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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:12,800

Welcome to Sightings. I'm Tim White. January 7th, 1948, five months after the mysterious

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00:00:12,800 --> 00:00:17,600

crash near Roswell, New Mexico, a National Guard pilot on a routine training mission

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00:00:17,600 --> 00:00:23,400

radioed in with a strange message. The pilot had decorated World War II ace with over

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00:00:23,400 --> 00:00:27,960

2,800 hours of flight time, told the tower that he was in pursuit of a glowing object

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00:00:27,960 --> 00:00:32,320

he could not identify. Moments later, the pilot, Thomas Mantell, was dead.

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00:00:32,320 --> 00:00:42,320

In 1948, three separate UFO sightings that have come to be known as the classics sparked

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00:00:42,320 --> 00:00:47,640

the modern UFO investigation movement. In response to public demand for answers, the

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00:00:47,640 --> 00:00:53,720

U.S. government established Project SIGN. Its stated purpose was to scientifically investigate

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00:00:53,720 --> 00:00:59,520

UFO sightings and among its first commissions was one of the three classic cases, the mysterious

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00:00:59,520 --> 00:01:10,520

death of pilot Thomas Mantell. Was the World War II flying ace the world's first UFO fatality?

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00:01:10,520 --> 00:01:16,800

Tommy was my big brother. He was three years older than I am. And sort of awesome to me,

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00:01:16,800 --> 00:01:23,440

of course. I remember Tommy mostly interested in airplanes. He made bottle airplanes and

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00:01:23,640 --> 00:01:30,160

he had them hanging all over his bed. He wanted to be a fighter pilot so bad, but he was too

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00:01:30,160 --> 00:01:37,160

tall. But then he was very happy when they sent him over to England and his job was to

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00:01:39,640 --> 00:01:46,640

take the gliders and paratroopers behind the lines. And on D-Day, that's what he did.

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00:01:47,440 --> 00:01:54,440

On June 6, 1944, Thomas Mantell proved just what kind of a pilot he was. Mantell's top

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00:01:55,720 --> 00:02:01,320

secret mission was to deliver a glider deep behind enemy lines. Toeing the glider behind

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00:02:01,320 --> 00:02:07,820

his unarmed C-24, Mantell came under attack from enemy anti-aircraft fire 100 miles from

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00:02:07,820 --> 00:02:13,280

the drop-off point. The plane was hit, but Mantell kept going and completed his mission

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00:02:13,320 --> 00:02:19,680

dropping the glider on target. This is what his plane looked like when it landed safely

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00:02:19,680 --> 00:02:26,040

in England. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism and extraordinary

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00:02:26,040 --> 00:02:33,040

achievement in aerial flight. When he got out of the Army, I was hoping he'd get a regular

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00:02:33,120 --> 00:02:40,120

9-5 job, but he still wanted airplanes, so he started his own flying school. Then he

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00:02:40,880 --> 00:02:47,880

joined the Air National Guard and he liked that because he got to fly fighter planes

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00:02:48,360 --> 00:02:55,040

in the Air National Guard. On January 7, 1948, six months after receiving the Distinguished

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00:02:55,040 --> 00:03:00,200

Flying Cross, Captain Mantell died during what should have been a routine training mission.

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00:03:00,200 --> 00:03:04,240

He and his flight were retrieving some aircraft that had been undergoing overhaul and maintenance

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00:03:04,240 --> 00:03:09,640

down in Mariott and Georgia. Larry Tabor is an historian and aeronautics expert who's

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00:03:09,640 --> 00:03:13,960

been researching the Mantell case for more than 10 years. When I got into college, I

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00:03:13,960 --> 00:03:19,480

found out that our squadron at the University of Louisville was named after Thomas Mantell,

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00:03:19,480 --> 00:03:25,080

the Arnold Air Society portion of it, and so I began to do more and more research. Tabor

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00:03:25,080 --> 00:03:29,920

has amassed hundreds of civilian and military documents related to the curious death of

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00:03:29,920 --> 00:03:35,280

Thomas Mantell. He was returning from Marriott to Georgia that day with three other men and

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00:03:35,320 --> 00:03:42,000

a flight of P-51 fighters and they were returning to the Stantiford Field when they received

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00:03:42,000 --> 00:03:46,720

a call from Godman Tire Fort Knox to pursue an unidentified flying object that had been

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00:03:46,720 --> 00:03:52,560

in the area. One of the airplanes did not participate in flight because it was short

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00:03:52,560 --> 00:03:57,080

fuel. The other three aircraft continued on even though two of the aircraft, including

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00:03:57,080 --> 00:04:03,120

Mantell's, were not equipped to go at high altitudes. They did see some type of flying

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00:04:03,160 --> 00:04:09,120

object. They chased it for a certain amount of time there in the early afternoon and they

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00:04:09,120 --> 00:04:16,120

got to about 25,000 feet and at that point Mantell's wingman turned back to escort the

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00:04:16,760 --> 00:04:21,120

less experienced pilot down. I, of course, find that strange since it's the job of a

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00:04:21,120 --> 00:04:26,400

wingman to stay with his flight leader at all time. Mantell chose to continue to chase

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00:04:26,400 --> 00:04:31,200

the object to something that he felt was a threat to the security of America. At some

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00:04:31,240 --> 00:04:35,280

point Mantell said, I see the object, I'm going to pursue it a little bit further. That was

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00:04:35,280 --> 00:04:42,280

the last contact that anybody had with Mantell. He went up to above 33,000 and at that point

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00:04:42,560 --> 00:04:48,680

appears to have died from anoxia or lack of oxygen. The aircraft was continuing its high

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00:04:48,680 --> 00:04:53,520

power climb. Of course with Mantell dead, eventually the aircraft healed over from

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00:04:53,520 --> 00:05:00,020

torque and came down in a spin where it crashed in a field down in Franklin, Kentucky.

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00:05:00,020 --> 00:05:05,900

We were not told or informed by the Air Force. They wanted to sweep it under the rug with

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00:05:05,900 --> 00:05:11,260

as little attention to themselves as possible, whether it be because they felt they were

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00:05:11,260 --> 00:05:17,860

at fault for sending him or if it was something they didn't want to talk about, what he was

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00:05:17,860 --> 00:05:24,860

chasing. A neighbor that lived free houses down came to our house and told my mother

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00:05:25,020 --> 00:05:32,020

what had happened. Two neighbors from down the street came in and they said, Peggy, we

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00:05:34,820 --> 00:05:41,820

got something we got to tell you. And of course I had no idea what it was and they told me

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00:05:43,380 --> 00:05:50,380

they said, Tommy had a crash and I said, oh, is he all right? And they said no, he was

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00:05:51,100 --> 00:05:58,100

killed. The main thing I recall was standing in my brother's home with his wife and we

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00:05:59,100 --> 00:06:05,460

were all standing in a circle holding hands and my mother said the circle is broken. And

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00:06:05,460 --> 00:06:12,460

I might say she was broken also. For nearly 50 years, the family of Thomas Mantell has

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00:06:12,460 --> 00:06:18,220

searched for an explanation. The military's silence has contributed to a flood of contradictory

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00:06:18,220 --> 00:06:23,660

rumors. Mantell's body was found riddled with bullets. The body was missing. The plane

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00:06:23,660 --> 00:06:29,660

had disintegrated. The wreckage was radioactive and most disturbing of all, the Thomas Mantell's

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00:06:29,660 --> 00:06:36,420

P-51 was knocked down by an extraterrestrial spacecraft. When we come back, our sightings

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00:06:36,420 --> 00:06:42,220

investigative team returns to the crash site remarkably after nearly 50 years and a thorough

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00:06:42,220 --> 00:06:47,780

military investigation. Sightings was still able to find additional pieces of wreckage

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00:06:47,820 --> 00:06:53,820

from Thomas Mantell's P-51. National Guard pilot Thomas Mantell on a routine training

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00:06:53,820 --> 00:06:58,860

mission spotted what he believed was a UFO bearing down on him. Moments later his plane

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00:06:58,860 --> 00:07:05,860

crashed and from that day to this, his family has never known why. They've always had a

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00:07:07,500 --> 00:07:14,500

theory. I still hear the Venus theory and most recently the balloon theory, the top

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00:07:14,580 --> 00:07:20,780

secret balloon that was out at that time. The Air Force will neither confirm nor deny

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00:07:20,780 --> 00:07:26,060

the existence of a balloon near Godman Field that day. But there is compelling evidence

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00:07:26,060 --> 00:07:31,700

that such a balloon did exist. In the hours before Mantell's UFO sightings and subsequent

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00:07:31,700 --> 00:07:38,420

death, several bases reported seeing a UFO overhead traveling at 250 miles per hour.

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00:07:38,420 --> 00:07:44,460

One air controller described it as round and white resembling a parachute. The Navy skyhook

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00:07:44,660 --> 00:07:50,620

balloon program was aimed at carrying cosmic ray experiments into the stratosphere and

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00:07:50,620 --> 00:07:56,580

the January 6, 1948 flight carried instruments I believe for the University of Minnesota

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00:07:56,580 --> 00:08:03,180

Physics Department. Chief Engineer Charles Moore believes that the skyhook balloon launched

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00:08:03,180 --> 00:08:10,180

on January 6 was directly responsible for Thomas Mantell's death on January 7. We heard

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00:08:10,180 --> 00:08:17,180

reports of a large white object being seen in the sky over Illinois and later we heard

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00:08:17,180 --> 00:08:23,300

reports of a similar object being seen over Kentucky and this was the first time that

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00:08:23,300 --> 00:08:30,060

anyone in the Central United States had ever seen such a high flying balloon. But there

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00:08:30,060 --> 00:08:35,540

are serious discrepancies between the actual flight pattern of a skyhook balloon and what

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00:08:35,620 --> 00:08:41,700

Thomas Mantell reported seeing. He described an object traveling up and forward as fast

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00:08:41,700 --> 00:08:48,700

as he was and that the UFO was metallic and of tremendous size. I do believe and I always

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00:08:48,700 --> 00:08:53,660

will that there was a cover up because they never came to talk to anybody in my family

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00:08:53,660 --> 00:09:00,660

about what had happened. They more or less just let us assume what had happened on our

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00:09:00,780 --> 00:09:07,780

own. I'm very angry sometimes as the Air Force I feel like they know more than they're telling

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00:09:08,500 --> 00:09:15,500

us. It's affected my children because they never knew their daddy growing up they were

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00:09:16,140 --> 00:09:22,180

just children. I feel that he was intelligent and experienced enough not to have made the

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00:09:22,180 --> 00:09:27,220

mistake of chasing a balloon. On several occasions he said he couldn't gain on the object and

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00:09:27,260 --> 00:09:32,940

he even appeared to be going faster than he was. I think it's possible that Captain Mantell

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00:09:32,940 --> 00:09:38,900

did see the balloon and attempted to chase it. I would suspect it would have been high

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00:09:38,900 --> 00:09:45,500

above him so that he had no possibility whatsoever of climbing to the altitude where the balloon

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00:09:45,500 --> 00:09:50,140

was floating still in the stratosphere. When I first started doing research many years

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00:09:50,140 --> 00:09:55,260

ago one of the things that I heard was the fact that the aircraft had small holes in

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00:09:55,260 --> 00:10:00,580

it. It was ionized and it came about because Captain Mantell had gotten close enough to

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00:10:00,580 --> 00:10:06,780

the exhaust system whatever type of flying object that it was and when this UFO kicked

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00:10:06,780 --> 00:10:12,780

into high gear to leave our orbit he was caught in the exhaust blast. If Captain Mantell had

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00:10:12,780 --> 00:10:17,980

been caught in a radioactive backwash the wreckage of his plane would tell the story

99

00:10:17,980 --> 00:10:23,340

best. Sighting sent an investigative team to the crash site in Franklin Kentucky with

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00:10:23,380 --> 00:10:28,100

the hope that clues to the Mantell mystery might still litter this field. It was the

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00:10:28,100 --> 00:10:34,100

first time the family had been to the crash site. At the time of the accident we were

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00:10:34,100 --> 00:10:40,260

not able to come here. They threw security all in the whole area. Glenn and Anna Margaret

103

00:10:40,260 --> 00:10:45,940

Mays were two of the first people on the scene. I mean it was like pandemonium you know how

104

00:10:45,940 --> 00:10:51,860

people just congregate in and it was you know the road was full of cars and people were coming.

105

00:10:52,500 --> 00:10:58,300

How long did they keep the area blocked off? Good while didn't they Glenn? Good while. I don't know

106

00:10:58,300 --> 00:11:02,780

exactly how long. One or two three days they brought a truck and a dozer down here from Fort Knox

107

00:11:02,780 --> 00:11:09,580

and loaded what was left of the plane on a truck and took a dozer and buried you know. That's what

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00:11:09,580 --> 00:11:17,940

we heard. We just heard that information today. After 46 years Glenn Mays thought he remembered

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00:11:18,020 --> 00:11:23,500

the location where the military had buried wreckage from Mantell's plane. After so many years

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00:11:23,500 --> 00:11:29,780

our team had few expectations but the family had high hopes. He's right up in there bunch of weeds

111

00:11:29,780 --> 00:11:38,940

right in there pretty close right up in there where the weeds are. I'm getting some radiation spots.

112

00:11:38,940 --> 00:11:46,100

There were pockets of high radiation in the field but when our team began to dig there were no

113

00:11:46,140 --> 00:11:52,100

signs of metal debris. We sent him back to fetch a picture he has shown where the aircraft crashed.

114

00:11:52,100 --> 00:11:57,300

If that can give us a perhaps a better determination how far it is from the barn and if the military's

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00:11:57,300 --> 00:12:02,700

records are accurate or not. Our sightings camera crew matched the angle and the depth of field

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00:12:02,700 --> 00:12:07,860

shown in this old newspaper clipping. It may not have been the most technically sophisticated

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00:12:07,860 --> 00:12:21,380

method the team tried but it worked. Yep aircraft. It's green. Yeah it's chromate green. That's the

118

00:12:21,380 --> 00:12:29,180

interior of the aircraft. It's one of the spars. There you go. It's not necessarily all over it's just

119

00:12:29,180 --> 00:12:35,220

like on sections. That's interesting. See here it'll spike but up here it goes back to normal.

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00:12:38,140 --> 00:12:45,260

In just the few remaining hours of daylight Larry Tabor and the sightings team found over two dozen pieces of wreckage.

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00:12:46,260 --> 00:12:54,140

Fortunately there are serial numbers on several pieces of the aircraft that were recovered and these can be traced

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00:12:54,140 --> 00:13:00,100

to ensure that it did come from the airplane that Captain Mantell was flying that day. I hope what you are doing

123

00:13:00,700 --> 00:13:11,420

brings to light some of because I was hoping before I passed on that I find out what it is. If this

is wreckage for

124

00:13:11,420 --> 00:13:17,980

Mantell's plane why was it buried in an unmarked trench by the same military that had promised to do a thorough

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00:13:17,980 --> 00:13:26,140

investigation and why does it refuse to answer the Mantell family's simple plea. What happened to Tommy. As far as the

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00:13:26,180 --> 00:13:35,420

military cover up I believe there was at that time very much a cover up of the whole incident. To me that's why

127

00:13:35,420 --> 00:13:44,740

there's always been a question. Maybe it was a UFO. How do we know. He was too good of a pilot to take a risk of his

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00:13:44,740 --> 00:13:55,140

life and to hurt his family to go chasing after something that wasn't there. Sightings has notified Air Force officials

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00:13:55,140 --> 00:14:02,740

at the Pentagon that we have found what appears to be wreckage from Thomas Mantell's P-51. Sightings has also requested all

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00:14:02,740 --> 00:14:08,540

information pertaining to this incident under the Freedom of Information Act. We hope to bring you the response to these

131

00:14:08,540 --> 00:14:10,220

inquiries on a future broadcast.