

Many UFO reports are taken very seriously

By FRANK CRANSTON

IT APPEARED off Bass Point, NSW, early in the morning on July 16, 1950 and stayed in sight for about one hour and 45 minutes.

To three people who reported "it", it appeared like two lights which kept circling and was moving from north-east to south-west.

"It" was not travelling very fast — just at an estimated speed of about 25 kilometres an hour. They did not all agree with that description, one believing that the lights were red and green and that at one point they were stationary for some time.

Just what "it" was was never satisfactorily settled but whatever "it" was "it" had the honour of being Australia's first officially recorded Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) or Flying Saucer as they were once known.

Despite common belief to the contrary, it was taken seriously and was advised to the Directorate of Air Force Intelligence, which investigated it as best it could given the scanty information and the disparities in what was reported.

In his summary of observations, Mr O. H. Turner, of the Department of Defence, was still not satisfied and was somewhat scathing in his observations of the initial approach by the RAAF.

"If it is assumed that the report is genuine and that it is sufficiently accurate to warrant analysis one is aware of an incongruity in the description", he wrote. "On the one hand red and green lights that circle an area of about a mile in length for about 100 minutes are most unusual according to most UFO reports and far more indicative of an aeroplane, particularly as the red light is to port and the green to starboard.

"On the other hand the estimated time for one circuit gives a speed of only 15mph [miles per hour]. Further the

lights were reported to be stationary at one period for five minutes and that at no time was any noise of an aircraft heard. Civil and Air Force authorities were unaware of the presence of any aircraft.

"If an unauthorised aircraft were to be flying between 0150 and 0335 hours it is suggestive of subversive activities.

"For this reason alone further action should have been taken by EAHQ [Eastern Australia Area Headquarters].

"If the report proved to be a hoax, litigation could have been invoked to deter future potential hoaxers".

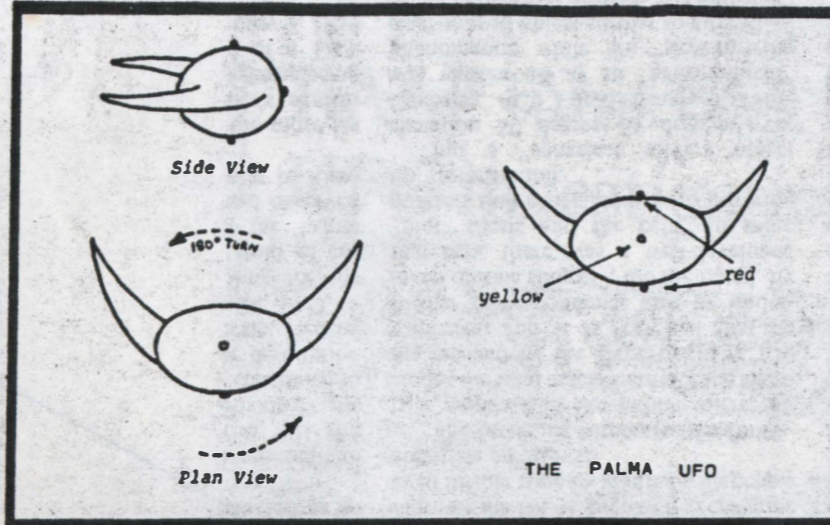
With that sort of admonition in mind both EAHQ and the RAAF in particular began to take very seriously indeed the "Flying Saucer" reports which it has now been decided will be further probed only if some national-security interest is involved, the rest being referred to interested civil observers.

But at that time the Cold War was hotting up. People were asked to be on the alert for anything suspicious. The immediate thought was that perhaps somebody — obviously the Russians — might have developed some super aerial machine with which to spy on us or from which to rain death into our midst.

There was another school of thought as well that perhaps these just might be visitors from space though most serious-minded military observers put this thought to one side.

The first reports of a Flying Saucer had come from the US and they seemed to spawn their kind around the world as the advent of mass aviation and the war time development of long-range (for the time) rockets made people more aware of what went on overhead. It was natural that this interest would arise in Australia.

Back then, almost 35 years ago, space travel was still in the realms of Buck



The illustration above is from a 1981 edition of 'UFO Research Australian Newsletter', used to show similarities between a sighting in far north Queensland in 1980, known as the Palma UFO, and one in Mexico in 1973, known as the Cocoyoc Incident. The descriptions tally to a marked degree.

Rogers and company and flying through the air was still as remote to most people as the possibility of walking on the moon. It was a world still very much of the edge of technological developments which would render blase future generations who would not be totally astonished when men first did walk on the moon and when the "Brave New World", which had so recently been mightily fought for, seemed to be slipping away. Earth's leaders had failed to come up with the Utopia into which we all thought we had been moving. Perhaps it was from outer space that we might expect the improvement.

The next report to make Mr Turner's 1954 summary of sightings was not until November 29, 1950 this time from

Queensland and NSW. This one turned up at 7.10pm, lasted only eight or 10 seconds, was a green-blue light trailing flame and appeared to disintegrate as the reporters observed it. But this time there were more reliable observers, Captain Herman and First Officer Flynn plying their airliner off Nambour and Captain Boyd of the Citizen Military Forces in Sydney. This, though there were some doubts, was ascribed as being most probably a meteor, or possibly two meteors, the issue being further confused by a similar report from Victoria the following night.

The Directorate of Air Force Intelligence summary of its next investigation was on February 2, 1951, when two witnesses at Condamine, Queensland,

described "eight rockets" which had the speed of a tracer bullet, trailed an exhaust, made a "loud swish" and disappeared over the horizon.

That one was the first to be formally designated "UFO".

Most of the "glowing light" phenomena of various colours were put down as probable meteors but things took on a more serious turn on September 27, 1952, when from the then-secret weapons testing station at Woomera, South Australia, came the report of a "light grey cigar" labelled "UFO?" and from the same source on October 8 a radar echo which was attributed as an "ionised cloud".

The sightings came and whizzed and flashed and disappeared but the Woomera observations, obviously the most worrying of them all, continued to come in, "UFO" being the description given the "white oval light-detected by doppler" detected on July 24, 1953.

It must have been galling for the Woomera observer to be told of his sighting a week later that the "white round objects" which he had observed high up with his binoculars at 10.30am was a cloud of thistles.

The reports poured in, the more interesting making Mr Turner's summary an October 15, 1953 sighting being confirmed as the tail light of a TAA airliner and another on January 9, 1954 to the planet Jupiter.

"Exploding fire, smoke" (no interpretation), "mushroom" (UFO?), "silver square" (balloon with tin reflector), another "mushroom" (UFO, is not a hoax) and "silver oval" (UFO?) earning their place in the DAFI files for posterity.

The "two black saucers joined by a span" which disappeared over a hill at St Morris, South Australia, on January 17, 1954 earned a UFO label, no decision

being made apparently on the "log or short telegraph pole" from Kingaroy, Queensland, on September 9, 1953.

But the observers were becoming keener-eyed. On June 5, 1954 an East Dandenong, near Melbourne, sighting described a "rotating disc with a windowed canopy, 3 wheels, 3 ports etc" glowing yellow, about 12 metres in diameter and making a "noise like a motor bike also ticking".

By 1960 the investigation of the Unusual Aerial Sightings, as they were by then called in official quarters, had become a skilled if time-consuming art. Nor was the RAAF prepared to consume even further time by arguing with people about its solutions.

"The foregoing summary of information prepared in the public interest includes the final assessment of each sighting reached by the Department of Air, Canberra, and it is regretted that no further correspondence can be undertaken on this subject", the file noted. By that time there was a well-developed "plot" thesis and the belief in some quarters that officialdom was "covering up" information.

Thus a "spherical, silvery object elevation 80 degrees-65 degrees over Canberra, ACT" on February 1, 1960, was written off as an "astronomical" phenomenon while the "slow-moving cigar-shaped object similar to aircraft — bright orange rear portion, rest dull grey" was attributed to a TAA Viscount VH-TVG.

"Orange-coloured balls", "blue-grey objects", "long white glowing object flaming tail buzzed train", "dark glinting object" and the rest were attributed mostly to astronomical sightings and some to aircraft.

Even the RAAF itself got involved. From Darwin on Christmas Eve, 1963 it reported "marks on negative of photo

taken at RAAF, Darwin" which was put down to a static charge on the paper during camera loading.

As satellites began to orbit the earth they added their mite to the mass of reports where for a while they vied with meteorological balloons as the instigators of reports. Aircraft continued to be another source of material.

One sighting on June 16, 1969 from Melbourne was put down to "aircraft and imagination".

Throughout the saga there have been a fair number of reports simply put down as inexplicable but usually on the grounds of incomplete or tardy information.

Birds, lightning, space debris, planets, and temperature inversions have been among the explanations for the hundreds and hundreds of sightings investigated. Even the RAAF itself does not have the full total.

But there have been others, particularly in northern Australia, which have been assessed as quite probably the incursions of drug runners and in fact some have been caught. And the closure of the RAAF version of the USAF "Blue Book" does not signify that it is not interested any longer in receiving the reports. It will accept them and will still welcome them, but those which do not appear to have a direct impact on national security will not be further investigated.

It has been an exhausting task and a relatively thankless one. Many of the reporters have been unsatisfied with the explanations despite the magnitude of the effort which has gone into it all.

It has been a long task and in many ways an interesting if not particularly rewarding one. The files are copious and the detail which has gone into the project will now be diverted to what is perceived to be areas of more productive defence interest.