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Continental Divide, New Mexico

26 January 1955

I. Description of Incident

On 26 January 1955 at 2225 EST Air Force personnel stationed at an ANW station in this area observed an aerial phenomenon simultaneously by electronic and visual means. To the naked eye the object appeared as a very bright reddish-white object estimated to be 50 miles west of the radar site. The object passed behind a hill and then reappeared apparently heading in a westerly direction at a slow speed. The strain making this visual observation reported it to personnel manning the radar equipment. They stated that they had an unidentified blip on the radar scope, appearing west of the station approximately 9 miles away. The scope showed the object to be on a 270° azimuth at an altitude of 30-15,000' moving away from the site at 10-15 mph. It was eventually lost on radar at the 15 mile range. The object was under visual and radar observation intermittently for 15 minutes. The elevation of the station is 7,500' above sea level.

Weather at the time was characterized by a high thin overcast and low scattered clouds. Winds aloft were from 270° at 30 knots at 10-30,000'. An isothermic inversion layer existed at 16,000' with the top at 21,000'.

II. Discussion of Incident

This is the most complete report ever received by AFSS on the sighting of an unidentified object. The intelligence officer of the WAB Air Division, AEC, is to be complimented on his initiative and complete covering of all the angles bearing on the observation. Moreover, the combination of radio-electronic sighting is the best type of sighting to work with because it affords the most information.

The intelligence officer preparing the report checked on weather balloon releases in the area of observation as a possible answer to the sighting. It was found that a 20' radiosonde balloon released from Woodson, AF20000, would afford the only possibility. The unknown object was observed to move from east to west, against the prevailing winds aloft which blow out the balloon theory. Also the sighting time of 2225 is 1 hour and 15 minutes after the Woodson release and by that time it is probable that the radiosonde had burst at altitude long before.

The fact that the object was detected on radar and seen visually for so long a period of time eliminates the possibility of an astronomical object, such as a star or fireball, and especially if both radar and eye were seeing the same object, it is unlikely that these objects would cause radar returns. Since the object was tracked at 10 to 15 mph, aircraft are also eliminated as a possibility.

AFSS electronics specialists advanced the theory that the slow speed and large visual radar size of the target make it appear that weather effects may be the cause of the electronics pickup. However, the Inversion Layer at 16,000' appears to be too high to affect the radar which was tracking the object at 10 to 15 mph. The weather-effect explanation cannot, of course, account for the simultaneous visual sighting. There is a possibility which AFSS is now checking

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