

"TRIDENT" UFO REPORT CORROBORATED

Interview with the Commander of the TAP Boeing 727 involved in the Lisbon sighting of July 30, 1976

Vitor Santos

Although a possible explanation has been offered (see page 2), this article is retained. Translation from the Portuguese by Gordon Creighton

FOLLOWING the request of Mr. Omar Fowler, who obtained such an excellent interview with the Captain and crew of the British Airways *Trident* about their observation of strange aerial phenomena while approaching Faro Airport on the evening of July 30, 1976*, my group was able to interview the skipper of the TAP jetliner who witnessed the event.

The officer is Commandante Antonio Cavalheira, aged 45, whose previous posts in aviation consisted of 15 years with the DTA in Angola, flying aircraft of the airlines served by the TAG Company, and who has spent the past five years as a 727 captain of Transportes Aereos Portugueses (TAP, or Portuguese Air Transport).

Here follows a synthesised account of the main passages from the taped interview:

Comdt. Cavalheira: "On July 30, 1976, we did a night flight, (TAP 126), and then the same crew flew to Vienna to bring back a charter flight. When we were on the charter job, with the aircraft ready to take off, and with the doors already closed after we had completed the checking lists, the co-pilot, who had asked the control tower for the word to start up the engines, said to me: 'We are going to wait for a bit, because there's an aircraft just about to land and they won't let us start up until that plane is down.'

"These lights, which then seemed to me to be on an aircraft, were lights like those that aircraft turn-on at 10,000 ft. and which give a very big flare-like luminosity. As the Sun was almost about to set, and so was very low in the sky — and the sky very clear — it did indeed seem to be another aircraft that was listening in on Faro Control Tower's wave length. The aircraft that was asking for instructions to land at Faro seemed to be the same aircraft as the one with the illuminated lights.

"Then the Tower at once gave us the authorization to take off. So I then said to the co-pilot: 'It must be either the one thing or the other; either that aircraft is a long way off, or it must be due to the intense brightness of the Sun. After that, we had to start up the engines. If I am not mistaken, our take-off was in the opposite direction from the light, which was over in the direction of Lisbon, and consequently behind us, which is why we could no longer see it.

"The light was indeed a very big one. It was like a planet, but with a much whiter light. To put it simply, it could be taken for a planet because it did not twinkle. Normally, planets appear with a slightly

yellowish light, which wasn't so in this case. It was a very, very brilliant light. At certain determined periods of the year, Venus is seen in that same position, very low on the horizon and very bright. That's how it was, and we don't remember anything else.

Trident—Lisbon Control discussion heard

"We were on the Faro Tower's frequency, and we took off for Vilar Formosa and Zamora, and from there we at once passed over to the Lisbon Tower frequency. When we were at 15 — 17,000 ft. — we must have been just about to arrive over the vicinity of Beja — I began to hear a BEA *Trident* and the Lisbon Control Tower talking, and at that moment I looked once more towards the horizon and saw the light again, clearly, but once again I immediately thought of Venus. But, the simple fact is, there was one thing about it that I only realized later: and this was that, instead of going down (if it was a planet, it would have to go down, because of the rotation of the Earth), this light was doing the precise opposite — going up. The crew were all very worked up about it, but were saying at that point that it would have to be Venus.

"At this stage, the mechanic and the co-pilot began looking at it, along with the chief steward who had just come in, and all three of them were now watching the thing attentively. The systems operator again insisted that it '...must be Venus, as does happen at this time in the year.' Meanwhile, I continued to listen in to the conversation between the pilot of the BEA plane and the Lisbon Control Tower, in which it was mentioned how many miles west of Lisbon the light was, and then we all started watching it closely. Obviously, it was a very big light, very bright, and then we realized that there was no planet of that size, and that the apparent movement of the light was very fast. As you know, the planets 'move' very slowly.

"I noticed how excited all the crew were and then, suddenly, just as the skipper of the BEA plane did, I saw another shadow which seemed to be beside the other light. I thought however that this must be the trail of an aircraft heading out towards the Atlantic and, as the Sun was very low, consequently seemed to be much darker.

The light rises

"But not so with the light. It continued to rise until it was out of sight, or rather until I could no

* See Omar Fowler's report "UFO Seen from 'Trident' near Lisbon" in FSR Volume 22, No.4 (Pub. November 1976)

longer see it because our own movement was very fast relatively to it. We were now flying at about 800 kph. I recall, however, that we continued to see the thing for a very long way, maybe almost up to the moment when we made contact with the Madrid Control Tower, that is to say, when we were over Vilar Formosa, which means we had been watching it for over half an hour. The phenomenon was observed from various angles, and from every one of them the light was far too bright to be a planet.

"As regards the degree of intensity of the light, it was very, very strong. The fact of the matter is, it was on a pretty bright day, with the sky extremely clear, and the Sun very low. One of the things it could have been is a satellite of the *Eros* or *Comsat* types, communication satellites that are at relatively low altitudes and that shine on account of their own composition. As regards its colour, the light remained steady. A white light, maybe a bit bluish, or faintly yellowish. In the summer there is always a very thick layer of mist, which accounts for the fact that the light looked different to me according to its altitude. When I saw it for the first time, it seemed like a plane's landing light, totally white and very powerful.

"I cannot estimate what height it was at. When I was down on the ground and was looking at it laterally, I thought it was an aircraft coming in to land and headed directly for Faro. Both the satellite explanation and the UFO explanation could apply. The one explanation that cannot fit is that it was a planet.

"I don't know, *de facto*, whether the light was stationary for 90 minutes. In relation to me, its movement, if it was very far off, would have been almost nil when I was on the ground. But it couldn't have been, as we saw it later. For its movement was very rapid... too rapid. And, for a fact, was certainly not the movement that it had when I saw it from the ground, when we were stationary on the runway.

Conversation with Trident pilot and Lisbon Tower

"It was when, at 3,000 feet, we passed over to the Lisbon Control Tower, that I first heard their conversation with the BEA *Trident* and I began to pay attention to what the pilot was saying. Later the *Trident* pilot asked me if I could see anything. I replied that I was listening to their conversation, and that I could indeed see something and also something else, which was the shadowy shape, for which my explanation was as given below, namely that it was the trail of an aircraft.

"My conversation with the Lisbon Control Tower was more or less as follows:—

"Tower: 'TAP No. 30-and-so, can you see a light over Lisbon?'

"Cavalheira: 'Yes, I do. And I've been watching it for quite a while.'

"Tower: 'But at what distance do you see it?'

"Cavalheira: 'We are told by the BEA machine that it is 12 or 20 miles west of Lisbon. Any estimate of distance is very difficult for me, for I am a long way off. But that it is over on the other side of Lisbon seems to be certain.'

Shadowy objects and ground witnesses

"It was at this juncture that I began seeing the shadowy thing, and then I began to get excited. Then my co-pilot said it could not be a planet.

"In the meantime, Lisbon had asked me whether it might perhaps not be an aircraft. My answer was: 'No.' It assuredly could not be, since it was stationary.

"Then Lisbon reported that there were crowds of people on the Rossio Square (Lisbon's chief square) and that they had already received lots of excited phone calls.

"While we were talking with Lisbon I heard, on the same frequency, the BEA machine which was contacting Lisbon and later was in contact with me, and I was told by it that the relative movement of the object was increasing steadily. I heard what he was saying perfectly clearly, because he was speaking very correct English.

"After that, I stopped the conversation, because my co-pilot was very excited, and I don't remember very clearly what he was saying. Then a plane of the Portuguese Air Force made contact with me, and said they were observing a strange light, but that it was in a bad position for them to see it well. At that point we saw the light was travelling very fast.

"The 'thing' was going straight up, very fast. It rose maybe half of the 90 degrees of arc from the horizon to the vertical in about ten minutes. And of course there is no planet that can do that. A planet takes two or three hours to descend the 45 degrees until it vanishes over the horizon.

Radar echo

"At one moment in the affair, the radar operator told us that he had picked up an echo. And that is strange, because the radar man is enclosed in a compartment and is not easily deceived. The radar registered a decrease, and that is absolutely definite. Consequently, when the operator said the echo was quite a strange one, it could not possibly have been the BEA machine, since that would be identified immediately. There is one thing that has got me very puzzled: if they had got an echo on the radar, then it must have been quite close, because the radar range can't be much more than 100 miles. Now, if the thing is 100 miles distant, it is at that distance in the whole Secam.

"In that case, it could have been a satellite, which might have been at 200,000 feet — about 60 kilometres — and therefore within the range of the radar. If I am not mistaken, there are satellites at from a height of 200,000 ft. or so upwards. Again, it might have been a sonde-balloon. These balloons are very big, and besides that they are also white and transparent. As they rise their volume grows. The fact that the thing moved in the way that it did could be perfectly well explained by its being a sonde-balloon.

"As for its luminosity, that could have been the luminosity of a balloon, which is purposely white in order to reflect the light. However there was one abnormal fact about it — and that was the speed at which it was moving.

"This is the first time I have seen a phenomenon of this kind. I admit I was pretty excited, maybe

because I do in fact believe in the existence of UFOs, and I even go so far as to believe that the governments – and principally the Americans – know about this and won't want to reveal anything about it. But I fully accept the existence of extraterrestrial beings. I cannot see why it is that we should have to possess a civilization that enables us to get to the Moon and that there should not be another civilization that is visiting the Earth and does not want to make contact with us. I also think that there are machines invented by mankind that are likewise giving rise to phenomena of this kind, especially military weapons and spy-satellites.

“But I never managed to conclude my conversation with the captain of the *Trident*. I remember that I asked him to give me the position of the light, to which he replied that it was some miles to the south-west of Lisbon. Meanwhile, the frequency was becoming rather saturated with traffic, so I shut up. Later, the Tower controller told me that a jet aircraft of the Portuguese Air Force had already been sent up.

“I observed the phenomenon of the light for about half an hour. It takes the plane about 40 minutes to go from Faro to Vilar Formoso, and I only ceased to have it in sight when we were very near

to Vilar Formoso. One of the things I do remember is that the light diminished in volume, which indicates that it could not have been very far away. Its shape was round. If we consider for example the light of Venus, which is a planet that can be seen very clearly, with an apparent diameter of 5 cms or so, then this light would have been at least 30 cms or so in diameter, which is indeed very big. Compared with the light from a star, it would mean that this light was almost the size of a bicycle lamp. Imagine a star in the sky, and then, right beside us, a bicycle lamp, and their relative proportions would have been very much as in this case. The light was... well, there's no word you can apply to it. It was just a very massive light. For example, you can make milk a very clear colour if you add a lot of water to it. This light was like pure milk.

We are indebted to Omar Fowler chairman of the Surrey Investigation Group on Aerial Phenomena (SIGAP) and a founder member of the UFO Investigation Network (UFOIN), for obtaining this valuable report for publication in *Flying Saucer Review*. His colleague, our contributor, is chairman of the Centre for the Study of Astronomy and Unusual Phenomena (CEAFI) of Porto, Portugal.

EDITOR

A 1967 LANDING IN MADAGASCAR

H. Julien

We are indebted to the Editor of *Lumières Dans La Nuit* for permission to reproduce this case, which was published in LDLN No. 160 (December 1976). Our contributor is a Regional Investigator for LDLN. Translation from the French by Gordon Creighton.

MONSIEUR WOLF, residing at La Verdière (83), was good enough to furnish the following details when I interviewed him.

Of German origin, he served in the French Foreign Legion with a view to securing French nationality and ultimately settling here. He now runs a hotel very competently in the Haut Var region.

Here is his story:

“It was in May 1967. I was in Madagascar, and serving in the Foreign Legion. We had just been out on a reconnaissance exercise in bush terrain. We were in hourly radio contact with Central Headquarters. We had halted at noon in a clearing about 100 metres wide and begun to eat. The weather was fine. Suddenly we observed the arrival and descent of a machine of indefinable colouring. I am colour-blind myself, but I can state definitely that the thing shone very brightly, and was of the colour of a new coin shining in the sunlight. Around it there was an intense, dazzling glow. It came down with the motion of a falling leaf, and you would have said that there must have been some sort of accident – it was like a shining egg on the end of a piece of string. It came down very rapidly. And we felt a very powerful

ground shock when it landed. And then a piercing whistling sound. By now the craft was no longer luminous.

“After that the whole thing was unbelievable. There were 23 of us Legionnaires, with one officer and four non-commissioned officers. And we were all paralyzed. All of us saw the machine land and take off again, *but none of us perceived the lapse of time.*

“Let me explain: when the machine had departed, we all recovered the use of our limbs. We were all in exactly the same positions and the same places as we were in when it had landed. But when we checked up on the time, we realized that it was now 3.15 p.m. *Two and three-quarter hours had passed without our perceiving it.* We had missed three radio rendezvous with Headquarters. Our Officer got a fearful ticking off for it, for he was incapable of giving any effective explanation.

“The machine was smooth, with no visible doors or windows. It appeared to bear no markings. No antenna. It was like a smooth egg, twice as high as it was wide. I can't say what its exact size was, given the amount of vegetation in the clearing. But, comparing it with the height of the trees as it was taking off, you could reckon that it was between seven and