

IV CREW FILMS U.F.O. OFF N.Z.

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A Melbourne television crew has captured on film what is thought to be the most convincing evidence yet of an unidentified flying object.

The UFO was filmed from an aircraft off the north-west coast of the New Zealand South Island in the early hours of Sunday.

The crew claimed to object about 1½km behind us and I turned the oval-shaped objects during the 5½-hour flight.

Last night the New Zealand Defence Department put an RNZAF strike squadron on stand-by to investigate any further sightings.

A spokesman said that one or two Skyhawk fighter-bombers would be scrambled if the Wellington airport radar picked up more positive sightings that looked as though they could be interesting.

"We do not consider there is a defence threat, but it's all very interesting," he said.

Re-enactment

The UFO was captured on film by a freelance cameraman, David Crockett, who was commissioned by Channel 0 to fly in a four-engine Argosy freighter to re-enact a similar flight which had reported seeing UFOs on the night of December 20-21.

The pilot, Capt. Bill Startup, said yesterday that their sightings were confirmed by ground radar in Wellington.

"Air traffic control then told us there was an

aircraft off the north-west coast of the New Zealand South Island in the early hours of Sunday.

Accelerated

"We spotted something which kept accelerating to get close to us and would then fall back. I know of no aircraft which could carry out such a manoeuvre.

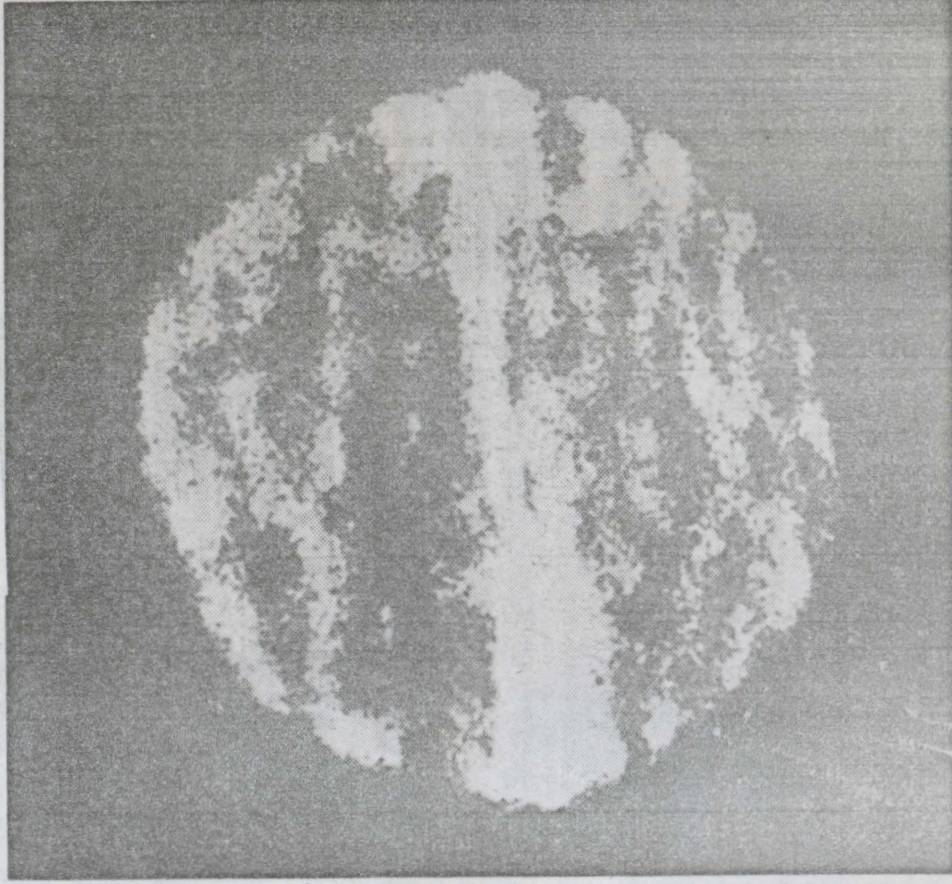
"We made a two-minute orbit but then continued the run because we did not want to push our luck."

He said that on the return trip to the aircraft's base at Blenheim, on the northern end of the South Island, more sightings were made.

"As we were climbing out of Christchurch at about 1000 metres I spotted a light travelling parallel to us," he said.

"We turned 90 degrees and got within 16km of it. It overtook us, stayed above us, came in front and then shot away.

"I am not a UFO believer and therefore I am not biased, but there was definitely something there."



A photograph of the unidentified flying object.

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Capt. Startup said: "The experience was more fascinating than frightening, but in retrospect it made me a little uneasy that at one stage there was something only 1½km behind us."

He had seen something similar in the same area and about the same time of night 10 years ago.

That sighting had also been confirmed by ground radar, he said.

Mr Crockett said that his wife left the plane in Christchurch because she was frightened.

"At one time there was an object travelling behind us," he said. "Later there were three tailing us."

"It got a bit scary and the atmosphere was strange on the flight deck. We were conscious this thing could overtake us and swallow us up."

He said that his camera caught the shape of the object—oval with rings around the outside.

VERY QUICK

"At one stage it was alongside us then in front of us," he said. "Its movements were very quick."

"I was a semi-believer in UFOs before. Now I am a firm believer, and so is my wife."

Another passenger, television reporter Dennis Grant, said he had seen a big spherical light with the light intensity varying.

He had found out later that two beeps on the radar screen in Wellington—one the aircraft and the other the object—had merged at one stage.

"I am sceptical of these things but I did see a UFO," he said.

A Melbourne television reporter, Quentin Fogar-

seen up to 50 objects in the sky during the flight.

"It was a little frightening," he said. "If they are intelligent objects or have intelligent beings in them I have this feeling that they mean us no harm."

"I don't know why I feel that, but I do."

"They were having a ball, and I think they were playing with us."

He said that the objects were glowing balls, and that their definition only became clear on film.

"Someone said it could be the planet Venus, but Venus does not move around like that," he said.

A Channel 0 spokesman said that the film had been sold to the British Broadcasting Corporation and the CBS network in the United States.

BASS STRAIT AIR PUZZLE REMAINS

MELBOURNE: The mysterious disappearance of a 20-year-old pilot, Frederick Valentich, over Bass Strait still has not been solved despite intensive investigations.

He disappeared after sending a radio message that he was being buzzed by an object with four green lights.

Mr Valentich was flying a Cessna 182 from Melbourne's Moorabbin Airport to King Island on October 21, last year when he vanished.

A sea and land search failed to find any trace of the aircraft.

His last message to flight control was: "Unknown aircraft is hovering on top of me. It is not an aircraft."

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Per A.A. Debsnam