

M.518.1

24th July, 1960

UNIDENTIFIED LIGHT - WEWAK AREA.

The Range Commander,
Maralinga.

At Wewak, the site of the Vixen "A" tests, approximately 15 miles from Maralinga Village, are a number of static balloons used in instrumentation. At 7.15 p.m. on 15th July, 1960, a telephone report was received from Constable Hubert Dave SCARBOROUGH, who is stationed on the site, that a balloon had burnt in the air. The Balloon Officer made an inspection and found that all balloons were intact.

2. The Constable was questioned and said that he was sitting in his caravan at approximately 7.5 p.m. when his attention was drawn to a light, of approximately the power of bright moonlight, playing on the ground. He left the caravan and saw what he described as a white light travelling from East to West. As it appeared to come nearer, or grow larger, it turned to a red colour. Because of its position and height he thought, at first, that it was a balloon afire and reported it as such. Owing to lack of knowledge as to distance away it was found difficult to estimate the size of the light. The only fact contributed that could assist was that the light appeared to occupy $1\frac{1}{2}$ to two degrees of the horizon. The Constable thought that the light burned for thirty seconds.

3. Constable Richard Henry MAXWELL who was outside the caravan at Roadside, thirteen miles from the Village, saw a light out of the corner of his eye at about 7 p.m. He thought that the light appeared to come from the direction of Wewak a distance of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. As far as he knows the light did not play on the ground in his immediate vicinity. The light had made so little impression on his mind that he failed to mention it to his companion when he returned to the caravan and recalled it only when he received a telephone call from the Constable at Wewak inquiring if the light had been witnessed at Roadside.

4. The light was observed from the Village at about the same time by the following personnel -

2/945 Capt. Keith Angus ROSS, Catering Officer.

Trevor James HOSKINS, Technical Assistant, Health Physics Group,

Russell McFarlane KINGSLEY, Fitter, Department of Mines, and

Ian Kenneth HASKARD, Supervising Technician, P.M.C.'s Department.

All gave, more or less, the same description. They saw a light over the R.E.M.E. Workshop Building in the Village and coming from the general direction of Wewak. There was some disagreement as to the duration of the light; this varied between two and fifteen seconds. The discrepancy could be explained by some people seeing the light some seconds after it had first appeared. The person who saw it for fifteen seconds was able to reconstruct his movements at the particular time and it is thought that his estimate is reasonable. While an agreement could not be reached as to the exact time all agree that it was some time after 7 p.m.

5. Inquiries, with negative result, were made of Woomera in case a firing had taken place and was witnessed in this area. The same source was used to contact a survey party from Exoil Pty. Ltd. who were camped in the vicinity of Bm in an effort to discover if they had witnessed any phenomenon such as a meteor. The result was negative.

6. A suggestion that the light could have been produced by a photo-flash from a high-flying aircraft was discounted. No aircraft was heard at the time and, in any case, no known photo-flash has a duration of anything like fifteen seconds.

7. Scientific personnel who would have the "know-how" were questioned in case the light was the result of a practical joke. Assurances were given that no member of the Scientific parties were responsible.

8. One practical suggestion was made by a Scientific Officer that the light could have been caused by "St. Elmo's fire". The Balloon Officer said that, although the balloons are "earthed" sometimes static electricity does build-up sufficiently to electrify the anchor vehicle. Three balloons are in line with the position where the light was observed from Wewak and approximately half a mile distant from the caravan. At such a distance it is understood that $1\frac{1}{2}$ degrees of the horizon could be calculated to approximately 40 feet. Opportunity was taken during a visit to Adelaide to attempt some research into static electricity at the Adelaide Public Library. No reference book produced gave much useful information. The following description of "St. Elmo's fire" was extracted from an encyclopaedia -

"...the glow accompanying the brush-like discharges of atmospheric electricity which usually appears as a tip of light on the extremity of pointed objects such as church towers or the masts of ships during stormy weather. It is commonly accompanied by a crackling or fizzing noise."

9. Mr. Oliver Harry Turner, Health Physics Officer, who possesses an inquiring mind, made an independent investigation and extensive calculations. He is of the opinion that the light was not the result of a natural phenomenon but caused by an unidentified flying object; either a cone from a satellite or a "flying saucer."

10. It is felt that all avenues of inquiry at Maralinga have now been covered and that it is not possible to positively identify the source of the light. It is felt, however, that the light was the result of either a meteor or static electricity.

11. Submitted.

SGD. J.J.A. HANLON

Security Officer, Maralinga