

UFO: hoax or mirage?

Steuart Campbell unravels the controversy surrounding the remarkable Trindade 'UFO' photographs taken by Almiro Barauna in 1958

The incident: it was 12.20pm (14.20 UT) on 16 January 1958 and the sailing ship *Almirante Saldanha* was preparing to weigh anchor near a small rocky island in the South Atlantic Ocean. Ilha da Trindade (Trinity Island) lies about 1100km off the coast of Brazil, to which it belongs. Usually uninhabited, it then possessed a meteorological and oceanographic station as part of Brazil's contribution to International Geophysical Year. The ship had been converted into a hydrographic unit and was operated by the Hydrography and Navigation Division of the Brazilian Navy. It carried a crew of 300, including several civilian specialists, one of whom was professional photographer Almiro Barauna. Barauna, 42, was on deck along with about 100 others at the time. He was preparing to photograph the shore boat and had with him his Rolleiflex 2.8E (set at f/8 and 1/125sec). The sky was bright but rather cloudy; the sea was agitated.

Suddenly Barauna was aware of a disturbance and his attention was drawn to a bright object moving towards the island. There was great excitement on deck and some shouted that it was a flying saucer. Despite being pushed and pulled by those around him, and nearly falling into the sea, Barauna managed to take six pictures in about 14 seconds. The first two he took while the object approached the island. It then disappeared behind a peak on the island, only to reappear a moment later moving in the opposite direction, apparently closer. At this point Barauna obtained his third picture. The object then moved at high speed away from the island but due to confusion on the deck, Barauna missed it with his next two shots. However, he obtained one last picture as the object seemed to stand still before it disappeared in the distance, near the horizon. The four pictures are integrated, with the mysterious object ringed in each one. The second shows an enlargement of the object from picture three, although its shape is not the same in every picture. The whole incident lasted no more than 45 seconds.

Barauna described the object as dark grey in colour, but appearing to be surrounded by a kind of

greenish, phosphorescent cloud. It glittered or flashed occasionally, but whether from reflected sunlight or its own light he could not tell. He was certain that it was a metal craft, however it moved in a curious way, undulating 'like a bat'!

Also on deck was retired Air Force Captain José Teobaldo Viegas, who confirmed Barauna's report in a press interview on 22 February. He described how his attention was called to what he thought at first was a 'big seagull':

'The first view was that of a disk shining with a phosphorescent glow which — even in daylight — appeared to be brighter than the moon. The object was about the apparent size (angular diameter) of a full moon. As it followed its path across the sky, changing to a tilted position, its real shape was clearly outlined against the sky: that of a flattened sphere encircled, at the equator, by a large ring or platform.'

All those on deck saw the object but no-one heard any sound from it. The ship's radar was not in operation at the time.

Official investigation

Following the incident the captain in charge of the oceanographic station, Carlos Alberto Bacellar, and other officers insisted that the film be developed at once, despite the poor facilities on board and the lack

Barauna described the object as dark grey in colour, but appearing to be surrounded by a kind of greenish, phosphorescent cloud. It glittered or flashed occasionally, but whether from reflected sunlight or its own light he could not tell. He was certain that it was a metal craft, however it moved in a curious way, undulating 'like a bat'!

of photographic paper to make prints. A bathroom was transformed into a darkroom and the film was developed by Barauna, under supervision. The settings chosen by Barauna were unsuitable for sky photographs and as a result they were slightly over-exposed. Nevertheless the mysterious object was certainly visible on the negatives. They were seen and examined by the whole crew and those who had seen the object agreed that the same object was on the negatives. Barauna retained the negative until the ship reached the mainland.

The negatives and subsequent prints were immediately examined by the Brazilian Navy's Photo Reconnaissance Laboratory and later by a civilian organisation, *Cruzeiro do Sul Aerofotogrammetria Service*. The latter made large prints which were examined by the Ministry of the Navy and the American Embassy. All these experts, and others in the USA, all concluded that the pictures were genuine. They found no evidence of a hoax or trickery.

The incident and the pictures caused a furore in Brazil and the latter were given wide press coverage. An enquiry to the Ministry of the Navy by a member of Parliament prompted an investigation. The resulting dossier was never made public in full but some details leaked to the press, which also uncovered other information. The incident was not isolated; at least seven other sightings had occurred towards the end of 1957 and early in 1958, one of them in daylight on 7 March 1958. Some of the earlier events were witnessed by Captain Bacellar. A fifth photograph, taken with a box camera by a sergeant of the garrison prior to 16 January, was part of the dossier. Barauna's pictures were released to the press by the President of Brazil, Juscelino Kubitschek.

UFO hypothesis

The Brazilian Navy appears to have concluded that the object was a real flying craft. Based on time test and the ship's position relative to the island, the: