

Lined Beer

AIR FORCE JETS SENT AFTER UFO

Herald Reporter

THE identity of the "bright flying object" seen over parts of Matabeleland and Bulawayo and which outperformed two Hawk fighter jets in a chase has still not been established.

"This was no ordinary UFO (unidentified flying object)," the Commander of the Air Force of Zimbabwe, Air Marshal Asim Daidipota, told The Herald yesterday. "Scores of people saw it. Even the two pilots of the fighter aircraft had visual contact with it over Bulawayo."

The object, said to be orange, was tracked by visual sightings on Monday afternoon last week from Beitbridge,

Gwanda, Mwenesi and West Nicholson and then Plumtree. It was then seen clearly from the control tower of Bulawayo Airport and the meteorology radar at the airport locked on to it.

Two fighters were scrambled at 8.45 pm and they were directed to the object hovering above the city at around 7 000 feet. It accelerated upwards at a "tremendous speed", according to Air Commodore Dave Thorne of the Air Force of Zimbabwe headquarters.

The Hawks hovered out at 81 000 feet and the UFO stopped at 70 000 feet.

When the two fighters returned to Thorn-

hill air force base the object was seen above the base by the two pilots and several other officers and men.

Air Commodore Thorne said some 95 percent of UFOs are easily explained. "The one that was sighted over Bulawayo and out-distanced our fighters is obviously one of the five percent that are not explainable."

The explainable UFOs that he was talking about are the swarms of bees or flying geese that have on several occasions had United States Air Force fighters scrambling after showing up on military radars.

Neither the commander nor Air Com-

modore Thorne were prepared to believe that the flying object might have been a remotely-controlled aircraft because of its quiet operation and its powerful vertical acceleration.

After the craft hovered over Thornhill for a few moments it flew eastwards horizontally again at a high speed.

Trained observers at Bulawayo airport said the object seemed to be rounded with a short cone stretching above it. The diameter was shorter than the wingspan of a Boeing 707 and it was dark.

It shone very brightly in the afternoon sun and was distinct to see distinctly. The two

observers, who have both been trained to observe objects in the air accurately, said they had seen nothing like it before.

In the past jet engine balloons have been seen and only (unexplained) but this is not one of those cases; the air force says it could not have been a jet balloon and this is confirmed by other sources.

In its specifications the over Bulawayo Airport from 7 000 to 70 000 feet in less than a minute the object could have been travelling at more than 3 500 km/h during the middle part of its ascent, around twice the speed of sound at those altitudes.