Postscript

The preceding letter was sent to the Air Force commenting on one aspect of claims related to the alleged 1947 Roswell UFO crash. Robert Todd has been an independent investigator of government UFO interest for a great many years. CAUS has always found his research to be a consistently vital link in the understanding of what the government knows about UFOs. There are few other sources to turn to for a correct interpretation of historical events as Todd has been able to do.

The validity of any crashed saucer claim hinges on the strength of its parts. If a part shows serious weakness, it should be removed from the debate until such weakness is either corrected, or, if it doesn't resist scrutiny, cast aside. The issue of Lincoln La Paz's involvement in Roswell was never strong but Todd's questioning reveals it now to be seriously flawed. Comments are invited. Attachments mentioned in the letter are on file at CAUS (too many to publish) and the 17 pages are available for $3 to cover copy and postage costs.

CBS UFO FILM SURFACES

Thanks to the effort of UFO researcher John Stewart of the UFO Video Coordinator Library in Randolph, New Jersey, CAUS has been provided with a copy of "UFO: FRIEND, FOE OR FANTASY," aired on the CBS television network in May 1966. The documentary was aired as a response to the great wave of UFO incidents during March and April 1966, the so-called "Swamp Gas" wave. The program has not been shown for twenty-eight years and is a piece of priceless, vintage UFO history, displaying young versions of Walter Cronkite, Carl Sagan, Thornton Page and many other figures of the past. Stewart may be contacted to answer questions at: 168 West Hanover Ave.; Randolph, New Jersey 07869.

THE MANTELL UFO - A SMOKING GUN? MAYBE! PART TWO

In our last number, the basics of the famous UFO encounter involving Captain Thomas Mantell on January 7, 1948 were given. Also published were two photographs of a Skyhook balloon launched from Camp Ripley, Minnesota, located near the town of Little Falls. The photos were kindly provided by Professor Charles Moore, one of a team of researchers performing balloon-borne scientific experiments during the 1947-49 period.

What those photographs show (and others are included with this article) is what is very likely the same object that Mantell saw, and ultimately lost his life pursuing.

How do we know this?

In late 1992, in the process of doing other work, researcher Robert Todd received an assortment of photographs of various balloon launch scenes from Professor Moore. The images contained date notations on the back, some labeled "1-6-48." Todd had recognized that the date was only a day before that of the Mantell incident. Given that most researchers now feel that Mantell had pursued a balloon, the only persistent mystery was from where the balloon had come. Todd contacted this editor and provided Moore's phone number.

I spoke to Professor Moore in January 1994 by phone and, consequently, additional photos were made available, thirty-seven relating to the January 6, 1948 launch from Camp Ripley.

Circumstances of the launch: The balloon's purpose was to hoist a cosmic ray experiment into the stratosphere, part of a series of such
experiments during that time. The instrument package hung below an
unpacked parachute, both of which were attached to the lower portion
of the balloon. Upon the triggering of a clock timer, the instrument
package would be released later and float to earth by means of the
parachute. This particular experiment malfunctioned due to the timer
not releasing the package, and presumably was lost after passing off
the east coast near the Georgia/South Carolina area.

It was launched at about 8 AM on January 6th. Temperature at
the time was about -45°F. After an earlier burst of polar air, the
launch site was under a dome of high pressure with winds from the north
creating a drift to the south and southeast. When airborne, the Skyhook
drifted southeast, confirmed by theodolite tracking (a tracking tele-
scope for those unfamiliar). Sometime subsequent to the balloon drift-
ing over the horizon, Moore recalled that radio reports of a flying
object over Illinois were monitored. Hours later reports over Kentucky
and Tennessee were received. Such a drift pattern would indeed have
carried the balloon to the Georgia/South Carolina region. Apparently,
aside from the radio reports, no published reports outside of the Ken-
tucky/Tennessee area are available. The Air Force's Project Sign
(predecessor to Blue Book) lists four cases on January 7th: Mantell's;
Lockbourne AFB, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; and Wilmington, Ohio. Mantell's
was officially explained as a balloon, after the planet Venus was ini-
tially considered and discarded, while the others were listed as Venus.

Former Project Blue Book head Captain Edward Ruppelt, in his
1956 book THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS, opts for a balloon
having been launched from Clinton County Air Force Base in southern
Ohio. Weather data available to Ruppelt suggested that a Skyhook
balloon launched from Clinton County would account for the various
changes in direction reported by witnesses in Kentucky as the supposed
balloon ascended through layers of atmosphere and changeable wind
direction. Ruppelt added that people who were working on Skyhook projects
remembered operating out of Clinton County in 1947 but could not confirm
a January 7, 1948 flight.

Professor Moore, who did work on early Skyhook projects, absolutely
ruled out Clinton County AFB as a launch site for the January 7th balloon,
saying that "...the first 'Skyhook-type' balloon launch ever from Clinton
County airport occurred on July 9, 1951. The first flights from that
site were made in the summer of 1951 by members of the New York Univer-
sity Balloon Group under Air Force Contract AF 19(122)-633 and are
described in New York University Research Division Technical Report 172.1
dated October 15, 1951. I can state with assurance that no large poly-
ethylene balloons were ever launched from Clinton County prior to 1951."

With the time lag between the Camp Ripley launch at 8 AM, January
6th and the first reports from Kentucky at 1 PM, January 7th being 29
hours, and factoring in an average drift speed of 18 - 25 MPH, a balloon
could easily have covered the approximately 700 - 750 miles from Camp
Ripley to northwestern and central Kentucky. Moore added that in 1952,
he once flew in a manned balloon averaging 7000 feet altitude from New
Brighton, Minnesota to near Staten Island, New York in 23 hours.

It is not unreasonable now to place a known balloon in the vicinity
of Kentucky on January 7, 1948. The following is a chronology of major
events on this date, based upon the Project Sign record:

January 7th, PM -
100 CST - Civilians call to report a UFO overhead from various
locations in northwestern Kentucky. Madisonville has it
flying overhead. Seen at Elizabethtown also.

110 CST - Seen at Lexington. Another report has the object moving
west, south of Ft. Knox.
120 CST - Godman Tower informed. Other sightings reported west of Ft. Knox, near Irvington and Owensboro.

145 CST - Godman personnel see object in the southwest, looking like a small white object similar to a parachute, bright on top, reddish on the lower portion. Another witness says the object is round, whiter than the clouds of which the object passed in front at times. Another still called it an ice cream cone topped with red. Another: white like an umbrella, red light on top and bottom sometimes. Stationary ½ hours.

245 CST - Mantell, told to look for the object during a routine flight, sees it. He said it was ahead and above, moving at 180 MPH. Godman said that the object dwarfed the size of the pursuing planes, two other P-51s having accompanied Mantell's for a time. Soon after, Mantell felt that the object equalled or exceeded his speed. Chase continued.

318 CST - Mantell crashed and was killed.

320 CST - Third shift takes over at Godman Tower. They are told that a disc, balloon or strange object was being hunted down.

405 CST - Mantell's wing pilots, Clements and Hammond, take off again after refueling to look for Mantell, not knowing that he had crashed. After having reached the Bowling Green, Kentucky area where Mantell was last seen, there was no sign of the UFO.

430 CST - A Vanderbilt University astronomer sees an object near Nashville, Tennessee, south-southeast of the city.

If one plots a general trend of the UFO's flight path, you will surely see a southeast drift, agreeing with the Camp Ripley Skyhook's trend of travel. What of the object's movement west at 110 CST? A contradiction unless one considers localized changes in wind direction for a time, or an incorrect report by a witness. Complete weather and tracking data for the Camp Ripley launch are not available for the entire path.

The object being stationary at 145 CST for ½ hours again might be explained as localized variations in drift over certain areas. Professor Moore explained as an example that in the summertime an area between 60,000 and 75,000 feet sometimes develops, called the "turnaround altitude," a region in which there is no wind. The stationary observation at this time would also appear to be contradicted by Mantell's testimony at 245 that the object was moving at 180 MPH. Clearly some of the testimony by witnesses is contradictory and the truth lies somewhere in between. We must allow that a portion of the speed/direction estimates may be in error.

A tell-tale indication that the Skyhook was in the vicinity when Mantell crashed comes from Project Sign records:

"...a Dr. Seyfert, an astronomer at Vanderbilt University, had spotted an object south-southeast of Nashville, Tennessee, that he identified as a pear-shaped balloon with cables and a basket attached, moving SSE at a speed of 10 MPH at 25,000 feet. This was between 1630-1645 (430-445 PM - ed.)."

This would have put the object roughly 30 - 40 miles south-southeast beyond the estimated point where Mantell was last seen. Given the 110-125 PM time difference between the crash and the continuation of the southeast drift another 30-40 miles in an area south-southeast of Nashville, the object would have been doing roughly 25 MPH, agreeing with the estimated drift speed range of 18-25 MPH given earlier to place the Camp Ripley balloon in the Kentucky area.
Even a superficial look at the Skyhook photo accompanying this article reveals a very similar object to Dr. Seyfert's description of his object (see page 12 for photo). One witness in Madisonville, according to Ruppert (page 37), called Flight Service in Dayton, Ohio, to say that he had seen an object traveling southeast and upon looking at it through a telescope, saw that it was a balloon.

Sightings in Ohio several hours later appear to have no relation to the Skyhook since 1) the balloon would have to have entirely reversed direction to be in southern Ohio at 730 PM, the time of initial sightings at Lockbourne Air Force Base and Clinton County Air Force Base, and 2) at 730 PM on a January evening, even at high altitude, a balloon should not have been brightly illuminated by reflected light to the extent reported by personnel at both bases. A balloon at 100,000 feet, for example, can be brightly illuminated for approximately 30 minutes after sunset. On this day the sun set at 450 PM locally, some two hours and forty minutes before the evening sightings.

If one still continues to even remotely believe that Ruppel's explanation is correct, that a Clinton County Skyhook was launched, then one is hard pressed to explain why personnel from there 1) didn't know that their balloon was responsible for raising hell over Kentucky and 2) were so alarmed by UFO sightings in the evening if launched Skyhooks were still in the vicinity, or why no mention of such launches appear in any of the Clinton County witnesses' statements. Assuming that the witnesses were well aware of the classified nature of the Skyhook program, if you grant Clinton County launches, then why would they report anything at all and draw outside attention to the program? This is engaging in a bit of overkill on the Clinton County matter, but it draws attention to the curious support for this scenario by Ruppelt.

Professor Moore recalled that in a meeting with Ruppelt at General Mills, Ruppelt felt that one of the Camp Ripley launches was responsible for the Mantell encounter. If so, then why did Ruppelt, in his 1956 book, proceed to so strongly support a Clinton County launch? This support, when read carefully does not seem to be based upon very much substance.

The answer may lie in the fact that the Navy, which funded and directed the Skyhook program, did not want to be held responsible for Mantell's death and, subsequently, suppressed knowledge of the Camp Ripley balloon, according to Professor Moore who was a participant in the discussion of this matter with the Navy. This would explain not only short-term suppression of the truth but long-term as well since even though the Skyhook program was eventually declassified, Mantell's accidentally death as a result of a Skyhook encounter certainly would do little to comfort Mantell's family knowing that one was responsible for the events leading to his loss. Further, even though the revelation that a Skyhook balloon was connected to the incident would have helped the government's effort to downstage UFOs to the public, the idea that an initial suppression did take place could have aroused unwanted suspicions that the government indeed was not always forthcoming with it's UFO statements. The matter was left alone.

It seems unlikely that much new information will be added to this story hereon, so unless dramatic evidence appears to the contrary, CAUS regards the Camp Ripley Skyhook launch of January 6, 1948 as the stimulus for the circumstances that led to Mantell's unfortunate accident, an accident which Mantell could have prevented by exercising proper caution in climbing to dangerous altitudes without the appropriate equipment. It seems certain that Mantell, taken with the possibility of witnessing a strange flying object, exceeded his limitations.
As a final note on the Mantell story, Professor Moore provided specifics on the January 6th Skyhook:

The balloon fully inflated: "Nominally 72.8 feet in diameter by about 102 feet high with volume of about 226,000 cubic feet. It carried 60 pound loads to an altitude of 100,000 feet where it became fully inflated and, thereafter, vented the excess lifting gas out its 'appendix,' an opening in the bottom."

CAUS wondered if at the 25,000 foot altitude the balloon would have been fully inflated at any point. Reports from Kentucky describe "parachute" or "cone-shaped" objects, implying that the balloon would not have been fully inflated as it passed over these areas. Yet, other reports from these areas described "round" objects. Moore explained, "On descent from high altitude it could have 'ingested' air through the appendix. This often happened and prolonged the duration of the flight because the ingested air would be compressed on descent which would cause the temperature of the air to increase thereby adding to the buoyancy until the compression heat was lost by radiation and convection. I do not know if this happened on the January 6, 1948 Skyhook but, in view of the apparent long flight, some air intake probably occurred."

(letter to CAUS, 7-21-94)