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The F-4's were unable to climb to the estimated altitude of the object due to the fact that they were carrying external fuel tanks and elected not to jettison them.

II. RADIO-OR INVESTIGATION

At 0700 HAST a radiosonde balloon was released from the John Leach Municipal Airport. This balloon was lost at 0717 HAST, eight miles from the airport on a bearing of 95° true, due to a malfunction of the speaking equipment. (See point 4 on overlag.) At this time the balloon would have been at approximately 40,000 ft. The winds above 40,000 ft. are unknown but it is logical to assume that at this altitude they will be relatively constant in direction. Assuming a relative constant direction of 270° and an average velocity of 70 knots above 40,000 ft. (the wind at 40,000 ft. was 40° at 1 mile) the possible flight path of the balloon can be plotted on the overlag.

The original sighting by Flight 1 could very possibly have been the balloon in their heading was toward John Leach Airport. The altitude of the F-4's at the time of the sighting is unknown but was probably below 40,000 ft. At 0717, the time of the original sighting, the balloon would be at 30,000 to 35,000 ft. and approximately ten miles directly ahead of the two aircraft. The apparent altitude of the balloon cannot be explained. The balloon would have a crested nose due to wind shifts but these are so gradual that it is doubtful if the movement would be apparent from an aircraft as fast as an F-4.

Referring to the ground track of Flight 1, if a 30 knot wind at 270° is assumed, at 0710, the approximate time the F-4's sighted the object from a 100° to 110°, the balloon would be at 8 on the overlag. The balloon would probably be at an altitude of 40,000 ft. and nearly straight ahead of the aircraft. Due to the size of the balloon, the distance could have been misjudged and the balloon could have appeared to be near horizon. Once again the altitude of the object cannot be explained.

The attempted intercept by Flight 1 could be explained. If the ground track given by the leader of Flight 1 is correct it is very doubtful that the flight was observing a balloon. The time they sighted the object is not known but if it is assumed that they flew beneath the object for 10 minutes, it is highly doubtful that a wind shift of nearly 300° could occur above 40,000 ft. to give the illusion of a turn.

The possibility of this object being an unidentified aircraft from some western California airport, coast, naval airfield, or Navy Weapons Air Force base was checked with negative results. No other balloons were released in the vicinity.

III. CONCLUSION

With the information available, it cannot be concluded that the object was definitely the radiosonde balloon released from John Leach Municipal Airport. However, since the balloon was near the flight path of two of the F-4's elements, on assuming that the altitude of the object was an illusion due to the relative motion between the balloon and the aircraft, it can be concluded that the unidentified object was very possibly a radiosonde balloon.

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