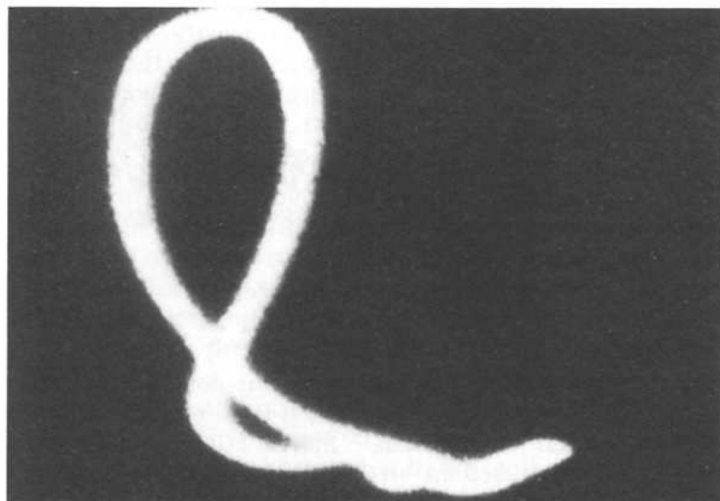
**Q.F:** At this stage I said I hope we don't see any more UFOs. I just felt completely drained and had seen too much. Then I said "We have another one." . . Two pulsating lights appeared and they were definitely above the land and (to the) left (in) front of the aircraft. I was watching them and one fell leaving the huge trail; just a blur of streak of light and reached the bottom with jerky movements. It looked like an aircraft beacon that flashes. I said turn off the beacon but there was no beacon in the area and beacons don't fall about a thousand feet and start rolling and turning. That was quite spectacular. . . There was one other thing just before we landed (at Blenheim). There was this huge globe of light (which) sort of opened up in the heavens in front of us and that really was tremendous. It was a climax to the trip. As I said if there ever was a star of Bethlehem, it would have been very much like that. It was almost like saying: "See you later folks." . . (as if) the whole thing. . . was turned on for our benefit. . .

**D.C:** . . . Bill Startup was always conscious of instruments and the moment he saw any spinning or distortion of instruments he was going to turn round and go for his life. Actually I think a fuel gauge went into a hell of a spin going towards this object (just out of Christchurch, off Banks Peninsula — B.C.), but he gave that away as occasionally it does do that. It was a very strange thing, Bob Guard said (after a few days). . . he said he went down to the aircraft the morning after to get a log, or something. He just ran his hand over parts of the aircraft and had a very slight magnetic (effect — *sic?*), like an

electric jug; a slight electrical (effect). . . (like static electricity — B.C.). . . He then went outside the aircraft and it was all over the plane. Something he had never expected before or never experienced before.

**“. . . And Christchurch wiped the tapes!”**

**D.C:** Of course getting back to radar tapes. . . I said that Wellington were out of touch. . . it was out of their area (when the *Argosy* turned towards the target off Banks Peninsula, just out of Christchurch — B.C.). . . I said Christchurch did not have it (on radar), in fact they did have it; and the tapes from that were promised to be delivered to Bill Startup. . . And Christchurch wiped the tapes! I said they closed down actually (soon after the *Argosy* had taken off from Christchurch — B.C.), but it came to me, when we were talking to them (for a subsequent reconstruction — B.C.) they had not closed down but had actually taken tapes. . . I don't know if it was a cover-up. It comes down to personalities I think.



**The controversial "loop frame" from film taken on the return leg of the flight.**

The radar boys at Wellington told me that the controller of radar in Christchurch is a real stickler. He doesn't believe in any of this sort of thing. He keeps strictly to the rules and apparently they are allowed to keep these things (the radar tapes — B.C.) for a month and then clean the tapes. He should have had sense enough to know that that night it was a very valuable tape (both Bruce Maccabee and Bill Startup made approaches to the Christchurch supervisor to preserve the tape, but he allowed the tapes to be erased, ostensibly on the basis of routine procedures — B.C.).

**“I had this dreadful feeling of something in the plane. . .”**

**Q.F:** I was on the right hand side as we turned back on course (after turning towards the target off Banks Peninsula — B.C.). Dennis was behind Bill on the left. I was further back as David was in front filming. I was out of Dennis's line of sight and I felt this strange vulnerability. Looked behind me. The lights were out in the plane and we looked behind us, Dennis and myself. Didn't say anything. I had this dreadful feeling of something in the plane. Dennis felt it too. It felt like a

\* When the plane turned to port to regain the original track.

warning. Maybe just a psychological feeling. I had the feeling, especially on the return leg, that we were being allowed to film. I was not thinking of spacemen or extraterrestrials or anything.

**B.C:** It was just completely foreign?

**Q.F:** Yes to me it was just that they were some sort of intelligence of their own, not having occupants or anything. Whatever they were, that was the entire thing. I didn't have a feeling of anything inside them. It gets a little weird and wacky. I had another feeling at the time, which I have not written about, like they were collecting souls of the dead. I can't explain this feeling. They were far more psychic than anything. I felt there was something incredibly spiritual and emotional about it all. But could not come to terms with it; can't work out what it was. Maybe my feelings and reactions can be explained by the fact that I was confronting something inexplicable and my mind began to play tricks on me. Who knows. I've been asked my theories about what we saw that morning, but I cannot be convinced about an extraterrestrial origin, because it doesn't feel right, for no other reason.

**Q.F:** . . . I have written about this 'presence' that I felt and, about 2 months after I had written about that, Leonard Lee (TV channel O Producer) again approached me and said (Dr. Bruce) Maccabee wanted to have a rethink about how long I thought we were off course. Apparently everybody gave a time between 5 to 8 minutes and radar had us off course for only 1 to 2 minutes. It was only 1 minute. What he told me was that there was no way the 'plane could have landed at Blenheim when it did, if we had been off course for more than a minute or two. . . . Yet I have timed my tape commentary and I picked it up when we were actually going towards it. That's the time we can gauge, when we went on to the course we could see it moving in relation the 'plane as we did the turn towards it. So I started timing from there until my last reference to it. . . . It came to about 3 minutes 47 seconds. We went off course for that long. It would take equally that long to get back I gather, even though we would have been further up the coast. . . .

**B.C:** Has Maccabee offered any explanation?

**Q.F:** No, it's a general puzzle at the moment. It is a time discrepancy that we can't explain. It's not something again that he has made a big thing about at this stage (understandably, if a "time warp" is suggested! — B.C.).

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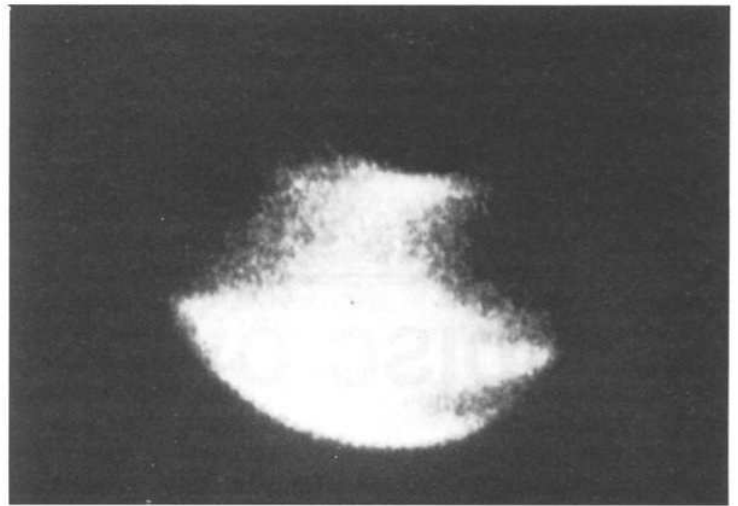
The nature of the beast we call the "nocturnal light" and the manner by which it has manifested over New Zealand leads me to recollect some words of Pope which have a measure of meaning for the phenomena:

So Man, who here seems principal alone,  
Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown.  
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal,  
'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.

Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*

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**Note:** RNZAF: Royal New Zealand Air Force  
DSIR: the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research



**Detail of large light source with apparent shape evident — return leg of flight.**

#### References

1. See for example West Wales (1977), Warminster, Yakima Reservation etc. in the United States and Kempsey & Tyringham in Australia. "UFO Flaps — a context for Scientific Study," October, 1975, Terrigal, NSW, Australia, a paper presented at Australian national UFO conference — "UFOCON ONE".
2. The examples of nocturnal light photos are boundless and most are of little real consequence as hard evidence, sad to say. More sophisticated analyses of these photos where the supportive sighting is good are needed.
3. Here in particular I refer to radar-visual event although there are a few cases supported by apparent "electromagnetic" correlations, eg. the RB-47 case, Dr. Poher's 1954 study, alleged "detector" correlations and Dr. H. Rutledge's Project Identification, wherein correlations with a CRO signal were suggested.
4. "Science in Default" by the late Dr. James E. McDonald, pgs. 70-89, *UFOs — a Scientific debate* edited by C. Sagan & T. Page (Cornell Uni. Press, 1972). See also FSR, March-April, 1970, "UFOs over Lakenheath" by Dr. McDonald and more recently the "Debunkmanship" Editorial in FSR, Vol. 24, No.1.
5. "Science in Default," McDonald, *ibid.*, pgs. 56-69; See also FSR, Vol. 16 No. 3, May/June, 1970, "The 1957 Gulf Coast RB-47 Incident" by Dr. McDonald.
6. See for example Edward J. Ruppelt, *The Report on UFOs* (1956) and Dr. D. M. Jacobs', *The UFO Controversy in America* (1975).
7. John Prytz in his "Just Whistling in the dark: Explanations of the recent New Zealand UFO encounters" in ACOS Bulletin (now the Journal of the Australian Centre for UFO Studies), No. 17 — February, 1979, pgs. 7-9.
8. Robert Lanigan-O'Keefe, a Sydney based amateur astronomer has offered a lengthy analysis of the NZ sighting complex, which first interpolated an exotic "atmospheric lens" system to explain what he perceived was on the TV footage. He subsequently concluded that the TV film was attributable to a hoax perpetrated over 3 separate days, all featuring the planet Jupiter as the main "UFO" image. The earliest timing of the hoax scenario, dates the deed as taking place at about the same time Quentin Fogarty and his family were stepping off their plane in New Zealand at the beginning of their holiday!
9. *What Really Happened in New Zealand* by Bruce Maccabee, 1979.
10. *Ibid.*, See also the International UFO Reporter & the MUFON UFO Journal during 1979.

11. See for example "UFOs were atmospheric effects: report" from Ben Sandilands, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 26, 1979. RNZAF/Department of Defence report, released on January 25, 1979 at Christchurch, NZ.
12. *Ibid.* (9) Maccabee, pg. 2.
13. *Ibid.* (9) Maccabee, pg. 46.
14. "Unfamiliar Observations of Lights in the Night Sky" by W. Ireland, Physics and Engineering Laboratory, DSIR, Report No. 659, December, 1979, 30 pages.

15. "A Reply to the Debunkers" by Quentin Fogarty, February, 1980. (To be published in FSR Vol. 26/2).
16. *The UFO Handbook* by Allan Hendry (Doubleday/Dolphin, 1979), pgs. 146-159.
17. *Ibid.* Hendry, pg. 155.
18. Full interviews held with author & UFO Research (NSW). My thanks to Dee for the lengthy tape transcript compiled from the interviews.

# MINI-DISC OVER BLACKBUSHE

*Omar Fowler*

**Our contributor is Chairman of the Surrey Investigation Group on Aerial Phenomena (SIGAP). Copies of his report, and summary — from which this account has been drawn — have also gone to UFOIN and BUFORA.**

AT 2.30 p.m. in a bright sky with five tenths cumulous cloud and clear visibility, chief flying instructor Laurie Adlington (53) and student pilot Lieut. James Plastow (20) of Sandhurst Staff College, had just taken off from Blackbushe Aerodrome, near Camberley, Surrey, in a *Cessna 150* when they encountered a most unusual mini-disc. They were at about 2,000 feet, and heading for Basingstoke, Hampshire, when it happened.

Said Lieut. Plastow when I interviewed him:—

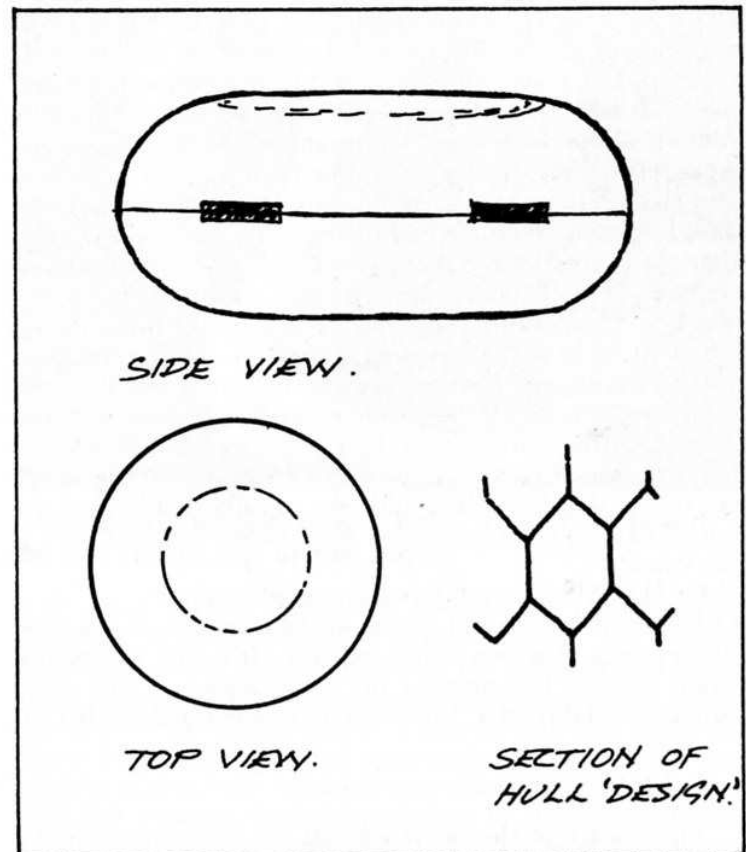
"I was piloting the 'plane, preparing for my flying test, when suddenly the chief instructor took the controls away, throwing the aircraft into, I think, a right bank. We descended to about 1,500 ft. when I suddenly observed an object go across the screen. It went fairly quickly, and disappeared past the 'plane in just three or four seconds. It was about 40 metres away from the 'plane.

"My initial impression was that it was a doughnut-shaped object about one foot in diameter, and it was a silver-metallic colour. Laurie, the chief flying instructor, described it as a 'mercury blob.' It was definitely metallic and had a solid appearance about it. He (instructor) then put the 'plane into several turns, intending to keep the object in view while he was turning. He then put out a call on the radio. At that point it seemed to be turning with the 'plane. . . He said on the radio that the object seemed to be playing with us. It seemed to be flying round the 'plane.

"We kept up with it most of the time. At one point it passed close to us and I had the impression that it was made up of sections, but that seemed more certain when it went underneath my side — I was on the left-hand side of the 'plane — about ten metres below the 'plane under the left-hand wing. Looking down on it, it appeared to be made up of hexagonal or pentagonal panels on the top, like little plates. I would say about twelve or thirteen panels on the top. They were not miniscule. There were about eight or nine around the circumference.

"I did at this point think that I saw some form of aerial on one side, but I am not sure. I know I saw something sticking up there.

"Another recollection is that when it went in front of the aeroplane it appeared to be in two halves. There seemed to be a line around the middle, a dividing line. I also saw some form of clip at intervals around the middle.



**The mini-UFO over Blackbushe airport, based on the sketches made by Lieut. Plastow.**

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