

Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos & Wim van Utrecht

BELGIUM IN UFO PHOTOGRAPHS

Volume 1
(1950-1988)

FOTOCAT Report #7



Cover illustration: Pen-and-ink drawing by German illustrator and painter Heinrich Kley (1863-1945).
Image borrowed from The Drawings of Heinrich Kley, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1961.

Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos & Wim van Utrecht

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**Volume 1
(1950-1988)**

FOTOCAT Report # 7

MMXVII

DEDICATION

***Dedicado para mi hijo Daniel:
Todo esfuerzo tiene su recompensa***

Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos

Voor Mieke

Wim van Utrecht

"The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality"

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

"Qui peut garantir l'exactitude de sa mémoire? Pour commencer, qui oserait illustrer de dialogues un récit prétendument vécu?"

Vladimir Volkoff (1932-2005)

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FOREWORD

By James Oberg (*)

The 70th anniversary of humanity's encounter with the 'UFO Mystery' has recently passed, and anniversaries are good waypoints in time to assess the current state of understanding of this mass cultural phenomenon that may also hint at a world-shaking scientific revolution. If the most imaginative theories turn out to be true it will be the greatest human discovery in history, and if none of the extraordinary theories turn out to be true, it then would 'merely' be one of the grandest cultural delusions in human history. Either way, it deserves serious attention.

Without taking sides on selection of explanations, Vicente-Juan Ballester-Olmos and Wim van Utrecht have been practicing a methodology of research that—were it far more widespread—could help determine the better theories from the more extreme ones. They are looking at, and recording, the raw data, in painstaking detail and depth, to provide current and future researchers with the rarest and most valuable resource in any mystery, authentic clues.

Their basic assumption, which I share, is that there are potentially important processes and events that are today hopelessly mixed into the soup of misidentifications, mistakes, occasional hoaxes and delusions, that comprises the 'UFO data base'. To focus in on the potential pearls, to identify them and describe them to the detail required to test theories against them, they have generated catalogs of reports covering decades of human perceptions. Unlike most Internet databases, they expend great effort in going beyond 'cataloguing existing catalogs' by quoting from other existing sources and books, passively relying on assumptions of diligence and competence by often anonymous (or, if known, occasionally dubious) previous investigators.

Over the decades, thousands of ordinary citizens fascinated by the possibilities of this mind-stretching phenomenon have labored, usually in private, to collect, assess, and record events in their immediate vicinity. They did so in the trust that someday the fragments of the puzzle would accumulate a mass and shape from which an explanation (or several explanations) would become discernable. If and when that happens, these enthusiastic volunteers will deserve a lot of the credit.

An example of documentation work done by Ballester-Olmos and directly applicable to my own investigations (space and missile related events and reports) deals with the Canary Island sightings of the 1970s and 1980s. The sighted phenomena turned out to be top secret missile tests by American submarines. In many substantial ways the witness reports showed

the same features of reports from other events around the world also sparked by missile launches.

There is a significant value to such 'solutions', far beyond the satisfaction of merely 'solving' a famous story. Most 'ufologists' are quite adamant that when a case is shown to not be a UFO, but an 'IFO' (Identified flying Object), it is no longer of interest to the study of UFOs and ought to be deleted from existing data bases. Ballester-Olmos and Van Utrecht, like me, believe that just the opposite is true; that such 'IFOs' have lessons to teach 'ufologists' that are crucial to making sense of cases that remain in the 'true UFO' databases.

Here's why: our understanding of the process between raw perception and ultimate memory formation and recollection remains very shaky. The concept of a 'trained witness', or of assigning veracity of a witness to their intellectual, academic, or professional level, remains dominant in the 'UFO Studies' universe. The report of a pilot or an astronomer (or a movie star or a politician) is given heavier weight because of their status.

So when a medical doctor on the Canary Islands reports seeing a transparent craft a few hundred meters from him, one evening after sunset on a road through a local forest, with two humanoids inside working on control consoles, the presumption is that such a visual manifestation actually existed as described.

But when Ballester-Olmos's meticulously documented case files show that many people on the island were at that same date and time, and in the same direction, were seeing the sunlit ascent plume of an American submarine-launched rocket rising above the horizon, there is confusion and disbelief. The two sightings must be coincidental because nobody—especially a medical expert!—could possibly misinterpret one for the other. If it happened only once, it would be hard to claim it WAS such a perceptual error, but the written record of IFOs show that it is, in fact, a common pattern.

In another report which Ballester-Olmos discovered, and shared with me (I had NEVER seen it) because he intuitively suspected its significance, the same pattern was displayed. Certain kinds of unusual once-in-a-lifetime stimuli were reported in similar misperceived forms. This case, a nearly horizontal fireball swarm over Kiev, USSR, in 1963, had more than a hundred witness reports and drawings. About half showed various configurations recognizable as a swarm of meteors, but the other drawings showed not scattered fireballs but one enormous structured object covered with lights or rocket thrusters.

The fireball swarm was caused by the atmospheric reentry of satellite rocket, as it disintegrated in flames about 100 km high moving at 8 km/sec. Soon it became clear that other particularly large satellite reentries, under good nighttime viewing conditions, were sparking almost identical misperceptions all over the world (France, Estonia, Zimbabwe, Yukon, Florida, all over). People of all ages, cultures, education and professional

levels, all were seeing a documented prosaic event (for the first time in their lives) and many of them were coming up with interpretations of uncanny similarity.

The implication of this is startling, in that people's minds jump to quick conclusions about startling sights based on evolutionary shaping and on personal lifetime experiences. But this interpretation depends on the reliability of the detailed reports that had originally been written based on witness interviews near the time of the events.

The existence of such data, and its ready accessibility via smart indexing schemes, was crucial to the development and validation of this profoundly important insight. The theory remains controversial among serious UFO investigators. But that it exists at all is a tribute to the original chroniclers AND to the kind of data gathering and documentation that this current book demonstrates.

The newfound power of combining GOOD records keeping with Internet tools and search engines can be seen in specific cases discussed by the authors. The Faymonville photos (pages 99-113), together with witness testimony and post-event questioning, is a good example. Note this comment by an early investigator: "The object, which was several hundreds of meters away when the sighting began, approached the witnesses at a constant pace following a SSE-NNW trajectory... slowly heading in their direction." An immediate warning signal is to note how the witnesses jumped to a conclusion about distance to the object when there were NO valid clues to how far away it actually was. Such premature interpretation of visual stimuli often leads witnesses to subconsciously edit subsequent perceptions and recollections to 'fit' a hypothesis that was unjustified. The current report proposes an astronomical explanation that is plausible in the cultural context that surrounded this period in the country.

But such explanations are not 'proven' either, except to the degree required to demolish the common pro-UFO argument that "there is no OTHER possible explanation" aside from an unknown stimulus, perhaps alien visitors. THAT theory is not disproven but in terms of scientific proof is shown to be unnecessary to account for the testimony and photos. So it fails to attain confirmation.

I was also impressed with similar dogged investigations and plausible reconstructions of other sightings and photos [such as the PAGEOS balloon over Mariakerke (pp. 154-162)], where previous investigations had erroneously eliminated prosaic explanations based on inaccurate assumptions as well as unfamiliarity with common perceptual errors when observing stars and moving objects high in the sky. Particularly impressive was the authors' description of brief distraction leading to transfer of reference point from a nearby star to the moving object and the misleading misperceptual consequences. In 1974 while observing a known satellite, EXACTLY the same experience struck me so vividly I was overwhelmed with vertigo and stumbled, almost falling to the ground.

In case after case, the authors apply wide knowledge of geometry, optics, meteorology, human perception, and human cultural context (they recognized one impressive-looking UFO photo as actually taken from a popular French science fiction movie), to illustrate that plausible explanations often are found not by dogged cookbook methods but by inspiration and by accident. No wonder, then, that not ALL such prosaic explanations can be found, however dedicated and diligent may be the amateur investigators.

The question of alien visitors [who could remain as detectable or not, as they desire, or even disguise themselves as weather balloons as needed] remains unresolved, but the satisfaction of seeing good detective work is worth the reading. The implication of this work is that the body of existing reports and photographs does not unambiguously require the existence of ANY new phenomenon. But there are plenty of HUMAN and natural phenomena of great interest to science, to national security, to psychology, to sociology, that are wrapped up in these reports which makes them worth studying, and they deserve study at the level of this book.

As such, the approach shown by Ballester-Olmos and Van Utrecht should serve as an example and as an inspiration to other 'citizen scientists' who have played, and will continue to play, a crucial role in providing the resources that will allow theorists with more data and wider insight to someday make more sense about what lies behind this mysterious phenomenon.

(*) Born in 1944, James or "Jim" Oberg, is an American space journalist and historian, regarded as an expert on the Russian and Chinese space programs. He had a 22-year career as a space engineer in NASA specializing in orbital rendezvous. Oberg is an author of ten books (including UFOs and Outer Space Mysteries, published, among others by Donning Company Publishers, Virginia Beach, USA, in 1982) and more than a thousand articles on space flight. He gave many explanations of UFO phenomena in the popular press. He is also a consultant in spaceflight operations and safety.

INTRODUCTION

Everybody with the least appetite for the mysterious and an appreciation for old pictures finds them charming and intriguing: the often blurred black and white or bleakly-colored pictures from the second half of the previous century that depict strange aerial contraptions against the background of a badly-framed landscape. Typical of the flying objects that are portrayed is their anachronistic circular wing design that hints at the crafts' ability to travel in any direction without any visible means of propulsion. While such flight maneuvers can be accomplished by every multicopter drone of today, they were still an exclusive feature of imaginary craft in SF novels and comics in 1947, the year in which actual reports of these *Flying Discs* or *Flying Saucers*, as they were then called, started to emanate from the U.S. and later from other countries around the world. Official and unofficial, scientific and not-so-scientific investigative probes were set up to deal with what several years later would be more neutrally designated as *Unidentified Flying Objects*.

But what do these UFO pictures really show? Are they offering us a glimpse of spacecraft from another world? Did these photographers capture intruding high-tech spy devices from enemy countries? Nowadays, it is pretty obvious to most that the majority of these flying saucer photos do not show meters-wide craft, but merely models on strings, hand-thrown kitchenware, birds and insects, lens flares, film defects, and paper cutouts pasted on windowpanes. The million-dollar question, of course, is to know if there are any images left that are not explainable as hoaxes or misinterpretations? It is the main goal of our project to find that out.

The present study examines the history and veracity of the photographic evidence for unidentified aerial phenomena by assessing the images themselves. In doing so we opted to focus on Belgian UFO reports that are backed up with photographs, slides, films, or videos. Despite the fact that Belgium is one of Europe's smaller countries, its ufological heritage can be regarded as a micro-universe that comprises all the aspects found in UFO archives from other parts of the world. By selecting a subset of reports from one country, we ensure that the local interactions that can influence the reporting process (like press coverage and the location of popular UFO groups) are not neglected.

Not all collected images show classic saucer-shaped objects. A great many contain little more than fuzzy dark- or light-colored blobs that may or may not relate to an actual visual sighting, not necessarily anything strange. The types of UFO reports we have studied are of a great variety. As such, our case evaluations can be extrapolated to similar scenarios encountered from other countries. In this way, we hope our study will benefit current and future researchers with their own analyses of UFO photos and videos.

The cases that are discussed in the present monograph are those that are included in FOTOCAT, a database developed by one of the authors (Ballester Olmos, 2017). FOTOCAT comprises over 12,000 worldwide imaged UFO sightings. As of August 2017, it listed 242 cases for Belgium dating from between 1950 and 2005. We have spread them over two volumes. 2005 is the end year of the catalog. From that year on, the number of UFO photos and videos skyrocketed due to the rise of digital imaging that made the taking and distributing of images easier than ever. A mere look at the number of photographically-substantiated UFO reports from after 2005—a list of Belgian UFO photo cases from between 2007 and 2017 will be published in an appendix to Volume 2—testifies to this.

This monograph is part of the FOTOCAT Report series, which, since 2004, focuses on exploiting the FOTOCAT database in three different ways: reports by year (Ballester Olmos, 2008), by geography (Ballester Olmos, 2006; Ballester Olmos and Brænne, 2008; Ballester Olmos, 2010; Ballester Olmos *et al*, 2012), and by type of subject photographed (Ballester Olmos and Shough, 2011).

Belgian UFO groups that have been in the business of collecting UFO reports since the 1960s and 70s were willing to collaborate with our project. Without their help our work would have been severely handicapped. Private investigators also freely cooperated. When the only source was a newspaper article, the authors tried to locate the best possible prints through library searches. In several instances we tracked down the photo- and videographers themselves and asked them to provide a current position statement on the images they had taken. In cases where complex visual information was encountered, the authors relied upon international experts in image evaluation for a professional assessment.

Besides to painting the evolution of the phenomenon and weighing the evidence, the authors probed the case material for any anomaly that could hint at a phenomenon not yet fully understood by science. In a similar vein, we paid attention to photos of eccentric meteorological phenomena that ended up in the Belgian UFO archives.

The present volume is divided into two parts. Part 1 is the main catalog in which all known reports are brought together chronologically. Part 2 reviews the ensemble of reports and provides statistics and conclusions.

Projects like these are never exhaustive and complete. For that reason, the authors welcome any new cases and/or additional information regarding already included reports.

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PART 1

A CATALOG OF EVENTS

In this first part, the authors review what is the most comprehensive collection of Belgian UFO photo & video reports in existence. Images included in the catalog concern events that occurred up to December 31, 2005. This is the end date for the period covered by the catalog. The volume at hand deals with the first four decades of UFO photography in Belgium, more precisely the period from 1950 until 1988. The second volume will cover the period from 1989 until 2005, with a major wave of reports hitting the country in 1989.

Every included case has a heading with the following basic information: day of the week, date, time, location (town/city and province), duration, special features (when applicable) and an assessment reached by the authors or their technical consultants. Case summaries usually begin with a description of the circumstances in which the images were taken and a summary of any examinations already carried out on them. Then follows our own discussion and conclusions. Each entry ends with a list of references to the sources where the original information resides.

Translations of quotes—almost all sources that were used are either in Dutch or in French—were kept as literally as possible, though slight alterations were sometimes introduced for ease of readability. Text between square brackets is not part of the initial quote and has been added by the authors.

Unless credited otherwise, diagrams, as well as graphics added to photos are by Wim van Utrecht.

The map on the next page will help readers to find the principal locations referred to in the catalog.

Map of Belgium



Map of Belgium with provinces, provincial capitals, and neighboring countries.
(Original blank map borrowed from
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Belgium_location_map.svg)

Chapter 1

1950-1971

When UFOs Were Still Flying Saucers

In 1945, the mass destruction inflicted by the atomic bombings of Japan, installed the awareness in people's mind that "total annihilation" was no longer a fictional concept. At the same time, stories of strange contraptions in the skies of our planet worked themselves loose from the science fiction pulp zines and took root in the real world in the form of actual eyewitness reports. In 1946 reports surged of mysterious "ghost rockets" crossing the skies of Sweden and neighboring countries. One year later, the flying saucer craze swept the United States. While some attributed the sightings to experimental spy planes from enemy countries, others wondered if we were being watched upon by scout ships from another world. Most European countries discovered the saucers in 1950, when a flurry of reports hit Spain. That same year a Brussels newspaper published Belgium's first photographic document of a "flying saucer". Four years later, France and Italy became the theatre of what news reporters jokingly referred to as "an invasion from Mars".

This section covers the first two decades of photographic evidence for flying saucers in Belgium. 22 years that constitute 14 photographically substantiated reports (an average of 0.6 per year).

Date: Monday, March 31, 1950
Location: Bruges (West Flanders)
Time: daytime
Duration: several hours
Special Features: ground level / creature
Assessment: journalistic fake (April Fool's Day)

Ironically, it was in a British newspaper from April 10, 1950 that we located information on the first Belgian "UFO" picture. In his column "This World of Ours", journalist and pioneer collector of flying saucer reports Elliott Rockmore, then working for *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, mentions the story of a spaceship from Mars that landed at Bruges "two weeks ago." The item reports that, according to the Bruges newspaper *Burgerwelzyn*, 26 "living beings" were found inside the craft and that, following an emergency meeting of the local council, the Martians had been taken to a camp at St. Kruis "to await inspection and interrogation." One published photograph of the saucer shows "a large flat circular object with queer things protruding from the top" surrounded by Bruges citizens. Another photograph shows the "Martian crew leader wearing a thick, rubber suit with breathing apparatus strapped to his chest, and on his left shoulder a mysterious instrument resembling a clock." The story appeared in other journals in the UK and in the United States, but apparently no editor took it seriously enough to include the earth-shaking pictures in their articles.

It was not until 2014 that Michel Roy, a long-time collaborator of the Bruges UFO group GESAG, tracked down the original article from *Burgerwelzyn* at the Bruges Public Library. The article was found in the March 31 issue of the journal. The full text runs as follows:

Upon going to press we learned that a Flying Saucer has landed on "De Burg". It's a big one and it looks eerie. It measures about 45 meters. Fortunately nobody got hurt and only one truck was destroyed. Nobody is allowed to approach the saucer. Only on Saturday, when the experts and authorities will be on the site, the public will be able to have a glimpse of the activities. Specialists will arrive by airplane at the Lombardzijde airfield and will continue the journey by car. In the saucer we spotted twenty-one living creatures and we were able to photograph one of them.

Due to the efforts of the authorities they were interned in Camp Sint-Kruis, where professors are trying to question them. Their size is very small; they have only one eye and their lips resemble a small tube made of 'securiet' [presumably what is meant here is Securit, a brand name for hardened security glass]. They are being fed with a kind of food that nobody is familiar with. The concourse of people was so great that the police and gendarmerie had to take measures. Considering the importance that science

attaches to these saucers, the city authorities have decided to set a time-table so that on Saturday, from 11 to 12 a.m. and from 3 to 5 p.m., the experts will be able to execute their work.

The morning meeting of the city council is off, but the budget will be discussed in open session at 5:15 in the afternoon. It is not excluded that the Opposition will request the suspension of this meeting. At the last moment we learn that the living beings that were found in the saucer are inhabitants of the planet Mars.

In early 2017, the authors found the Bruges library prepared to track down this long-searched item. The scan we received is of poor quality, but the article contains a picture (below) that gives a good enough idea of the size and shape of the "landed" disc. The "Supreme Commander of the spaceship" is visible in the inset top right.



Fig. 1. March 31, 1950, Bruges.

There can be no doubt: this is obviously a journalistic prank concocted for April Fool's Day. Accidentally or not, at about the same time, the Brussels paper *La Lanterne* reported that a flying saucer had crashed in the heart of the capital during the night. According to this newspaper, the day after, "crowds flocked to the office of the newspaper to behold a piece of the wreckage", but "returned home on realizing it was April 1".

The early flying saucer fever generated a number of journalistic hoaxes in which visitors from outer space served as the *leitmotiv*. In the early 1950s, particularly in conjunction with April Fool's Day (April 1 in Anglo-Saxon culture, but December 28 in Spanish and Latin American culture), several press agencies in the US, Europe and Cuba released such fake stories. Below is a non-exhaustive sample from the FOTOCAT files that nicely illustrates the popularity of the saucers in those years.



Fig. 2. Borrowed from *Buffalo Courier-Express* (Buffalo, New York, U.S.A.), April 1, 1950.

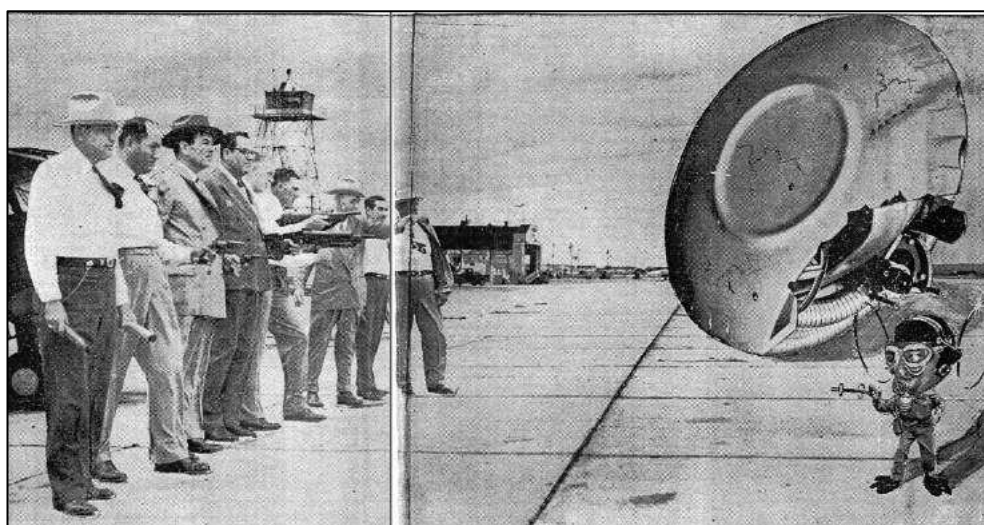


Fig. 3. Borrowed from *Laredo Times* (Laredo, Texas, U.S.A.), April 2, 1950.

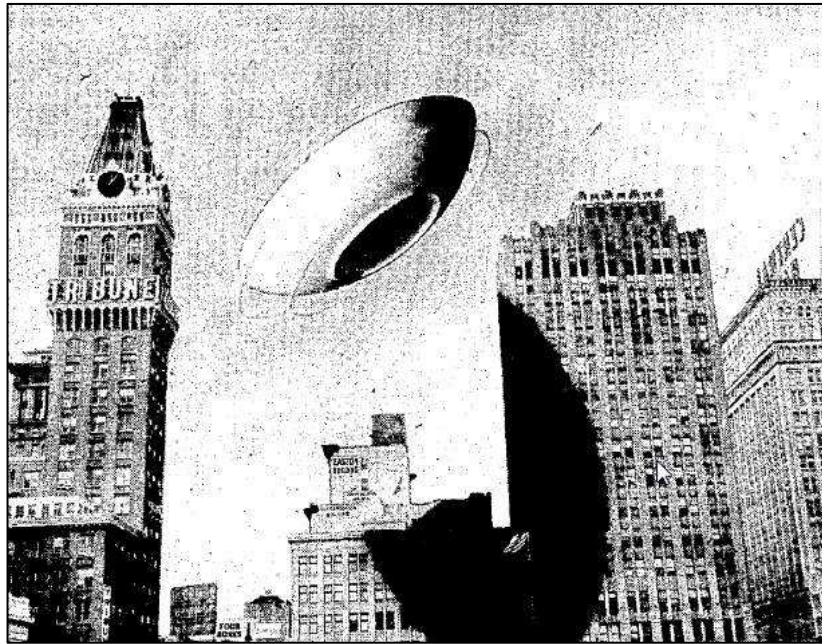


Fig. 4. Borrowed from *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, California, U.S.A.), April 1, 1950.



Fig. 5. Borrowed from *Neue Illustrierte* (Cologne, Germany), No 13, March 29, 1950.
Photo by Hans Scheffler.



Fig. 6. December 28, 1954, Havana (Cuba). Borrowed from <http://marcianitosverdes.haaan.com/2006/11/el-dia-que-los-marcianitos-llegaron-bailando-ricacha/>

(References: *Evening Telegraph* (Angus, Scotland, U.K.), April 1, 1950. *The Echo* (Liverpool, U.K.), April 10, 1950. Jacques Bonabot, *SVL Tijdschrift*, Vol. 4, No.15, July 1985, pages 15-17. Ted Bloecher & David Webb, HUMCAT, <http://www.cufos.org/HUMCAT.html> Giuseppe Stilo, *Scrutate i cieli!* UPIAR (Turin, Italy), 2000, pages 293 and 372. Michel Roy, meeting with Jacques Bonabot and Wim van Utrecht, September 16, 2014. Others, as noted.)

Date: Saturday, May 16, 1953

Location: Bouffioulx, Charleroi (Hainaut)

Time: ~20:15

Duration: 20+ seconds

Assessment: aircraft contrail plus deliberately induced film damage

On the cover of its May 18 and 19 editions of 1953, the Brussels daily newspaper *Le Peuple* carried the following story about two unusual photographs taken by one of its correspondents some 7km Southeast of the city of Charleroi:

It would have been 8:15 p.m. when professional photographer Hermann [correct spelling is Herman] Chermanne from Bouffioulx returned home via a place called Blanche Borne, location of a blooming workers' district. Suddenly, his attention was drawn to a strange noise that reminded him of the prolonged vibration of a metal sheet. Raising his eyes, he observed a long white trail in the wake of a mysterious object that shot off at a

very great speed in the direction of the workers' quarter. Our reporter had the time to trigger his camera a first time when the object, which had immobilized itself in the sky, turned round and presented what seemed to be its face: a resplendent sphere surrounded by a whitish halo and satellites that appeared to go in all directions.

This phenomenon lasted about ten seconds before the disc returned to its initial position and disappeared completely from sight. The long trail in the sky slowly dissipated due to the effect of the wind.

The newspaper further reports: "In the region of Bouffioulx and beyond many people have perceived, at the precise moment of the phenomenon's apparition, a dull and violent explosion."



Fig. 7. LEFT: cover of the May 18 Brussels morning edition of *Le Peuple* with a reproduction of the two photographs taken by Herman Chermanne.

TOP RIGHT: newspaper photographer Herman Chermanne (1911-2001). Borrowed from <http://www.vieux-chatelet.be/index.php?page=6.131>

BOTTOM RIGHT: the type of camera (a Linhof Technika 9x12) that was used by Chermanne. Borrowed from <https://kameratori.fi/linhof-technika-iii-reporter-set-9x124x5-en>

Another contemporary document that mentions the incident is a brief *Reuters'* dispatch from May 18. The item rests in the files of the United States Air Force's Project Blue Book where it is part of a vast collection of newspaper clippings from around the world.

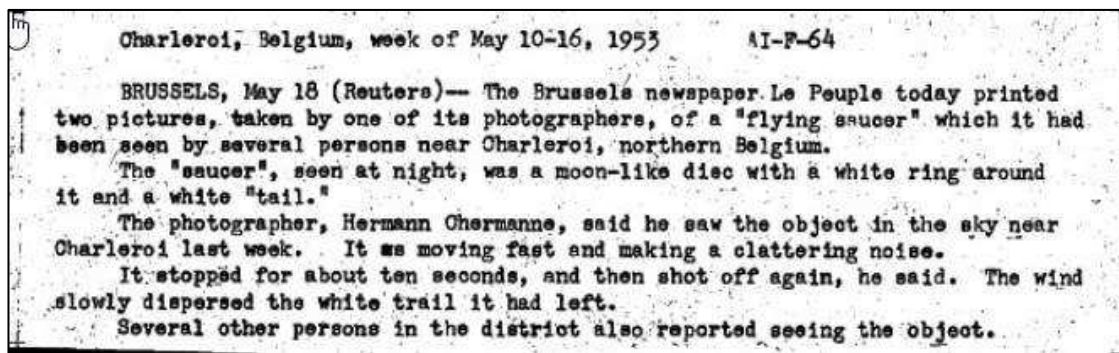


Fig. 8. Reuter's dispatch found in the files of Project Blue Book
<http://www.bluebookarchive.org/page.aspx?pagecode=MISC-AFOSR4-146&tab=1>

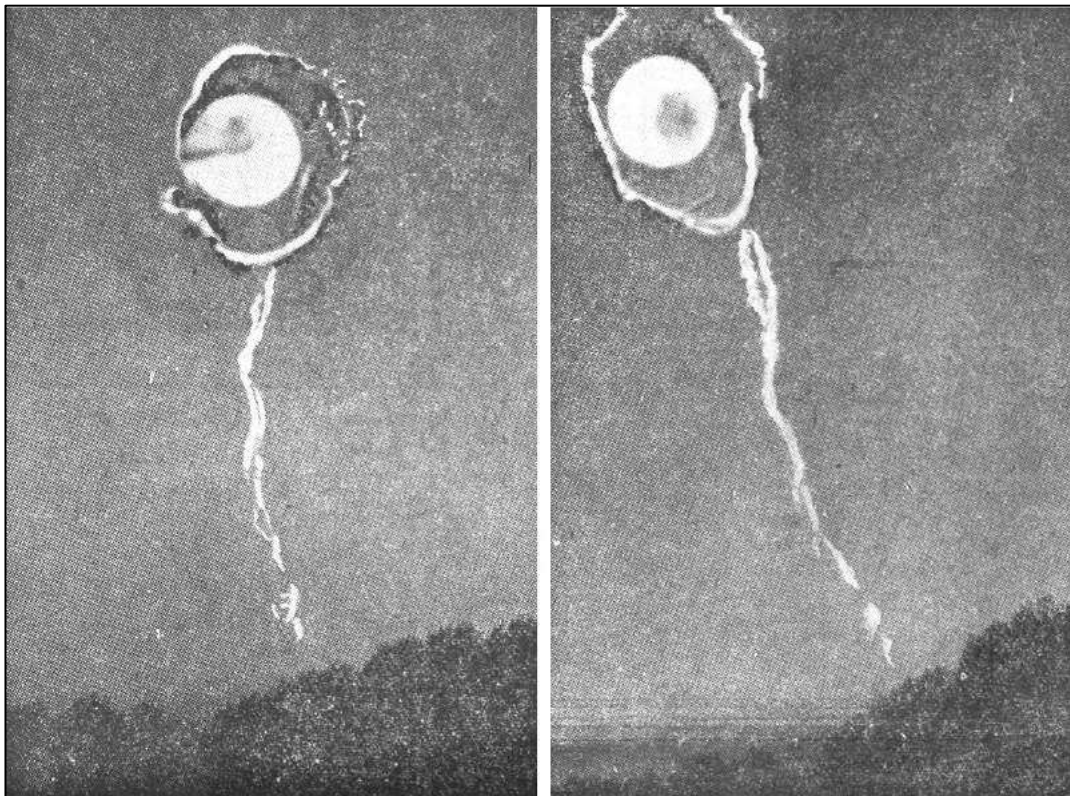


Fig. 9. May 16, 1953, Bouffiuulx. A closer look at the photos in *Le Peuple*.

Through Patrick Ferryn (COBEPS), the authors obtained a second contemporary article on the pictures; this one was published in the November 7, 1954 issue of the Flemish TV weekly *Humoradio*. The reported details were obtained directly from the witness/photographer and it is the first source that gives a precise date for the incident, namely May 16. The article described the sighting as follows:

At about 8 in the evening, Herman Chermanne, photographer at Bouffioulx (near Charleroi), was returning from Charleroi by car when he noticed a plume of smoke spiraling upward over the hamlet of 'Blanche-Borne', at Couillet. The rotational motion of the smoke caught his attention. He stopped and got out of the car to get a better view. Looking for an original subject for an inter-national photo competition in Paris, he had his camera ready in the car and hurried back to get it. When he turned round, he noticed that the smoke had "burst open" because at the top there was now a phenomenon "shining like the Sun", glowing white in the center and surrounded by multiple colors, like a rainbow. Until that moment, a soft and regular whirring sound had accompanied the phenomenon: "Much like hearing a V1", he told our reporter. Then the thing began to oscillate, making a rumbling sound similar to a piece of sheet iron that is shaken to imitate thunder behind the scenes of a theatre, but softer. It was at this moment that Chermanne took a first picture. Next, the object turned round and revealed a smooth surface. Mr. Chermanne had the time to take a second shot before the bizarre apparition suddenly disappeared without leaving any trace other than a bit of smoke that quickly dissipated.

The article further quotes Chermanne as having said that he spoke to several other witnesses in the days following the incident. No names are given.

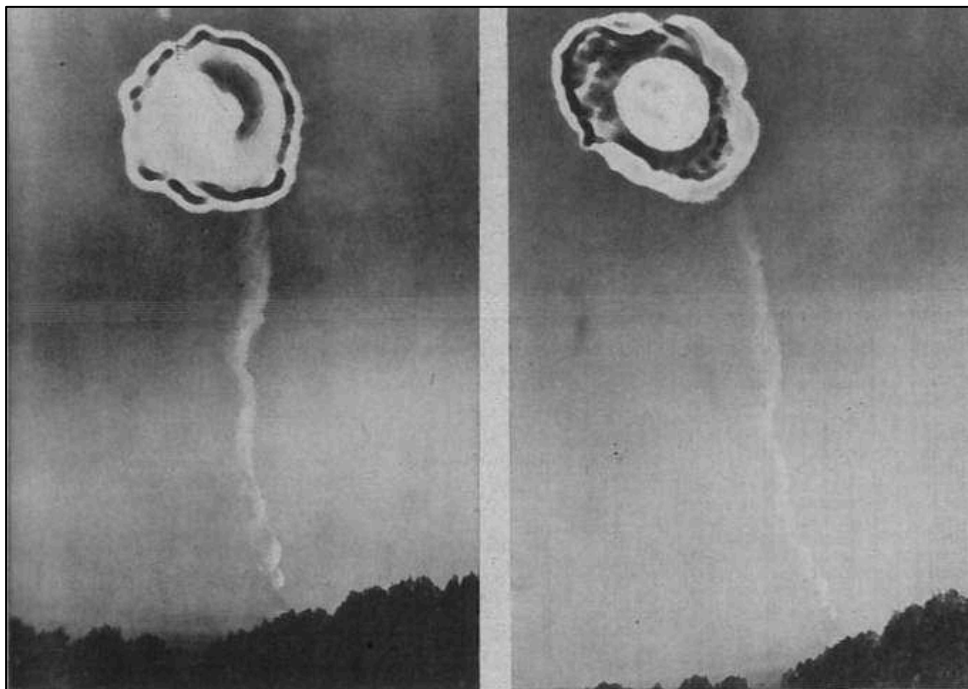


Fig. 10. The pictures as published in *Humoradio*. The article refers to the photo on the left as the "first picture". We have denoted it as "picture #1 and the photo on the right as "picture #2". Courtesy of Danny Adams-Levy & Patrick Ferryn.

In the two decades that followed, the Bouffoulx case gained notoriety mainly through two French books published in 1954, one written by Jimmy Guieu (*Les soucoupes volantes viennent d'un autre monde*), the other by Aimé Michel (*Lueurs sur les soucoupes volantes*). Both UFO authors refer to *Le Peuple* as their only source. Whilst Guieu's book features high-quality reproductions of both pictures, Michel included only picture #2.

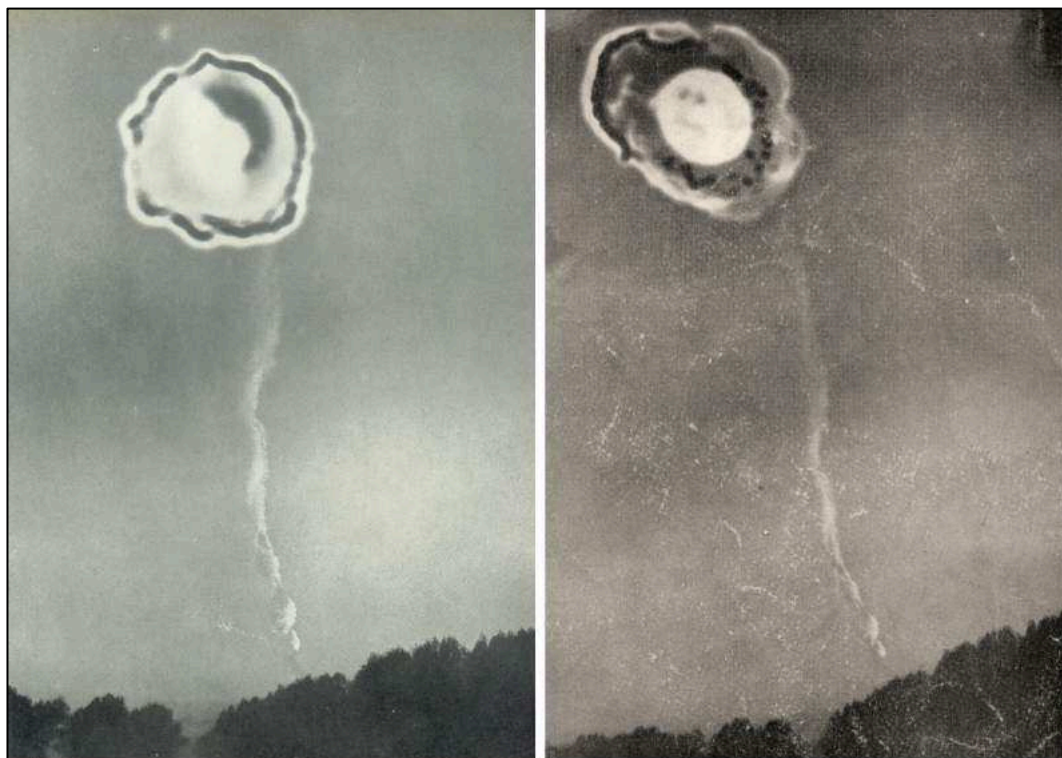


Fig. 11. May 16, 1953, Bouffoulx. The photos as published by Jimmy Guieu.

Guieu limits his account to quoting extensively from *Le Peuple*, whereas Michel's book contains a more personal rendering of the facts (apparently neither one of them contacted the witness/photographer.) Michel puts a lot of weight on the claim that there were many people in the region who saw the passage of what he refers to as "a classical flying object: flat, circular and shiny" and he ends with a statement that the two "beautiful pictures confirm exactly what numerous other eyewitnesses reported." He describes the event itself as follows: "At a given time [the object] stopped abruptly and tilted. For several minutes, it remained like that, its brilliant surface, a perfect circle, facing the witness. Then a big detonation was heard and the object started to vibrate. White filaments detached themselves from the disc 'like lashes', disintegrating as they fell. It lasted for ten seconds after which the object made a blistering takeoff, leveled out and rapidly disappeared."

Like with most spectacular-looking flying saucer photos, the story and the pictures have been published in articles and books around the world. The

photos even appeared in the popular Russian science magazine *Tekhnika-Molodezhi*. In preparing the present summary, we consulted most of these sources, finding that the information supplied was always brief, third-hand and added nothing new to what we already knew.



Fig. 12. Borrowed from *Tekhnika-Molodezhi*, No. 11, 1979 (page 4). Courtesy of Mikhail Gershtein

It was not until 1972 that an article by Patrick Ferryn in the journal *Infospace*, published by the Brussels UFO group SOBEPS, disclosed “new” information on the Bouffioulx case. Ferryn interviewed Chermanne in person. During the conversation, the latter told the SOBEPS photo expert that it must have been around 5:30 p.m. when he took his pictures. This is almost three hours in advance of the time mentioned in *Le Peuple*. Probably Chermanne erred, because at 5:30 p.m. on May 16th the Sun’s bearing was due West (azimuth 270°; elevation 26°). With the azimuth for the center of the photograph—as gleaned from a map in Ferryn’s account—being close to 280°, this would mean that the Sun should have been visible in the shots if they were taken at that moment. At 20:15, however, the Sun was 0.5° over the horizon and at an azimuth of 300°, which is a much better match with the specifics of the photographs, namely a low Sun to the right of the trail (assuming, of course, that the date itself is accurate and truthful).

This is the description of the event given to Ferryn: after hearing a dull, heavy sound like a rattling metal plate, and a series of detonations like the firing of a machine gun, Chermanne spotted in the Northwest a large shining object surrounded by a whitish halo. It was rising into the blue sky with white particles falling down, followed by a twisted trail of smoke of blue and white color. In Chermanne’s own words:

The ascent was fairly slow, and was accompanied by a spinning motion: it turned a quarter to the left, then a quarter to the right, and this several times, alternately displaying an oval shape and a round shape, which undoubtedly explains the twisted look of the trail. Next, it halted for about 20 seconds, during which time the sound it produced diminished and it suddenly ceased completely. At that time, the object accelerated and disappeared at the speed of a shooting star, without any noise, off to the Southeast.

According to Chermanne, the twisted trail had already disappeared by the time the object disappeared from view.

Ferryn mentions another person, Robert Michel, a carpenter from Bouffioulx, “who saw the object near Chamorgneau”, which is around 1.5km from Chermanne’s location. However, this witness was not only “unable to describe his sighting with precision,” he also said to have been “stunned by the absence of noise coming from this object” (*sic*). The *Inforespace* article then states that many more had perceived a dull and violent explosion at the time of the phenomenon’s appearance, but Ferryn points out that “the witnesses we read about, have now disappeared.”

Besides stipulating that Chermanne took his photographs with a *Linhof Technika* camera, using *Gevaert Gevapan* 33 glass plate negatives measuring 9 by 12cm, Ferryn reports that the Brussels *auditorat militaire* (Military Prosecutor’s Office) extensively questioned the witness/photographer. Ferryn later informed us that it was actually the Military Judicial Police who interrogated Mr. Chermanne. We wonder if this action was prompted by the story being the most media-spread flying saucer case to date in the nation, or if the military were alarmed by other reasons (like abandoned explosive ordnance from WWII, or the intrusion of unknown aircraft into Belgium’s air space.) As for the photographer’s personal view on the incident 19 years after, Ferryn writes: “he is aware of the fact that he witnessed ‘something’ unknown, but he does not seem to be attaching much importance to it and, even to this day, very objectively, refuses to claim that what he saw was a *flying saucer*.”

Alternatives other than a flying saucer sighting

In a monograph on UFO sightings reported by astronomers, Belgian skeptic Marc Hallet challenged the mysterious nature of the Bouffioulx photographs. Hallet compared what’s on the images to a meteor’s fireball trail and noticed similarities in sound, appearance and motion. According to the initial article in *Le Peuple*, Auguste Piccard, the noted Swiss inventor and balloon explorer, who was a professor of physics at the Free University of Brussels, defended the same idea. It is not entirely clear though if Piccard was referring directly to the Bouffioulx pictures or to flying saucer reports in general. At present, Hallet no longer believes the meteor theory is valid.

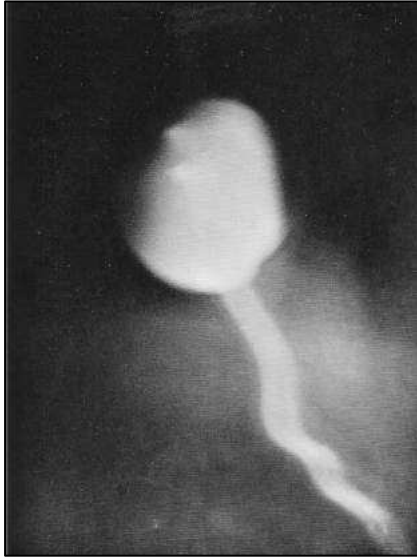


Fig. 13. 1933, New Mexico. Photo of a meteor fireball with persistent trail as published in *L'Astronomie* (Paris), October 1937. Courtesy of Marc Hallet.

In an article in the September 2014 issue of *Lumières Dans La Nuit*, Jacques Bonabot commented that the interest shown by the military and the description of a fireball accompanied by a rattling sound, pointed to the detonation of World War explosives akin to signal flares. When fired with a hand or mortar gun, flares may indeed leave a visible trail of sparks behind them, but these upward trails always dissipate very rapidly. It is only when these pyrotechnic devices "explode" in midair and deploy a small parachute to slow down their descent that they become visible as a brilliant light with a smoke trail visible above the light, not below as in the Bouffioulx pictures.

Back in 2002, the idea of an explosion was already explored by one of the authors (WVU) who pointed to the many mining sites in the area and to similarities with pictures of black, meters-wide smoke rings that linger in his photo archives. In isolated cases, small whitish cumulus-like clouds develop inside these rings, like in these two shots of a simulated atom bomb explosion carried out at the military base of Holstebro, Denmark:

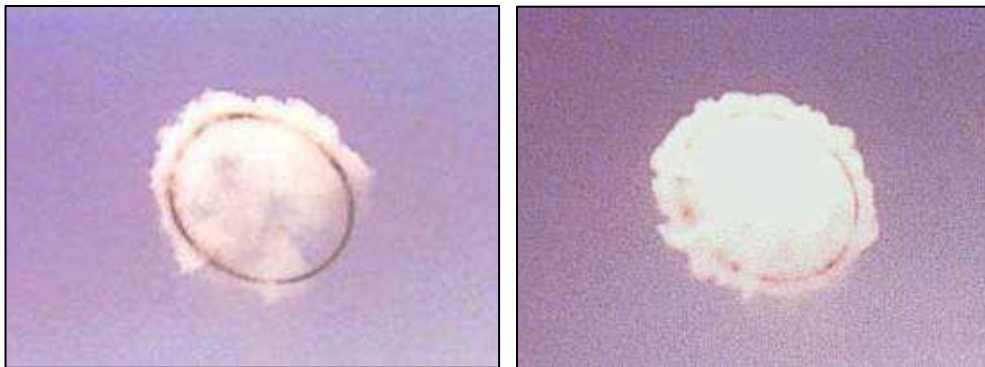


Fig. 14. October 19, 1978, Nørre Felding, Denmark. Photos taken by Birthe Jensen. Courtesy of Ole Henningsen (SUFOI Picture Library).

Or in this sequence of six photographs showing a smoke ring that formed after a similar controlled explosion held at a U.S. military base:

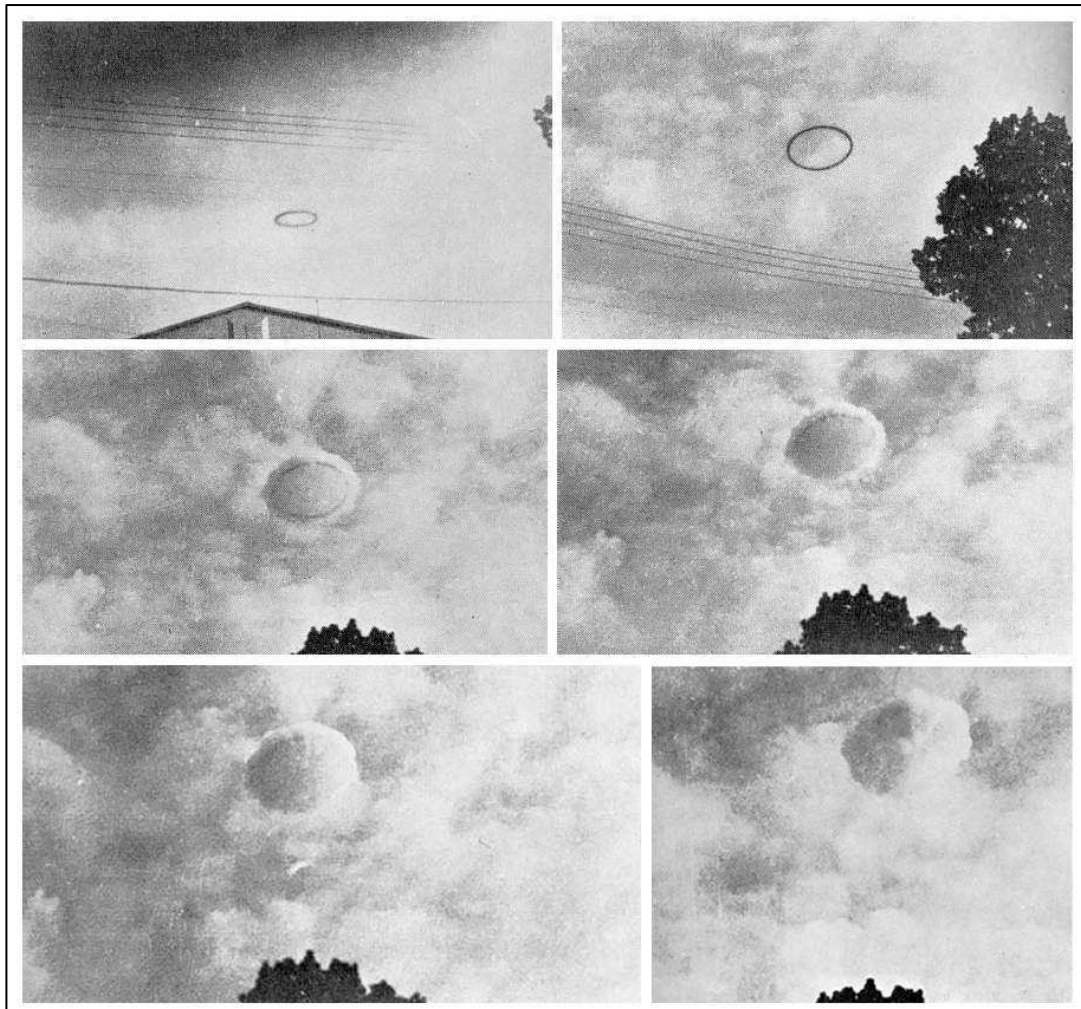


Fig. 15. September 1957, Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Borrowed from *Flying Saucers, UFO Reports*, No. 4, 1967. For more information and images on these peculiar rings, see <http://www.caelestia.be/ringvortex.html>

However, smoke rings caused by an explosion usually leave faint dark trails and the rings do not "rotate around their axes" before "accelerating" and taking of "*at the speed of a shooting star.*" As for the possibility of a grenade that exploded in the sky, such "air bursts" are very short-lived and the contours of the blast would not have shown up so smoothly outlined in a picture.

A hoax?

It was the noted UFO author Dr. Jacques Vallée, who first referred to the Bouffoullux photos as a hoax. In a diary-book published in 1992, the French-

born U.S.-naturalized computer scientist wrote “Chicago. 29 November 1964. The Bouffioulx photograph . . . has turned out to be a hoax.” He did not give further details about the origin of this revelation, but in personal correspondence, Vallée assured us that, from what he had heard from his French colleagues, “the author of the photographs had confessed it wasn’t a genuine UFO.”

In recent correspondence with the authors, Patrick Ferryn, too, has reconsidered his prior views in support of the authenticity of the Bouffioulx photos. He writes:

Today, despite the fact that Chermanne was a renowned Belgian photographer, I must confess this curious ‘object’ always reminded me of an accidental photographic developer or fixer stain, especially because of the clearness of the dark outline above left on picture #2.

Besides the many reproductions published in books and magazines, the authors also possess what is believed to be a first-generation print of this second picture (the print was part of a set of SOBEPS image files donated to the FOTOCAT project by Ferryn.) On the next page readers will find a scan of this presumed first-generation print that Chermanne handed to Ferryn in 1972.

It was especially after viewing this print that the enigmatic photos revealed their true nature. A close look makes it overwhelmingly clear that the omelet-like object in picture #2 is not a true physical object in the sky, but a roughly circular stain on the image carrier caused by what appears to have been a violent chemical reaction. Indications for this are:

- (1) Presence of a dark semi-circular ring to the bottom left of the “stain”, which is typical of a dried-up fluid (presumably this is the “dark outline” that made Ferryn rethink the authenticity of the pictures);
- (2) Black, round granular patches inside the “omelet” that look similar to what a thin sheet of plastic (here the gelatin emulsion coating that contains the light-sensitive silver halide crystals) would look like when you expose it to chemicals or to extreme heat.

(Compare for instance with these images at:
<http://petapixel.com/2013/05/06/photos-created-by-coating-negatives-with-gasoline-and-setting-them-on-fire/> and
<http://www.ericdallimore.com/photography-negatives.html>)

- (3) Dark-colored elongated shapes that resemble splash marks and appear to converge to a point near the center of the ring.

The figure on top of page 23 zooms in on these three distinct effects.



Fig. 16. May 16, 1953, Bouffioulx, picture #2. Photo by Herman Chermanne.
Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

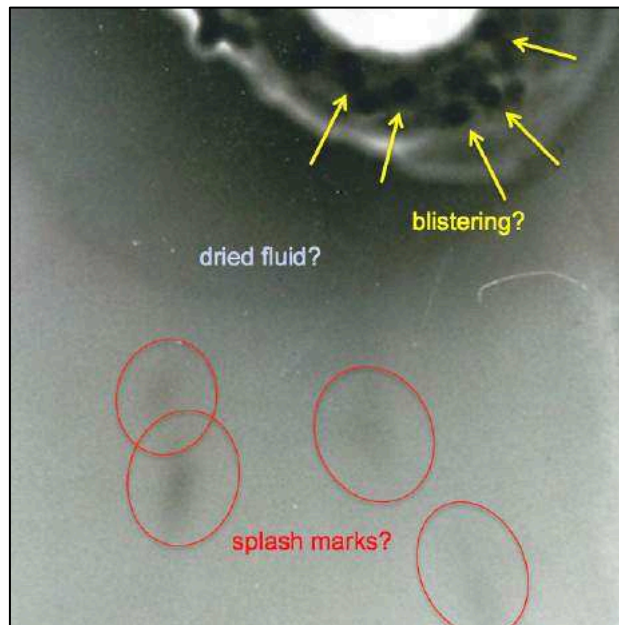


Fig. 17. Image characteristics typical of film defects

Pouring flammable fluid on an image carrier and then setting fire to it can produce dark granular patches and white halos like in the Bouffioulx pictures. We got the following results from burning a negative with a cigarette (photo on the left) and from pouring methylated spirit on a negative and then scorching it with a lighter (image on the right). Of course, no two stains are identical and the negative films that can be purchased today are not the same as those used in the early 50s. Still, the overall similarity is clear.

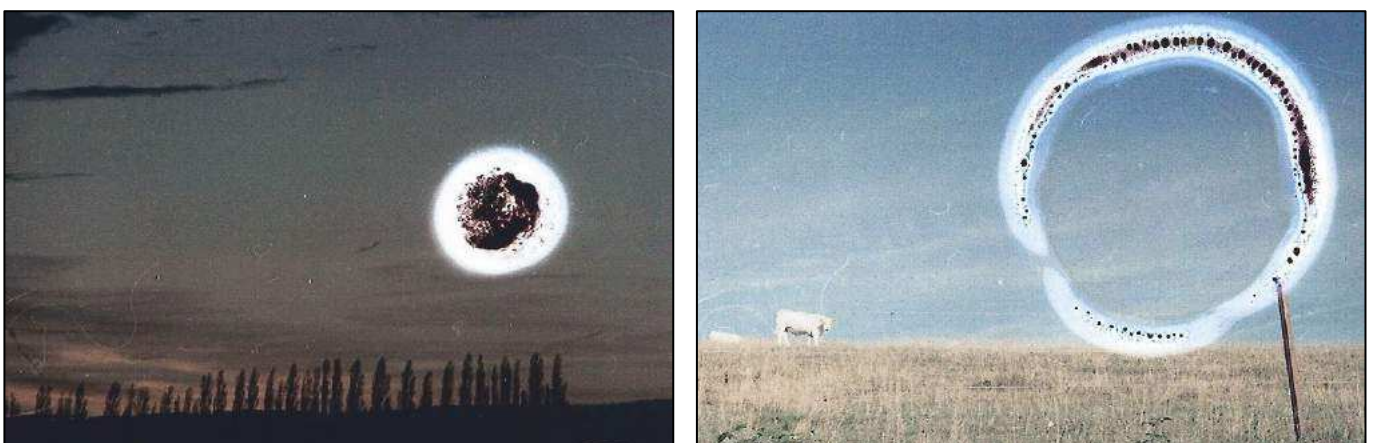


Fig. 18. Burn marks on color negatives produce unusual and unpredictable effects in prints. Photos by Wim Van Utrecht.

Another particularity is that the trees and the white trail are in focus, whilst most of the white and grey cloud-like parts of the unknown object are not (only the black dots and the black mass on the right have sharp edges). This is not what one would expect from distant subjects that are all imaged with a lens focused at infinity.

Alert readers may have noticed something else that does not fit well with pictures of a true object: the “disc” in the Bouffioulx pictures appears to alter its shape dependent on the newspaper, book or journal that published them. This magical effect is particularly notable with picture #2:

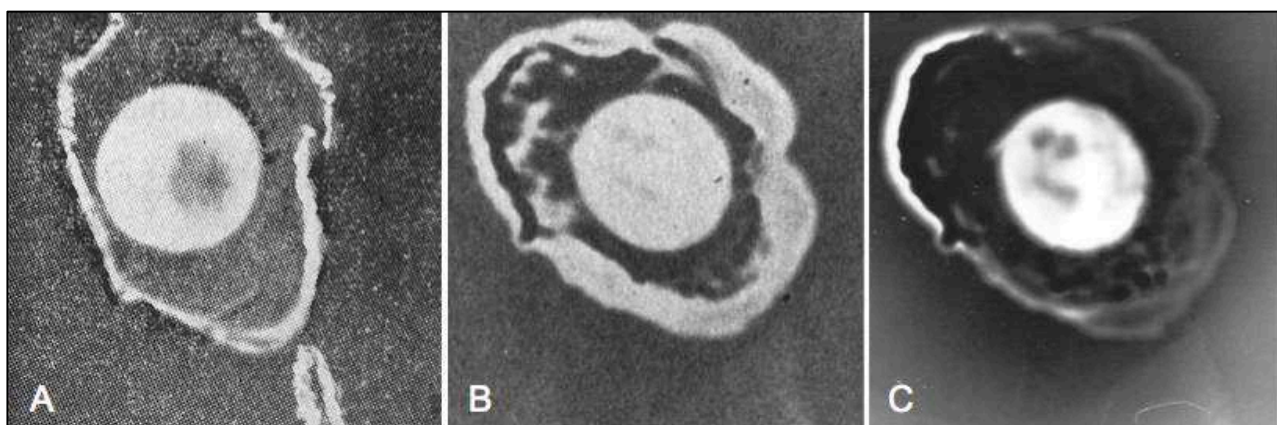


Fig. 19. A shape-changing saucer?

- (A) The way the Bouffioulx object appears in picture #2 in *Le Peuple* of May 18, 1953;
- (B) As published in the November 7, 1954 issue of *Humoradio*.
- (C) The way it appears in the presumed first-generation print Chermanne handed to Ferryn in 1972 (in essence, this is a darker version of the reproduction in Michel's and Guieu's 1954 books).

One of the things that immediately strikes the eye in the above montage is that the cloud-like structure around the disc looks whiter in images A and B. One way this could have been achieved is by manually retouching the image (maybe to make the overall aspect match better with what can be seen in picture #1). In the pictures published in *Le Peuple*, white paint was used to highlight the trail, white and black paint to add contrast to certain parts of the cloud. But to what purpose? None of the other reproductions in the newspaper shows any evidence of retouching. In addition, why edit photographic images so crudely when the paper itself describes them as “extraordinary”, “exclusive” and, referring to the possibility of a meteor, “the very first time it has been photographed with such a remarkable precision.” Another possibility that may account for certain differences in whiteness, in particular between images B and C, is that the “unknown object” is not part of the photographic image but that we are dealing with a hardened fluid that got attached to the image carrier. If this is the case, such an unevenness may have been illuminated differently dependent on the type of enlarger that was used to reproduce the image.

Even more incriminating to the photographs' authenticity are the striking differences between the shape of the white disc (circular in A, ovoid in B & C) and the outline of the halos in the three prints. These differences are not only abundantly clear when we compare A with B & C, but they are also apparent when comparing B with C. In the latter images, the outline of the halo is identical on the right-hand side of the disc, but different on the left. Yet, small details in other parts of the pictures (film flaws and shape of the white trail) confirm that both images are reproductions from the same original.

As for the white trail, in order not to be distracted by what is going on in the upper part of the images, we cropped the two photos in such a way that only the trail remains visible:



Fig. 20. To the left is the trail as it appears in picture #1 (Guieu). On the right is the same trail in picture #2 (Ferryn). For ease of comparison, we have slightly rotated the image on the left.

The image above shows that the shape of the trail is nearly identical in both pictures. Even if only seconds have elapsed between the two shots, this is not what one would expect from a trail of smoke that emanates from a fast-spinning object relatively close by. It is much more likely that we are looking at a sunlit contrail very high in the sky. In fact, airplane exhausts and condensation trails can present the same aspect and structure as the trail in the Bouffioulx pictures. The denser, twisted lower part of the trail is the farthest point in the wake. Wind currents produce the helical look. Dissipation occurs in the older part of the trail, here the part that is closest to the upper picture frame, suggesting that the source of the trail is on the other side, close to the horizon. Contrails like these are far from exceptional, as is illustrated in the examples below. But in 1953 a sunlit, twisted and isolated contrail would indeed have been a much rarer sight, worthy of immortalizing in a picture.



Fig. 21. Four examples of contrail contortion. Borrowed from (left to right):

http://xenolithic.blogspot.be/2011_10_01_archive.html
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/57442878@N08/7530479658/>
<http://weatherwars.info/16-2/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmqPhNNu9f8>

By an effect of perspective, the part of the trail that is closest to the bottom frame of the picture—i.e. the part that is furthest away from the camera—is in reality equally high above the ground surface as the rest of the trail. How an airplane's trail, which basically runs parallel to the ground, may appear to climb is illustrated in the diagram below.

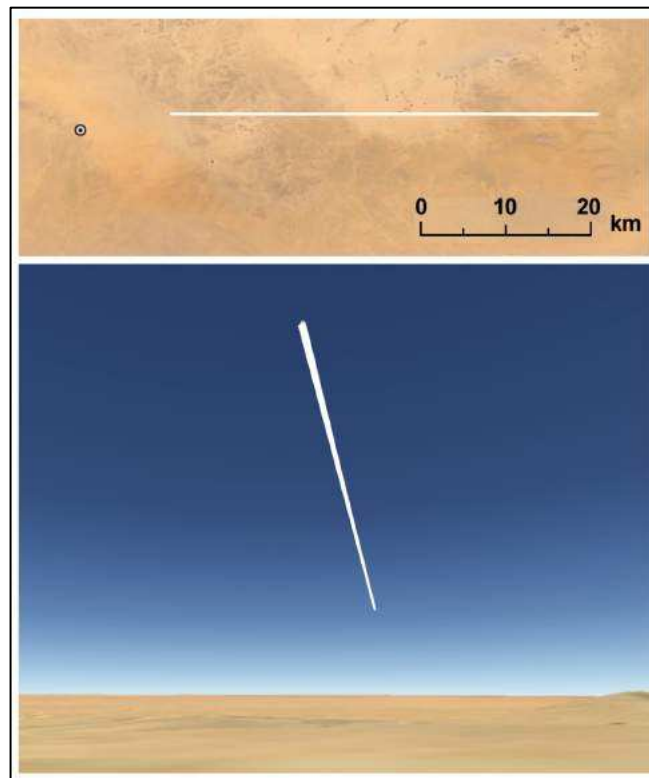


Fig. 22. Perspective simulation of an airplane contrail. Courtesy of Manuel Borraz.

For simplicity the trail is represented here as a horizontal, rectilinear white bar, homogeneous in nature (i.e. unaffected by air currents and not twisted or fanned out.) At point O we have an observer located 10km below the nearest end of a contrail, and looking at an aircraft expelling a condensation trail of 50km long flying at a height of 10,000m. A simulation of how this observer will view this contrail appears in the lower image, which compares nicely with the trail in the Bouffioulx pictures.

Much to our surprise, an astronomical verification revealed there was something else in the sky that evening that may have inspired Herman Chermanne to take a flying saucer-like picture. At 8:15 p.m., a first quarter Moon (illumination 14.6%) should have been visible in the sky very close to where the omelet-like “object” is in the pictures (azimuth 268° , altitude 34°). A Moon with a coincidental airplane contrail apparently coming down from it, must have been a strange sight and may well have prompted Chermanne to take his two shots hoping, perhaps, that the result images would yield convincing flying saucer pictures. Even though the scenery may have looked impressive to the naked eye, the crescent Moon would have shown up as merely a small white speck in the photographs. Could Chermanne’s disappointment over the resulting images have prompted him to concoct something more convincing in his lab using the curious-looking contrail? A possible hint that the Moon was involved in the taking of the photographs is a subtitle that appears in the initial article in *Le Peuple* and which reads “You would think it was the Moon!” An unusual statement, since no reference is made to the Moon anywhere else in the text.

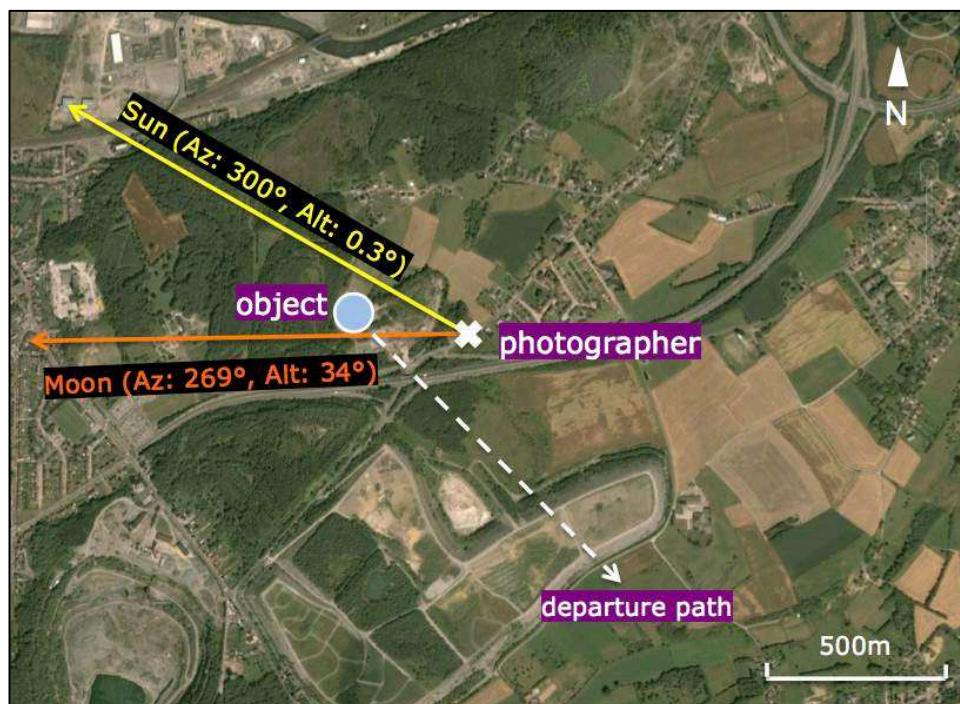


Fig. 23. Google Earth (2004) aerial view of the sighting location. The indicated positions and “departure path” are based on a map in *Inforespace*, No 5, 1972 (page 21).

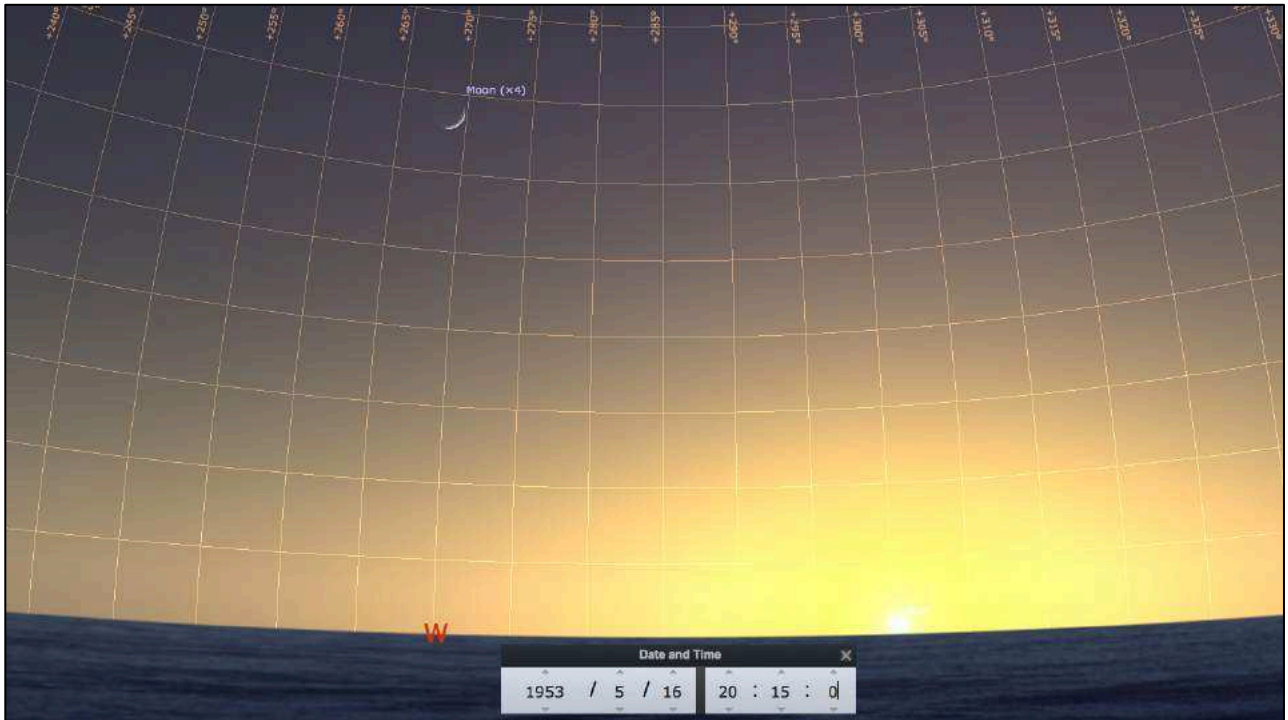


Fig. 24. *Stellarium* view of the NW sunset sky as it would have appeared to an observer in Charleroi on May 16, 1953 at 20:15 (Moon not to scale).

The pieces seem to fall together, but what about the other witnesses? Three original sources mention that other people in the area also perceived the phenomenon, either visually or auditory. The fact is, however, that no additional eye-witness testimonies could be unearthed: the “many people” who supposedly heard the “detonation” that day were never located, and those who did come forward with a personal account were either unable to provide details (like carpenter Robert Michel from Chamorgneau) or had seen something that could not be linked to the May 16 photos.

Conclusion

Objects in photographic images that change their appearance in between prints evidently point to something external, something that was not part of the photographed scene. But why would a hoaxter or a photo editor of a newspaper or magazine alter one amorphous shape into another, knowing that such an action would raise immediate suspicion? Could it be that the chemical process that created the “disc” continued in between the making of prints or that we are looking at a gelatinous stain that was flattened under pressure or turned soft because of the heat of the lamp from the enlarger? Contrary to Ferryn, we do not think that whatever caused these stain-like shapes got there “by accident.” To us, the fact that they appear in two different shots, and are positioned nicely on top of a spectacular contrail, points to a hoax.

We found sufficient evidence to conclude that the so-called flying saucers in the Bouffioulx pictures are damages deliberately inflicted upon the photographic emulsion layer. Possibly, Chermanne spotted an impressive-looking contrail in the sky with the Moon just on top of it, photographed the scene, found that the resulting black & white pictures were no match to the original, and decided to use the negatives to create something that would look really spectacular. The photojournalist may then have submitted the photos to his newspaper together with a corresponding UFO tale. An indirect support to the false nature of the event is the fact that one of the nation's largest newspapers never published any follow-up to this "exclusive" and "extraordinary" news event.

One more thing: attentive viewers may have noticed that the best quality prints of picture #2 contain a configuration of dark patches in the center of the "disc" that might be interpreted as a smiley:



Fig. 25. Detail of picture #2

Maybe we are stretching things a bit here, but could this be an emoticon *avant-la-lettre*, planted by Chermanne as a hidden clue to the solution? Worth mentioning here is that the Mayor of Bouffioulx, in a reply to a request from Bonabot to obtain the witness' address, wrote: "CHERMANNE Herman. H.G., press photographer, **painter**".

Post scriptum

In early 2015, GESAG Director Jacques Bonabot informed us that on January 8, 1983 he had received a note from former SOBEPS collaborator Franck Boitte stating that SOBEPS knew of at least one sighting that occurred on the evening Chermanne took his pictures. The incident reportedly took place in the community of Gosselies, only 9km NNW of Bouffioulx. We quote from a short case summary Bonabot sent us:

The witness was at home listening to the radio when a continuous signal interfered with the broadcast, prompting him to change to another station, but the same whistling sound also affected the other frequencies.

Well informed about UFOs and the way they manifest themselves, he went outside to locate any abnormal phenomenon. This is when he saw a pear-shaped object approaching from the airfield of Gosselies, about 1km away; the widest part pointing in the direction it was travelling; it was luminous, shiny and composed of

3 rings each of a different color: the center was pale yellow surrounded by a green demarcation line which in turn was bordered by a dark blue; these colors blended into each other; the flight path was oriented NE to SW. The object disappeared behind the roofs of the neighboring houses.

Bonabot specifies that the time given by the (unnamed) witness was 8 p.m. but that this time indication is uncertain. The same probably also goes for the date. Dates are almost never remembered correctly with incidents reported years after. In such instances, witnesses often tend to refer to published cases, assuming that what they saw was “the same thing”. Moreover, the NE-SW trajectory would have taken the phenomenon on a course W of the Bouffioulx area, while Chermanne claimed that the shiny disc moved from NW to SE. Other points of difference are that no mention is made of any explosion or loud noise that typified the Bouffioulx report. Nor was there any trail reported in the Gosselies case. In summary, we do not think this additional piece of information in any way substantiates the reality of the Bouffioulx photos.

(References: Jimmy Guieu, Les soucoupes volantes viennent d'un autre monde, Editions Fleuve Noir, 1954, pages 111-112, back-cover & page 129. Jimmy Guieu, Flying Saucers Come From Another World, Hutchinson, 1956, page 118 & plate opposite page 81. Aimé Michel, Lueurs sur les soucoupes volantes, Mame, 1954, pages 202-203 & plate 39. Aimé Michel, The Truth About Flying Saucers, Criterion Books, 1956, pages 171-172 & plate 30 in page 194 (US edition); Robert Hale, 1957, pages 158-160 & plate facing page 209 (UK edition). Bert Brem (pseudonym of Jef Anthierens), *Humoradio*, No. 739, November 7, 1954, also published in French in *Le Moustique* No. 1502, November 7, 1954, pp 15-18. Patrick Ferryn, *Inforespace* No. 5, 1972, pages 20-22. Adolf Schneider & Hubert Malthaner, UFO-fotoboek, Uitgeverij Ankh-Hermes bv, Deventer, 1977, pages 172-173. Marc Hallet, Astronomers et OVNI, 1986, pages 32-33. Jacques Vallee, Forbidden Science, Marlowe & Company, 1992, page 124. Wim van Utrecht, *Skepter*, Vol. 15, No 2, March 2002, page 21. Patrick Ferryn, personal communications to the authors, March 16, 2008, March 3, 2012, October 8, October 21 & November 9, 2014. Andrés Duarte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, July 31, 2014. Marc Hallet, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, August 4, 2014. Jacques Vallee, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, August 5, 2014. Manuel Borraz Aymerich, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, August 14, 2014. Jacques Bonabot, personal communications to the authors, October 24 & November 13, 2014. Others, as noted.)

Date: 1954 (backdated from November 2012)

Location: Lives-sur-Meuse (Namur) / Oostkerke (West Flanders)

Time: daytime

Duration: 1st sequence: 11 seconds / 2nd sequence: 27 seconds

Special Features: airborne / Internet viral film

Assessment: fake (CGI)

In the course of 2012, a remarkable film appeared on the Internet. It can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhSJrtUO4UM> Specifications

provided by the individual who uploaded the document, someone with the alias “Barzloff814”, were as follows:

UFO over Belgium filmed from plane

Added on Nov. 30, 2012

From the Belgium air component color archive -1954- released in February 2010 in compliance with Belgian disclosure legislation.



Fig. 26. 1954, Belgium. Still from the first sequence of the video.



Fig. 27. 1954, Belgium. Still from the second sequence of the video.

To begin with, it should be pointed out that, in 2010, there was not any release of UFO-related Belgian Air Force documents in compliance with a “disclosure legislation”. As for the video, it contains two separate sequences, both showing an aerial view of a landscape with a spinning top-like object hovering over it. Small satellite objects (white discs in the first sequence, metallic-looking balls in the second) accompany the larger objects.

Brazilian researcher and UFO skeptic Kentaro Mori was among the first to notice that Barzloff81 is an alias for David Nicolas, a gifted French CGI artist known as “Director Unit Numéro 6” in the world of computer animation, and working for the Paris-based firm Partizan. In 2007, Nicolas created the infamous “Haiti/ Dominican Republic videos”: a series of spectacular UFO videos that clocked up over 3 million hits within their first two weeks on YouTube, to reach no less than 7.5 million views in February 2008. The videos were featured in the Los Angeles Times (who were the first to expose them), on CNN and on Fox News.

The fraudulent nature of the Haiti/Dominican Republic videos became known when it turned out that there were identical palm trees in the scenery. The trees were found to be exported from an *e-on* computer animation software called *Vue 6 Infinite*, a tool that helps create 3D environments (an early demonstration by Michael Naisbitt of what’s wrong with these Caribbean videos can be viewed at: <http://blog.ufo-blog.com/2008/02/youtube-haiti-ufo-hoaxer-reveals-other.html>).



Fig. 28. LEFT: still from the Caribbean UFO film from 2007.

Borrowed from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up5jmbSjWkw>

RIGHT: still from another video by David Nicolas purportedly showing an alien craft over Paris. Borrowed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8_aTi8ImU0

The Belgian footage is just another example of Nicolas’ state-of-the art computer-generated imagery featuring alien spacecraft, this time inserted into a raw amateur film taken from an airplane. In the first part of the video clip, the unknown object is nicely in the center of the frame, but as the

airplane passes it on the right the camera is not panning towards the object as would be expected if this were a real UFO encounter. Likewise, in the second sequence, the camera centers first on the gothic church tower and then, as the plane continues its flight, on the village houses in front of the tower. The UFO does not appear to be the initial target. It can be assumed that Nicolas backdated the film, either because the footage from the plane dates back to 1954, or simply because he wanted to divert viewers' attention away from a possible CGI because there was no technology in the mid-1950s to produce this type of special effects.

Anyway, the hoaxer was not lying about the location of the video. Going through aerial photos and videos of the Meuse valley, which is located in the mountainous southern part of Belgium, we found a match with the landscape in the first sequence. As for the second sequence, it was Flemish historian Gui van Gorp who put us on the right track: the tower in the video is the Gothic church from Oostkerke, a small community in West Flanders, 145km NW of the first location.



Fig. 29. Lives-sur-Meuse, Namur.
Location of the first sequence.
Borrowed from
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fm7wWTXCo78>



Fig. 30. The Church of Oostkerke.
Location of the second sequence.
Borrowed from
<http://www.sintannatermuiden.nl/index.php/Kerk>

(References: Kentaro Mori, <http://forgetomori.com/2010/ufos/ufo-filmed-from-a-plane-over-belgium-1954/> Gui van Gorp, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, June 29, 2014. Leopoldo Zambrano Enríquez, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, July 1, 2014. Others, as noted.)

Date: Tuesday, October 26, 1954
Location: La Docherie, Marchienne-au-Pont (Hainaut)
Time: ~16:20
Duration: ~25 minutes
Special Features: film allegedly confiscated by the State Security Service
Assessment: sundog (parhelion)?

On October 27, 1954, *Le Journal de Charleroi* published an account on the apparition of a “second sun” that “moved” through the sky. Mr. Jules Bastin, who ran a bakery in the Rue de Jumet, was getting ready to drive his parents home when something blinded him. At the same time, he felt a sensation of heat on his cheek. He looked up and saw a big ball of fire, high in the sky. He called his neighbor, Mr. Paulin Gomy, who was stupefied to see that there was not one but two suns in the sky. This “second sun” was located at the left of the true sun and was placed “in an abnormal way.” After about 10 minutes, it changed its position with such a speed that it was immediately lost from sight. Soon thereafter, other witnesses noticed that the false sun had positioned itself in front of the true one, which now seemed to have doubled in size and started to spin, changing color from red to green, to blue and then to brown, while showers of sparks darted around in all directions. It then moved away so fast that it was lost from sight. Instants later it was observed again by other locals, “a few degrees” away from the true sun. Several minutes later it disappeared, this time for good. Apparently, close to one hundred people witnessed the “apparition”. Accompanying the article is a picture of what is referred to as “the second phase of the phenomenon”, taken from a film allegedly shot by Mr. Bastin himself.



Fig. 31. October 26, 1954, La Docherie. Low-quality photocopy from *Le Journal de Charleroi* showing a still from Jules Bastin’s 8mm film.

F. Moreau, astronomer at the Royal Observatory at Uccle, expressed his opinion that the phenomenon was an atmospheric optical phenomenon. Investigations carried out in 1970 by the Laboratoires d'Analyse et d'Expérimentation Technique (LAET) disclosed that an unusual sky phenomenon had indeed been captured on 8mm film by someone called "J.B.", and that the footage had been handed for analysis to Prof. L. Poncelet, a meteorologist at the Royal Institute of Meteorology at Uccle, Brussels. After that, the film never saw the light of day again. According to a letter from a local resident, sent to the Brussels-based UFO group SOBEPS in November 1973, "security people" had confiscated the film even before it was processed. Already in 1963, Bastin himself had claimed that a couple of hours after the event "some guys from the Sûreté de l'Etat" (State Security) had paid him a visit. "Accompanying them was a member of the Uccle Observatory who offered me an astronomy book and recommended I read it carefully so that I would understand that what I saw was nothing but a natural phenomenon", Bastin said.

The results of Poncelet's inquiries were published in a six-page article in *Ciel et Terre*, a Belgian journal that focuses on meteorology and astronomy. Alas, no stills are included in the article. According to a footnote, the prints that were obtained from the film were not distinct enough to be reproduced. (Which, together with the fact that a still image was published in *La Meuse*, contradicts the claim of the film having been confiscated before it was processed.)

Basing himself on "precise indications" on the position of the "second sun" furnished by Bastin and Gomy, Poncelet established that the "double sun" was actually a 46° parhelion. [1] Poncelet found that the "second sun" was first seen in the NW and about 25 minutes later in the SW. The meteorologist points out that the meteorological conditions on the day in question (and in particular the presence of layers of cirrostratus and cirrocumulus preceding a warm front coming from the NW) were favorable for the creation of halo phenomena.

Poncelet further concluded that the rotating "false sun" that had positioned itself in front of the Sun, and was described to him as a "grey-blue disc around which glowed a brilliant corona", that changed size and emitted a wide variety of colors, was actually a physiological phenomenon, a combination of superimposed after-images, eye fatigue and spasmodic contractions of the retina caused by prolonged staring into an extremely bright light source. An experiment conducted by Poncelet under comparable weather conditions on November 21, 1954 produced similar visual effects when staring into the Sun. In fact, identical descriptions are frequently encountered in claims of so-called 'Miracles of the Sun', published in connection with religious apparitions. Poncelet also emphasizes that the film was taken when the "second sun" had already extinguished and that it showed no evidence of any of the above-mentioned effects. In consequence,

what we see in the still that was published in the newspaper from Charleroi is probably just an image of a bright Sun shining through clouds.

There is, however, a problem with Poncelet's sundog explanation: 46° sundogs do not exist. What Poncelet was probably referring to is a 44° parhelion which sometimes appears just inside the 46° halo (a whitish circle with a radius of approximately 46° around the Sun). But 44° sundogs are extremely rare, occur only in diamond dust (ice mist) and are so weak that they normally would not be noticed by untrained observers (Bastin and Gomy told Poncelet that the "ball of fire" they witnessed was almost as bright as the Sun itself). Moreover, 44° sundogs are always accompanied by a 22° parhelion, the 44° parhelion itself being a mock-image produced by the light rays of an extremely bright 22° parhelion. [2]

For the reasons cited in the above paragraph, a 22° sundog would make a much more likely candidate to explain the second sun (or suns). Important in this regard is Poncelet's mention that, around 5 p.m. on the same day, his colleague Prof. Bourlet observed a classic 22° sundog near Bassily (44km Northwest of La Docherie). We don't know what the "precise indications" were that led Poncelet to believe that the phenomenon occurred at 46° from the Sun, but we do know that 22° parhelia are on occasion mistaken for something they are not, as in Reinosa (Cantabria, Spain), where a crowd sighted one for 20 minutes at 5:40 p.m. on March 15, 1990. This incident too was captured on film.



Fig. 32. March 15, 1990, Reinosa (Spain). A sundog appears to the left of the real sun.

Still from a video taken by Francisco García Sáinz. Full video at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hC_v7v7H5fA&list=UU110qKiPV_rDe3dBG2epyrw

Fig. 33. A blow-up of the colorful sundog as it appears in the Reinosa video.



Below is a photograph of this very common optical phenomenon as imaged by one of the authors (WVU).



Fig. 34. A long-tailed mock sun, approximately 22° to the right of the Sun, photographed from Antwerp, Belgium, in the late afternoon of September 17, 2012.
Photo by Wim van Utrecht.

[1] A parhelion is the scientific term for mock sun or sundog, an atmospheric phenomenon by which sunlight reflecting off billions of tiny ice-crystal plates in cirrus-type clouds creates white or rainbow-colored patches of light to the left and/or right of the Sun. Among the scholarly classics that discuss this type of optical phenomena we cite: Marcel Minnaert, *The Nature of Light & Colour in the Open Air*, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1954; David Lynch & William Livingston, *Color and Light in Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, and Robert Greenler, *Rainbows, Halos, and Glories*, Peanut Butter Publishing, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1999. We should also not forget one Internet source: Les Cowley's excellent atmospheric optics website, which can be found at: <http://www.atoptics.co.uk/halo/parhelion.htm>

[2] For more info on 44° parhelia and 46° halos see:

<http://www.atoptics.co.uk/halo/44pars.htm>
<http://www.atoptics.co.uk/halo/46hal.htm>
<http://haloreports.blogspot.be/2006/01/44-parhelion-in-finland.html>

(References: *Le Journal de Charleroi*, October 27, 1954. *Le Dauphiné Libéré* and *La République Nouvelle de Bourg-en-Bresse*, October 28, 1954. *De Volksgazet*, Antwerp, October 27, 1954. *Het Volk*, Ghent, October 28, 1954. *L'Impartial*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, October 28, 1954. L. Poncelet, *Ciel et Terre*, Vol. 71, 1955, pages 9-14, <http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/full/seri/C+T../0071/0000009.000.html> Frenay-Cid, *Le Soir*, Bruxelles, March 29, 1961, p 2. *SPW Tijdschrift*, Vol. 2, No. 7, September 1978, page 11. Franck Boitte's (unpublished) catalog of Belgian UFO reports from 1954, quoting *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, October 27, 1954.)

Date: Sunday, June 5, 1955
Location: Saint-Marc (Namur)
Time: ~19:30
Duration: ~90 seconds
Special Features: negatives allegedly lost in the mail
Assessment: fake

On Thursday, June 16, 1955 *Le Soir Illustré* (LSI), a weekly magazine affiliated with the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, published an article with the following introduction: "Are we in the presence of sensational documents? Do the photos, published on this double page, constitute the long-sought proof of the existence of flying saucers?" The author of the article, reporter Roger Vervisch [1], recounts the details of a story told to him "on Tuesday" by the maker of the photos. On June 5, François-Gilbert Muyldermans, a resident of Schaerbeek (one of the suburbs of Brussels), was cycling on a secondary and deserted road towards Saint-Marc, a small village located a few kilometers NW of Namur city. Muyldermans, then in his early 20s, described what happened as follows:

The sky was uniformly blue when, suddenly, my attention was drawn to a very bright spot moving at a very high speed. I immediately got off the bike to better observe the phenomenon. It appeared out of nowhere, very distinctly, a disc, flying noiseless, at around 1,500m altitude. "It must be one of these famous saucers", I said to myself, because the day before I had heard a press release on the radio announcing the passage of one of these craft over France. Without losing a second, I took my camera, fortunately charged, aimed it as best as I could, and pushed the shutter. As soon as the picture was taken, the saucer began a descent of about two or three hundred meters, then it rose again for a few seconds emitting a cloud of white smoke. I had enough time to take two more photos before the vision disappeared.



Fig. 35. François-Gilbert Muyldermans with his bike in 1955.
Borrowed from *Le Soir Illustré*.

This is the basic story. Replying to questions raised by Vervisch, the photographer explains that the object “must certainly have been smaller than a plane and have measured two to three meters in diameter at most.” Muyldermans describes the object as “composed of three superimposed discs, of decreasing dimensions and topped by a small dome or a ring.” The color was “black and bright, like certain types of glass insulators”. “When it ascended”—the witness continues—“first along a curved path and then vertically, the bottom part of the machine became luminous. As for the smoke, it dissipated immediately. This smoke was also luminous. I also think I saw, underneath the saucer, four to five pretty big legs.” After the event, which reportedly occurred at about 7:30 p.m., Muyldermans pedaled to Waterloo, where his [twin] brother lived. LSI adds that he spent so much time there trying to convince the latter of what had happened that he only got home by midnight.

The magazine reproduced not only the three photographs but also a contact print showing the three uncut negatives. We publish these four images below in the same way they were printed in LSI and scanned by a university librarian from an original copy of the magazine. In a box below the article, the weekly assures us that the images “were not subjected to any retouching.”



Fig. 36. June 5, 1955, Saint-Marc (Namur). Picture #1 by François-Gilbert Muyldermans. This scanned image from LSI was partially cropped by the authors to leave out overlapping magazine inserts.

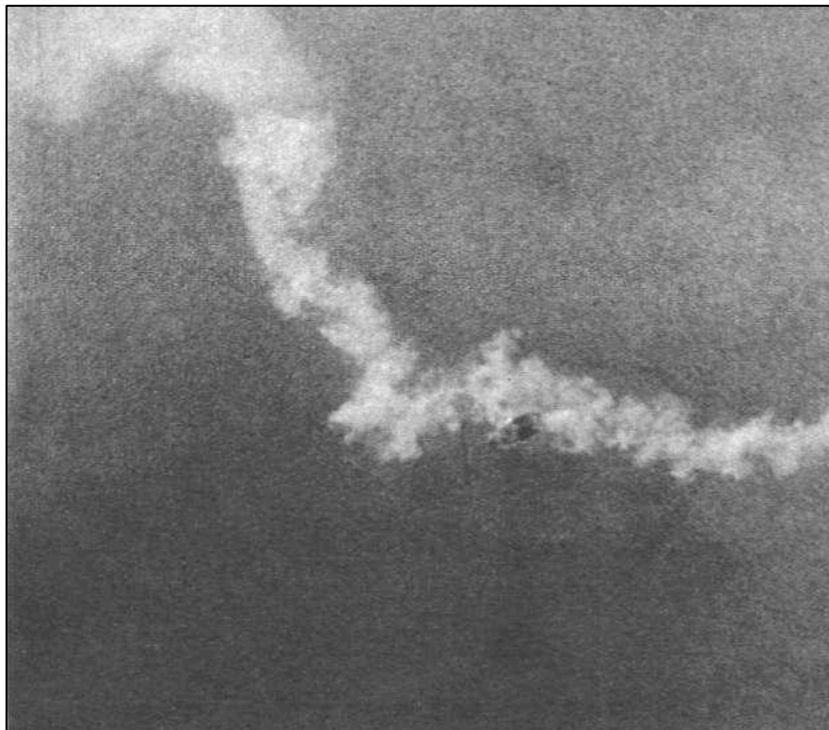


Fig. 37. June 5, 1955, Saint-Marc (Namur). Picture #2 by François-Gilbert Muyldermans. Full image as published in LSI magazine.



Fig. 38. June 5, 1955, Saint-Marc (Namur). Picture #3 by François-Gilbert Muyldermans. Composite image of the picture, printed on two adjacent pages of LSI magazine.

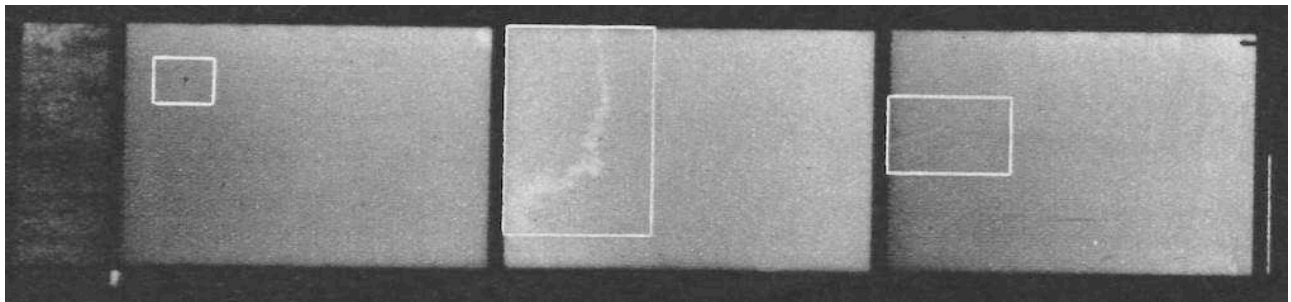


Fig. 39. A positive contact print of the filmstrip with the three negatives as printed in LSI. Visible on the left is a portion of the preceding photograph. The white boxes were inserted by the magazine and represent the areas shown in the larger images.

A closer look at the filmstrip reveals that the enlargements were printed differently with respect to the orientation of the negatives. We will cover this in detail in the analysis section.

LSI reports that the prints and the original negative strip were examined in their laboratories where it was found that the photos had not been tampered with. Aeronautical experts, too, were consulted. They concluded that, at the time of the sighting, no aircraft had flown over the region. As for the weather conditions that evening, another expert, alluding to the cloud of white smoke, stated that no condensation cloud could have formed at altitudes lower than 3,000m, thus elevating the ceiling of flight of the alleged UFO from 1,500 to—at least—3,000m. Notwithstanding the fact that he was told by Vervisch that the photos had been submitted for analysis to the country's military authorities, Muyldermans stuck to his story.

Years went by before one of the sensational documents surfaced again. It was the same *Le Soir Illustré* who, in March 1960, published a **retouched** version of the first of Muyldermans' photographs in a new, more general

article on flying saucers, again under the signature of Roger Vervisch and with the single caption: "Belgium, 1955." Next, in September 1960, all three pictures were used to illustrate an article written by noted French UFO author Aimé Michel and published in the popular science magazine *Science et Vie* (S&V). Although enlarged and cropped even more, the prints in S&V are of a better quality than the ones published in LSI. The photos would later appear in numerous books and journals, usually with captions stating that no trace of trickery was ever detected by "the experts". [2]

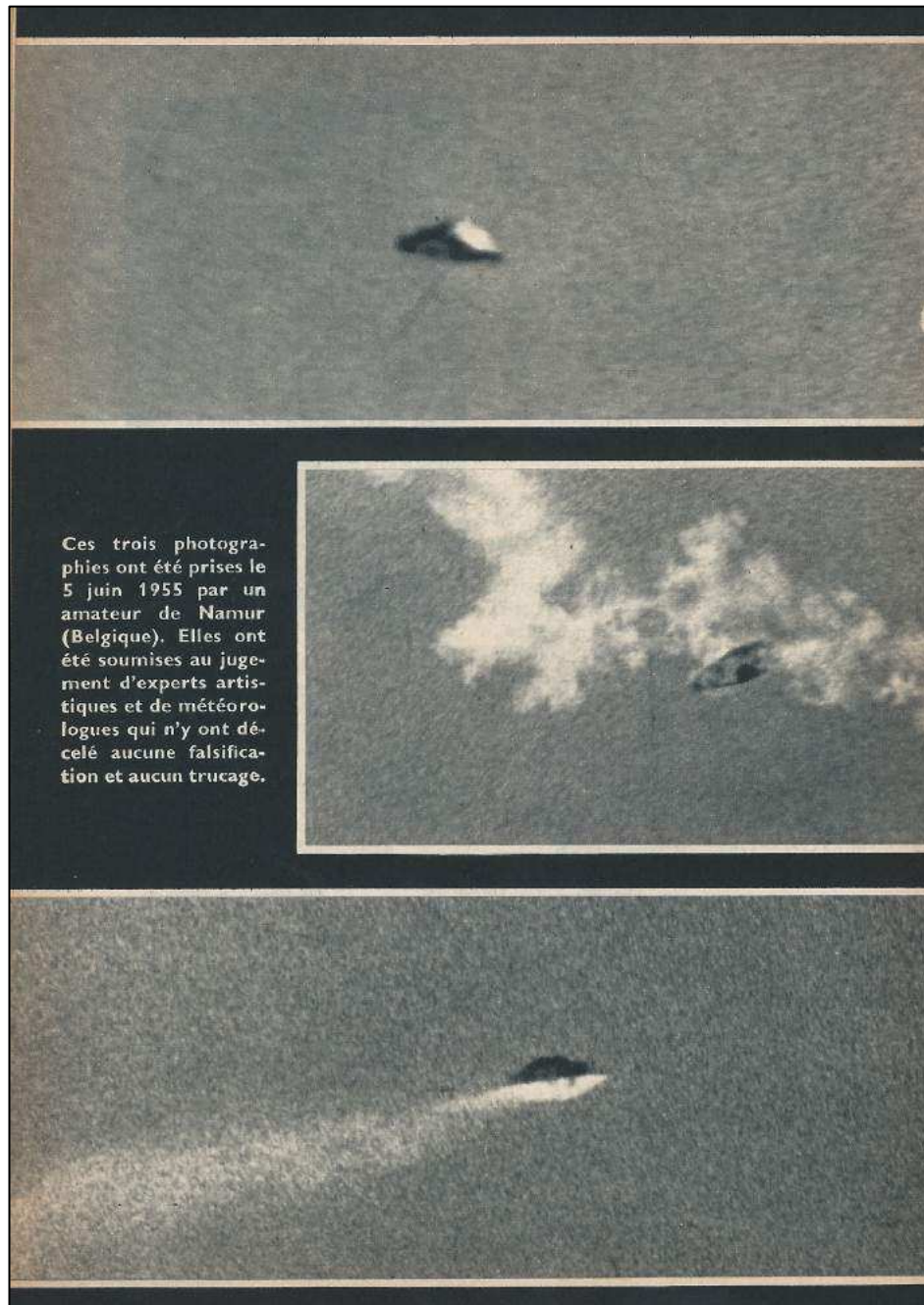


Fig. 40. Pictures #1, #2 and #3 as scanned from *Science et Vie* No. 516.

In 1961, the British *Flying Saucer Review*—by then the most reputed UFO journal in the world—published a short article by Aimé Michel devoted entirely to the Belgian photographs. [3] Michel did not give the name of the witness, but only identified him as “a repairer of harvesting machines, whose total possessions consist of a bicycle, a camera and a portable radio.” The article stated that a meteorologist had confirmed that “the vapor trail has been caused by an authentic atmospheric condensation”, one that “could not have been formed at less than an altitude of 1,500m”. Therefore, Michel writes, “the object in photograph No. 2 must have possessed dimensions of at least 12m”, but Michel, too, does not specify how exactly this figure was obtained. Finally, Michel explains that the “examination of the original negative by an expert photographer (a professional astronomer) led him to the conclusion that the photograph was not a trick.” [4]

According to the article in FSR, the witness had described the object as “silvery grey in color, shining brilliantly in the sun.” Note, however, that the 1955 article quoted Muyldermans as having said that the color was “black and bright.” Michel further considers it important that, at the bottom of the object, there were what looked like “four feet, very thin”, “just like those described by Father Gill” (referring to a much publicized sighting from Boianai, New guinea (see illustration below.) Yet, Muyldermans, in his interview with LSI, talked about “four or five rather big legs”.

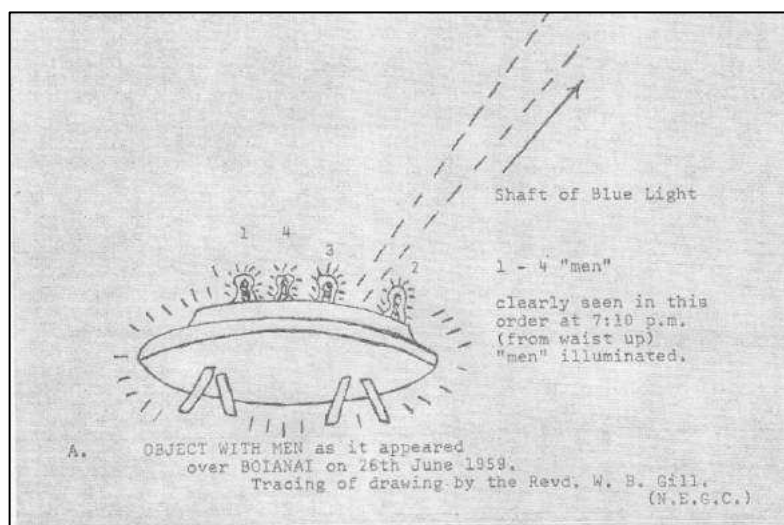


Fig. 41. June 26, 1959, Boianai, New Guinea. Witness' sketch borrowed from *The APRO Bulletin*, November 1961, p 7. Courtesy of Luis R. González.

The following chapter in the history of this classic is a report by Patrick Ferryn of the Brussels UFO group SOBEPS, published in the group's journal *Inforespace* in 1972. Ferryn visited the witness in his studio in Brussels that year. In the course of the interview, Muyldermans emphasized that “the whole story was in the magazine” [presumably referring to *Le Soir Illustré*],

that it was well reported there, and that there was nothing he could add. During what was only a short visit, Ferryn managed to unearth the following additional information:

- The object was first spotted flying at a low altitude at high speed. It then started to slow down in such a way the witness thought it was going to land, until it stopped completely (this is when picture #1 was taken), a few seconds later the object descended, during which maneuver it produced a white trail, resembling an aircraft condensation trail; it then described a curve in the horizontal plane and ascended again through the vapor trail (picture #2). Then, as the trail dissipated, the object suddenly accelerated, releasing minuscule luminous particles (picture #3) before it disappeared in the West, climbing at a speed higher than an airplane taking off (around 500km/h).
- The object was disc-shaped, very dark bottle-green in color.
- The Sun's reflection could be seen on the dome on top of the disc.
- Under the object there were what looked like landing spheres.
- The witness is a photographer by profession.
- The camera used was a *Leica*, model 1948, equipped with a 1.8 lens and a 17 DIN film.
- The sighting lasted about one minute and a half.



Fig. 42. A 1948 *Leica* camera. The standard orientation for this camera-type was the landscape mode. Borrowed from <http://www.leitzmuseum.org/CameraMakes/Leica/1948-Ilc-2.html>

Ferryn's report also revealed a disturbing detail: apparently Muyldermans had mailed the negatives to the French magazine *Radars*. This sensationalist weekly had announced a reward of one million French Francs for the person who could supply them with an authentic photograph of a flying saucer. The magazine acknowledged receipt of the negatives but when Muyldermans requested them back a month later, the editors replied that they had already been returned by mail. He initiated a lawsuit and an investigation was conducted, with no results. The negatives were never found. Was the alleged loss of the negatives a convenient move not to have them subjected to an

independent analysis? Ferryn was handed a cropped enlargement of each photograph. It is not known if these were first-generation prints or magazine reproductions. Muyldermans was convinced that the original negatives were lost for good. In the end, *Radar* magazine never published the pictures or an account of the event.

On June 19, 1977, Belgian ufologist Christiane Piens drafted a confidential 5-page report on the Saint-Marc incident and mailed it to six ufologists: Michel Monnerie, Maurice de San, Henri Durrant, Pierre Guérin, Claude Mc Duff and Claude Poher.



Fig. 43. On the cover of its October 17, 1954 issue, *Radar* announced a prize of 1.000.000 French Francs for anyone who could send them the first picture of a real flying saucer. Courtesy of Patrick Gross.

Although she calls her own findings “vague”, while at the same time underlining that “nothing in this story is coherent”, Piens’ report is actually quite informative. To begin with, she confirms the profession of François Muyldermans as “photographer and filmmaker” at “Europa Films”. This in itself is not a reason to suspect a hoax, but it does tell us that we are dealing with someone who at least knows how to handle a camera. Piens refers to the initial article in LSI and says she talked extensively with its author, Roger Vervisch. She found that, 22 years after, Vervisch, too, “has doubts about the story.” He further told Piens that the size of the UFO on the “40x35mm” negatives was 2 or 2.5mm. (Since the *Leica* camera uses the 24x36mm negative format, it is not clear what Vervisch meant by this.)

Oddly, two days before Piens had called Vervisch on the phone, the latter had received a visit from Muyldermans. Muyldermans had told him that his pictures were being re-investigated (by whom we do not know.) “Why”, Piens

asks herself, “did Muyldermans suddenly feel the need to meet again with the journalist?” (More than two decades had elapsed since the two first met.) As for the military authorities to whom Vervisch had submitted the pictures, the reporter told Piens that he had shown them to a colonel of the Belgian Air Force. A name is not given, but Vervisch stated that he worked at Dailly, a now-defunct military administration center in the heart of Brussels that—still citing Vervisch—was commissioned to deal with flying saucer reports in those days. As for the consulted meteorologist: Vervisch only recalled that he worked at the Royal Meteorological Institute in Uccle, Brussels.

Piens reviews a telephone conversation she had with Muyldermans on June 1, 1977, and which she recorded on cassette tape. In it, the photographer stated he no longer possessed the negatives because “they were stolen in Paris over 20 years ago by the journal *Radar*, which then went bankrupt”. “All I still have is a small print from LSI, but you needed a magnifying glass to view that”, Muyldermans ascertained. Below are several more extracts from statements made by the witness/photographer during this 1977 telephone interview:

- Elaborating on the books he had on UFOs: “many books have been published about me. . . in fact I heard that my photos travelled around the world 15 times . . . even in Moscow . . . but mine are the best because you can see all kind of details, while others are fuzzy . . . it is an object with a condensation trail behind it.”
- About the camera and film: “it is difficult to remember but I think it was a 21 DIN (100 ASA) film, 1/60 sec, aperture 8” (this information is slightly different from what he told Ferryn).
- About the time of the sighting: *it was between 16 and 17 hours* (he advances his sighting by 3 hours!).
- About his trade: “I do photo reportages and cinema.”
- About his flying saucer photographs: “my photos are real, it can be seen on the negatives that they are not faked, I worked in a laboratory.”

Piens and Muyldermans made an appointment for June 6 at 14:30 hours but the photographer failed to show up. She then decided to go to his house. Muyldermans was not there, but his twin brother was and he invited her in. Over a cup of tea, he told Piens of his career as a healer. It turned out that he was well acquainted with Roger Lorthioir, a locally well-known ufologist and author of many esoteric books. Piens qualifies Lorthioir as “a poor guy, always running around with [alleged] top secret UFO documents under his arm.” Muyldermans’ twin brother also told an unlikely story about a man [a certain S.V.V., former bookshop owner and mad on UFOs and the paranormal] who was swindled by someone posing as an extraterrestrial in search of an Earth woman to create a hybrid race. The aliens had

established that S.V.V.'s wife was the chosen one. The woman got pregnant and the person was arrested. Piens reckons that Muyldermans, too, was acquainted with these two individuals. She reports that Muyldermans was already interested in flying saucers before *Radar* established a prize for a picture of a genuine *soucoupe volante* in October 1954.

Regarding the supposed astronomer's analysis of the negatives that supported their authenticity, Piens sees no physical possibility for this. She argues that Muyldermans sent the negative film to LSI a few days after the sighting, and submitted it 2 or 3 days later to *Radar*. In fact, journalist Vervisch was unaware of this new analysis. "Besides the photographer [from *Le Soir Illustré*]", Piens writes, "he [Vervisch] was the only one who saw the negatives, and neither one of them conducted any analysis."

Piens further reports that "it was raining that day in Namur". According to a weather report she obtained from the Royal Meteorological Institute, the overall weather was stormy with rain and bright intervals on June 5, 1955. If true, this would be quite dissimilar to what Muyldermans initially stated to LSI and later repeated during the telephone conversation with Piens herself: "very clear weather, blue sky". However, our own findings, detailed in the analysis section, contradict Piens' claims about the rainy weather.

Without giving the source of her information, Piens writes that Muyldermans arrived at his brother's house in Waterloo by 9 p.m. Considering that, in 1955, there were only secondary roads connecting Namur to Waterloo, that the sighting allegedly occurred at 7:30 p.m., and that the distance between these two cities—about 60km—would take approximately 3 hours by bicycle, Piens believes Muyldermans could never have arrived in Waterloo at 9 p.m. (Unless, as will be discussed later, the alleged sighting did indeed take place "between 16 and 17 hours".)

An unnamed photographer, who knew of Muyldermans' work, confided to Piens that Muyldermans regularly used trick photography. He also speculated that the exact appearance of the white trail in picture #2 is easily reproduced by pouring albumen in hot water and then adding a small model to it. (The authors don't think that this is the way in which the shots were created. Actually, photos of egg white in hot water show solid looking, smoothly shaped strings, whereas the white trail in picture #2 has a smoke-like appearance.)

On June 16, 1977, Christiane Piens called Muyldermans again. This time he appeared less excited than 15 days earlier when he elaborated on the new photo analysis that was in progress. His only comment was: "I am sorry, but listen, I will be honest with you, I am not interested anymore... You had a talk with my brother, right? . . . Thus, as far as I am concerned, I am not interested anymore. I have taken my distance from all this." Based on her own inquiries, Christiane Piens concludes: "No matter how much I would have liked to see their authenticity confirmed, to me, the pictures are fake. I

think Muyldermans simply made his photos for the Radar premium. There is no evidence that the negatives are no longer in his possession.”

More recently, in 2014, Patrick Ferryn contacted the multimedia service that manages the image archives of LSI and received a scan of the only copy of the photographs that survived. It concerns the following print of picture #1, but the quality is not better than what was already available.



Fig. 44. The only surviving print from the LSI archives. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

Analysis

This classic flying saucer story deserved more and better investigation shortly after the photos surfaced. We have strived to obtain first-hand copies of the photographs, to no avail. Many Belgian and French researchers were contacted for this purpose, but no one possessed high-quality copies. With no original negatives or first generation prints available, we have no other option but to base our analysis on the best possible scans from the published images, namely those printed in LSI and S&V. But before we assess the photos themselves, let us examine the alleged circumstances in which they were taken.

One element that can be assessed is the weather for June 5, 1955 and in particular the marked discrepancy between the situation as described by Muyldermans (“uniformly blue sky”) and Piens’ claim that it was “raining in Namur that day”. Thanks to Dr. Ronny Blomme, astrophysicist at the Royal Observatory at Uccle, Brussels, we obtained scans from the climatological and synoptic data stored in the archives of the Royal Meteorological Institute. [5] From the coded tables we distilled the following data recorded for June 5, 1955, 7:00 p.m. local time, by the two weather stations that are closest to the sighting location: Florennes, 31km South-southwest of Saint-Marc, and Uccle, 49km Northwest of Saint-Marc:

	<u>Florennes</u>	<u>Uccle</u>
Pressure:	1015.3mb	1015.2mb
Temperature:	18°C	20°C
Dew temperature:	10°C	11°C
Relative humidity:	60%	55%
Wind direction:	ENE (95-104°)	E (85-94°)
Wind speed:	4kts	9kts
Horizontal visibility:	30km	10km
Precipitation:	0mm	0mm
Cloud coverage:	7/8 (broken, nearly overcast)	3/8 (scattered)
Height of lowest cloud base:	1,000 to 1,500m	600 to 1,000m
Cloud type:	Mainly cumulus	Stratocumulus cumulogenitus

In addition, data extracted from the monthly climatological surveys revealed that:

- the sunshine duration was over 13 hours at Uccle between 08:00 a.m. on June 5 and 08:00 the next morning;
- no precipitation was recorded on June 5 in any of the stations located in the French-speaking part of Belgium.

In summary: despite a cloud-filled sky, the Sun was shining brightly all day with temperatures close to 20°C at the time of the sighting. Contrary what Piens wrote, there is no evidence of stormy weather or precipitation near Saint-Marc on June 5, 1955. Instead, there was a light to gentle breeze blowing from the East to the East-Northeast.

Even though the majority of the lower cumulus clouds may already have dissipated by 7:30 p.m., the sky was still lightly cloudy at 10:00 p.m., with bands of semi-translucent altocumulus and cirrostratus. To photograph a considerable part of the sky under these circumstances and have no clouds appear in the pictures would have been hard to realize. According to the

official weather data, at 4:00 p.m. (the time mentioned by Muyldermans in his telephone conversation with Piens) the cloud cover was about the same as at 7:00 p.m. So, whether the photos were taken in the afternoon or in the evening has no bearing on this issue. One way out of this problem would be to assume that the reproductions are just not clear enough for the clouds to show up in the pictures, or that the photos themselves are overexposed, washing out any color nuances in the sky. The fact that Muyldermans mentions a uniform blue sky should then be regarded as an exaggeration rather than a literal description. Another possibility is that Muyldermans was lying about the date and/or time the pictures were taken, or that the background is not sky but something else of a uniform color.

Another element that was checked is the relationship between the position of the Sun and the bright reflection on the right-hand side of the object in picture #1. Using *Stellarium*, an astronomical software to calculate the position of celestial bodies for any given time or place, we find that on June 5, 1955 at 7:30 p.m. local time, the Sun was at an azimuth of 294° —i.e. in the West-Northwest—at an elevation of 9.6° (which is confirmed by the data in the altitude/azimuth table we consulted at http://aa.usno.navy.mil/cgi-bin/aa_altazw.pl). This would place the unidentified object in picture #1 roughly in the South with the Sun illuminating it from the West. But the question is to know whether sunlight striking a more or less horizontally positioned object consisting of three superimposed “domes” at an angle of about 10° , would create a direct reflection somewhere between the central dome and the upper dome without illuminating the ring-shaped bottom? In an attempt to determine the angle needed for a reflection to hit the top structure in this way, we asked an expert in visual effects to create an animation that shows a computer generated model of the saucer illuminated by a light source that circles the disc in a horizontal plane. Animations were made with the light source placed at four different altitudes: 10° , 20° , 30° and 40° . 4x40 frames were examined in this way. It was found that, only when the light source is placed at 30° (frame 99 in the animation) a reflection was obtained that hits the top structure in the center, with the bottom ring remaining more or less in the dark, as in Muyldermans’ picture (see Fig. 45). A second simulation was made with the top structure of the object tilted slightly away from the camera showing a segment of the bottom side (the object in picture #1 is not sharp enough to tell exactly how the object is tilted with regard to the camera). These animations showed that the angle required for the reflection to appear in the right place would be nearer to 40° .

An elevation angle of 30° would imply that picture #1 could not have been taken at 7:30 p.m. If the photo was taken on June 5, the incident must have happened **much earlier in the day**. The time that corresponds with an elevation of the Sun of 30° is 5:18 p.m. (4:14 p.m. for an angle of 40°), which would be more in line with the time Muyldermans mentioned to Piens in 1977, namely “between 16 and 17 hours.” An earlier time would also solve another issue raised by Piens: the impossible arrival time at the brother’s house.



Fig. 45. Frame 99 of a 3D computer simulation of the photographed scene. The frame shows the light source shining down on the object from the right at an angle of 30°. Computer graphics by Jan van Eetvelt.

An interesting twist in the story is that, during his talk with Patrick Ferryn in 1972, the witness referred to “landing spheres”. We already suspected that François-Gilbert Muyldermans and Roger Lorthioir were acquainted and this altered description of the landing gear from “feet” to “spheres” seems to confirm this since Lorthioir was in fact a fervent follower of the discredited Californian contactee George Adamski, whose famous photographs of “Venusian scout ships” visibly depict balls as landing gear. [6]

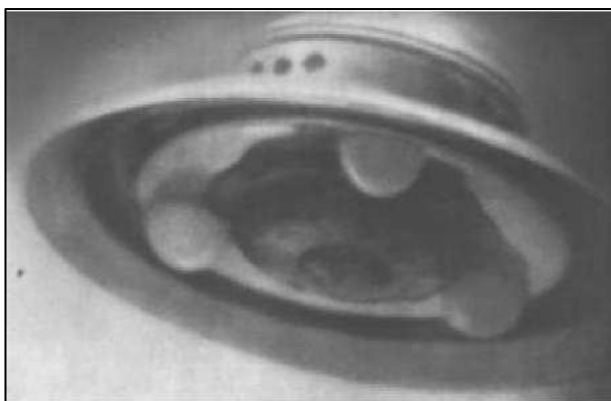


Fig. 46. December 13, 1952, Palomar Gardens, San Diego County, California, U.S.A. Photo by George Adamski. Courtesy of Joel Carpenter.

Reflecting on all the above a variety of elements appear that could have motivated Muyldermans to perpetrate a hoax. Not only the timeframe was right (only about half a year after a wave of spectacular flying saucer reports hit France and a popular magazine had announced it would pay a substantial sum for the first authentic photo of a flying saucer), also the setting was favorable (it turned out that Muyldermans was acquainted with fringe individuals from the flying saucer community and the paranormal scene.)

In addition, we noted several discrepancies in the narratives given by the witness to different investigators (e.g., the type of landing gear and the color of the object.) Inconsistencies are also reflected in the storyline itself (notably with regard to the episode's timing and the picture orientations, as will be demonstrated later.) Finally, there is Muyldermans' erratic behavior *vis-à-vis* Christiane Piens.

As a young man with an interest in flying saucers and photography, Muyldermans would have been the right man at the right time to fabricate an authentic-looking photo series of a flying saucer. Exploring this idea further, the question is, how he set out to create pictures of what looks like a flying disc engulfed in smoke and spewing a trail of fire behind it? Trick photos with such particularities would have been hard to accomplish in the 1950s. Perhaps Muyldermans did not resort to trickery in the literal sense of the word. One theory would be that he photographed a true but not extraordinary event and then invented a false story to go along with the photos. A closer examination of the photographic evidence revealed a couple of particularities that seem to point in that direction.

A first particularity—one that was noticed independently by skeptic author Marc Hallet and visual effects expert Jan van Eetvelt—concerns an unusual blur of the film grain in the pictures, especially in pictures #1 and #3.



Fig. 47. Cropped images showing motion blur in pictures #1, #2 and #3 as printed in *Le Soir Illustré*. The fourth picture (extreme right) shows the grain in a normal print.

In direct prints from a negative, the film grain (i.e. the light-sensitive silver halide crystals in the film's gelatinous emulsion layer that show up in extreme enlargements) should be roughly circular and relatively sharp, even if the

image of what was photographed is not. One way to explain how film grain can be affected by motion blur is that we are not looking at prints made directly from the negatives, but at photographs taken from printed positives. With the negatives in their possession, one may ask why the people from the photo lab at LSI, instead of making reproductions directly from the negatives, would have resorted to re-photographing printed images with an unsteady hand or a wobbly tripod. Photographing photographs sounds like a most unusual procedure for publishing pictures that the magazine itself typified as “sensational documents.” Therefore, if this is what happened, LSI either acted unprofessionally, or the negatives Muyldermans handed to the magazine were shots not of a real event but of printed photographs, photographs he may have taken himself or may have found elsewhere and which he then reworked or reframed to suit his purpose. The grain’s motion blur is also apparent in the prints published in S&V, but the orientation of the stretched-out grains is slightly different here. We are not entirely sure how to interpret this singularity. Possibly, it is the result of interaction between the linear patterns created by the stretched-out grains on the one hand and the use of a halftone mask on the other (different masks were used for the LSI and the S&V reproductions.) The phenomenon is known as the Moiré effect and occurs when two superimposed linear patterns that are not perfectly aligned create a third pattern.

The composite image on the next page shows the approximate positions of the unknown object in the camera’s viewfinder as gleaned from the negative strip printed in LSI. The larger rectangle represents the size of a 24x36mm negative. Note already how all the relevant crops of the three images are grouped together on the left-hand side of the frame. Curved yellow lines represent the orientation of the grains’ motion blur as derived from the LSI reproductions of pictures /#1 and #3. The exact orientation of the motion blur for picture #2 could not be determined because the crop reproduced in LSI is less enlarged than the other two crops. Because of this, the grains appear much smaller, making an eventual pattern difficult to distinguish from the fibrous texture of the paper and the halftone dots.

The way in which the grain is distorted (seemingly following concentric ellipses centered nicely within the picture frame) may also point to a more innocent cause. In correspondence with one of the authors, British researcher and former photolithographer Martin Shough rightfully noted that there is also the enlarger state to consider. Shough writes:

The magazine printer would certainly have been working from enlarged paper prints. One possible explanation for this type of grain distortion is motion or curl of the negative during exposure. This is sometimes called negative ‘pop’. It happens in glassless negative carriers due to overheating in the lamp housing. The common diffusing lamps had to have very bright lamps, which could get very hot. Exposure times will typically be 20, 30 seconds, or more depending on the lamp type, the paper type and

the magnification. The negative strip might curl during exposure, moving in such a way that grain is blurred. The pattern and extent of the blur would depend on several factors and whether it is an intact strip or cut negatives.

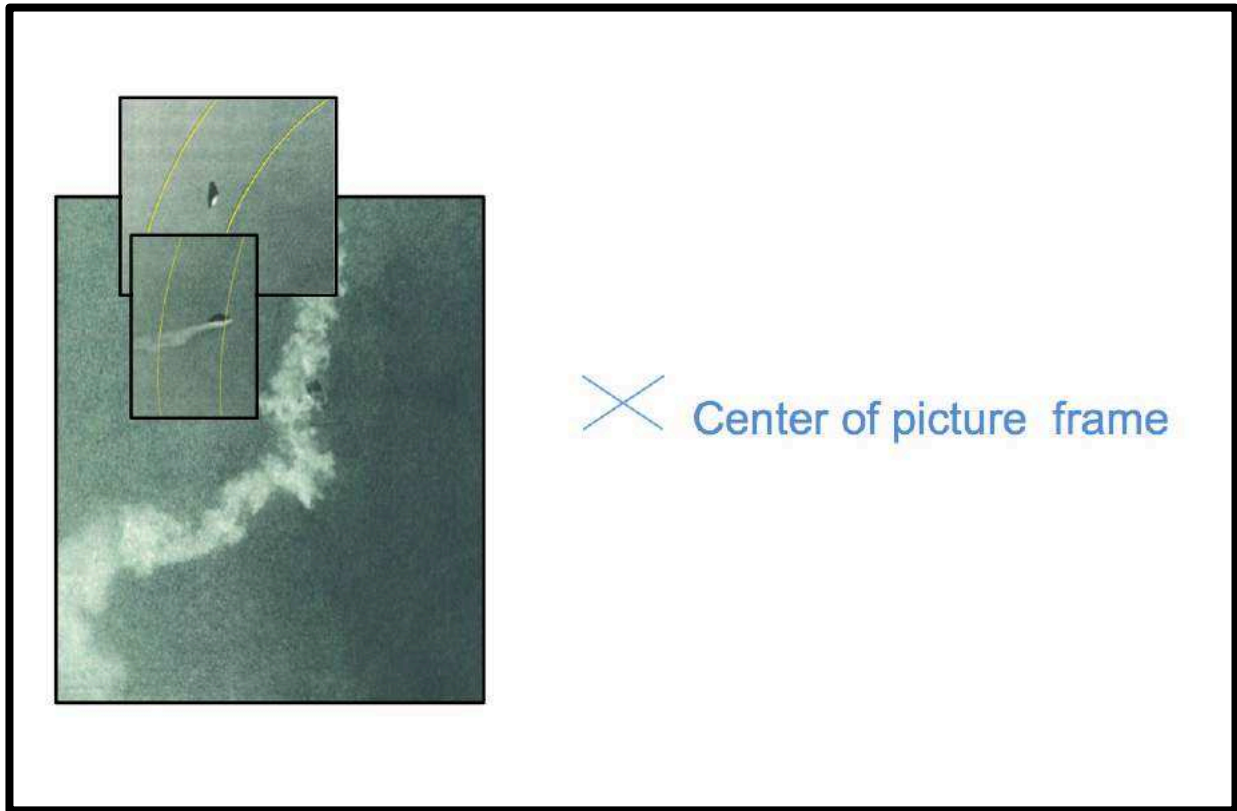


Fig. 48. Position of the targeted subject for the three pictures and orientation of the motion blur (thin yellow lines) for the grain in pictures #1 and #3.

Another possibility perhaps is a non-flat defect in a cheap or faulty enlarger lens. If it suffers from barrel distortion then details towards the periphery of the field could be stretched slightly. In this case, the radius of curvature of the defect ought to point towards the center of the field. I am not very keen on this idea.

A third possibility is vibration of the enlarger. By no means all enlargers in 1955—or buildings, indeed—were as robust as they might be. Traffic vibrations, or footfall and other impacts on sprung suspended flooring, etc., might vibrate the negative carrier. Usually this is stuck out on rods from a sleeve that slides up and down the main support with the inevitable possibility of some play in the mechanism.

This might happen with a rotating negative carrier or a fixed carrier. I think a rotating carrier offers the most interesting

possibility. This type allows you to change the orientation of the image on the paper. If the carrier is not perfectly locked in place then I can imagine that vibration during exposure might cause the carrier to rotate fractionally. Like the previous causes, this would predict blurring most noticeable towards the edge of the field, with a curvature whose radius points to the optical axis. Looking at your excellent reconstruction of the positions of the images within the negative field, I could argue that this is so.

With a fixed carrier, presumably most vibration in these circumstances is likely to be transverse to the axis of the negative carrier, which is anchored only at the support end. I'm not sure if that would fit the direction of apparent blur. If the filmstrip was printed intact it would probably be fed through with the long side of the negative parallel to the expected vibration direction, whereas in the present case the blur appears to be perpendicular. On the other hand the strip may have been cut.

The off-centeredness of the targeted subject in each picture seems deliberate and suspicious, but Shough wonders if this systematic effect could not be due to a viewfinder parallax error occurring with a non-single-lens reflex camera of this vintage (i.e. when the image seen in the viewfinder is not framed the same as the image captured by the lens). Martin Shough:

A small parallax error was inevitable even in properly aligned cameras and usually accepted and allowed for (although, interestingly, it would become much more significant for unusually close subjects). A bad error might be caused by misalignment of the viewfinder. Some cameras had adjustable parallax compensators, fixed with a setting screw somewhere, or could be used with separate finders fixed to a shoe on top of the camera body. I do not know the possible extent of any such error on the camera in question, but any mechanical thing has the potential to go adrift, especially the latter type perhaps, being vulnerable to impacts.

Is it possible that such a misalignment existed in the camera without the photographer realizing, or bothering? It's a bit of a stretch, maybe.

Another factor is that the viewfinder would presumably need to be recalibrated when a lens is changed, or else the negative image would be off-center. What possibilities existed in this case? I would think an f/1.8 lens is probably a standard 50mm, but if he was a photographer, he may have changed lenses. Remember also that the viewfinder field of view (FOV) would usually be larger than the imaging FOV in any case, which would mean that any off-center effect would tend to be exaggerated on the negative, whatever

lens was fitted. More importantly, of course, if a longer lens was fitted the negative FOV would obviously reduce so the centering judgment made by the photographer using the viewfinder becomes much more sensitive to error.

Unfortunately, It is no longer possible to verify if the other images on the film roll were also systematically off-center.

The authors feel that the fact that the unknown object is off-centered in such a glaring manner remains one of the most incriminating factors in this entire story. Muyldermans was only in his 20s when he took the shots. So this may have been his first camera and, perhaps, he was totally unaware of these parallax issues. But even then it's difficult to imagine that he would not have been aware of a hypothetical viewfinder parallax error of this magnitude. The *Leica* cameras from the 1940s—we are probably dealing with an *IIIc* model—had no parallax adjustment or parallax indications. However, the viewfinder was very close to the lens, right on top of it and so close that some lenses might even have blocked its view. Like Shough points out, the parallax problem with those early cameras was most noticeable for subjects close by. In consequence, the mere fact that the “flying saucer” is notably off center—whereas it can logically be assumed to have been the main target of the three pictures—points to a hoax: either Muyldermans wanted to conceal something in the lower part of the scene, or we are looking at a parallax effect due to the saucer being small and close to the camera.

Another problem with the Saint-Marc photos is that nowhere it is specified how the camera was held when the pictures were taken. In the absence of background details, such as trees or lampposts that can point to the right orientation of each shot, there are three options: horizontal (normal landscape format), vertical with the shutter button below eye-level (portrait format with the camera turned 90° clockwise) or vertical with the shutter button above eye-level (portrait format with the camera turned 90° counterclockwise). [7]

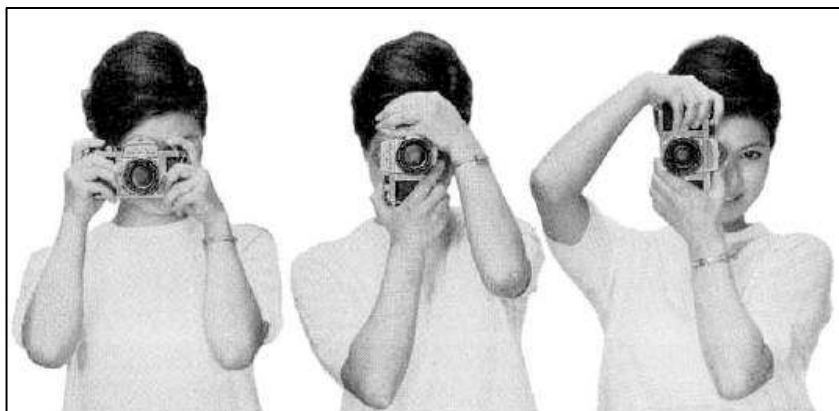


Fig. 49. Three different ways to take a photograph.
Borrowed from a *Pentax Asahi 51a* manual.

Now this is how the pictures appear in the contact print of the negative strip (for better visibility, we use crops from the enlarged images):



But this is how LSI published the photos:



Already, we notice something here that is not right, namely that picture #1 has been rotated 90° counterclockwise, whilst picture #2 has been rotated 90° clockwise. In other words, if the printed enlargements show the correct orientations for these two shots, it would imply that the photographer turned his camera 180° after taking picture #1. With picture #3 being printed in the same orientation as its smaller version in the contact print, this means the camera was turned a second time after picture #2 was taken, now 90° clockwise to normal landscape mode. Considering the nature of the photographed scene (a small object in an otherwise featureless sky), changing the way the camera was held would be pointless and highly unorthodox for someone who is confronted with a very unusual and possibly short-lived event. So we need to find out if Muyldermans did indeed change the position of his camera for each shot, or if the magazine—and consequently all other journals and books that published the shots afterwards—messed up the orientations of the cropped enlargements they printed.

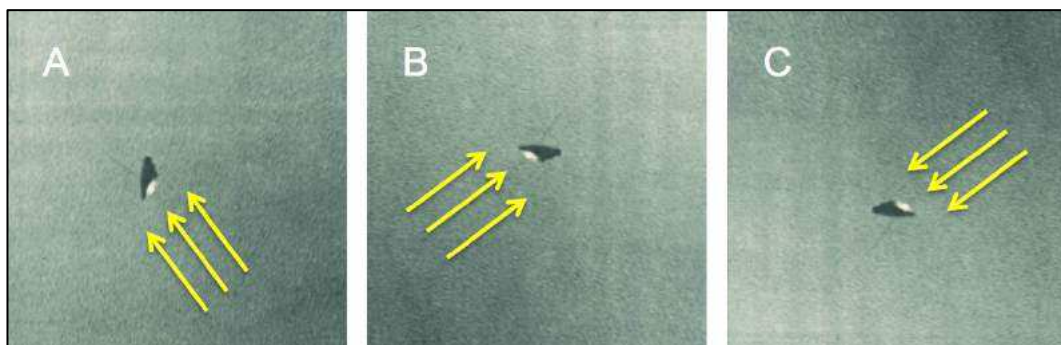
If the order of the shots as shown in the contact print is correct, then we have no less than 64 possible combinations for the way in which the camera was held during the making of the three shots. Logically assuming that

Muyldermans did not hold his camera upside down, we can reduce this number by eliminating all combinations that have one of the following images in them:



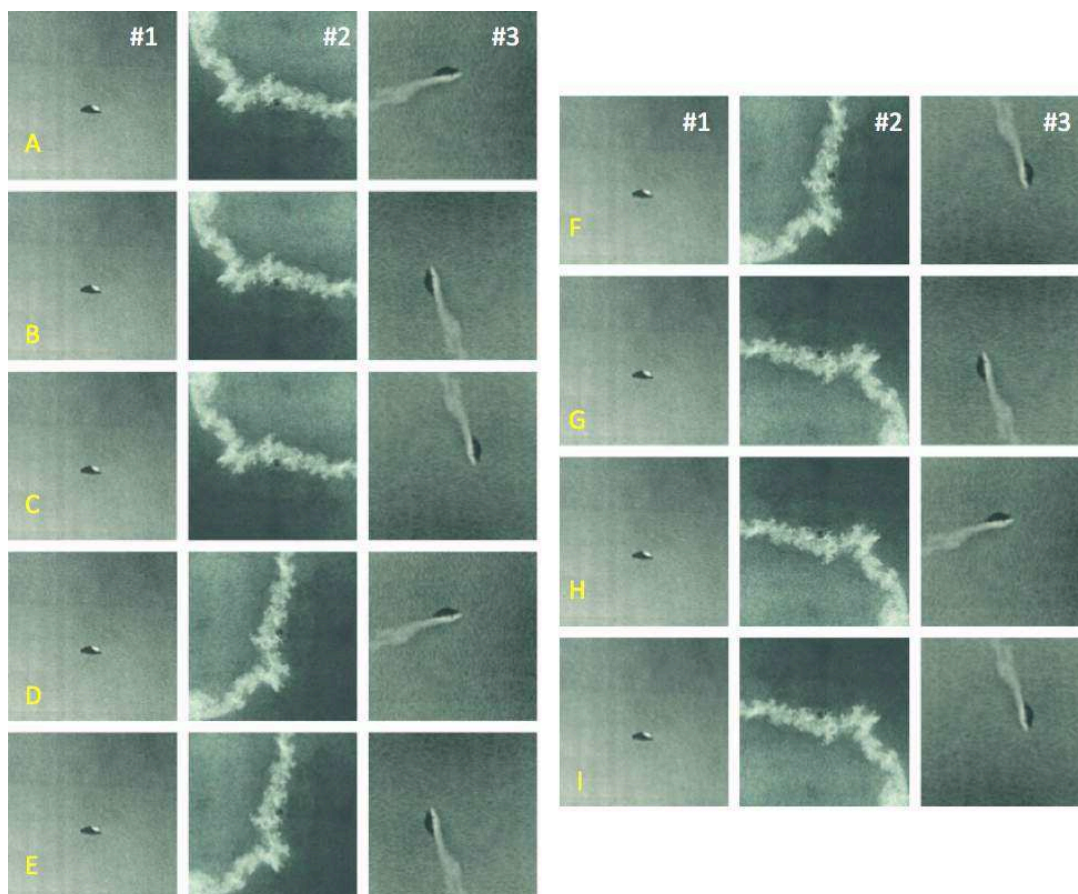
This leaves 27 options. We can further narrow down this number by establishing the position of the sun for each scene depicted. There are two ways to find out more about this: the first is by looking for sunlit parts and shadows on the physical objects in the picture (the saucer and the white smoke); the second is by assessing the gradation of the sky brightness in the pictures. We will first look at sun glints and shadows.

One thing that stands out immediately is the bright reflection in picture #1, already discussed. Since we have eliminated all combinations that show picture #1 in an upside down fashion, i.e. with the triple dome facing left, only three possible orientations remain for this shot:



In images A and B the incident sunlight (yellow arrows) hits the object from below. This would only be possible if the Sun was below the horizon. Since the pictures were taken in daylight, we can therefore safely exclude all combinations that have picture #1 in the A and B orientation. This leaves us with only those combinations that have picture #1 showing the object in a horizontal position with the widest part closest and almost parallel to the bottom edge of the picture.

We now have nine combinations left, i.e.:



Having established the orientation of the photographed scene for picture #1, we can infer the position of the Sun from the way the object is illuminated.

The bright reflection on the superimposed domes indicates that the Sun was to the right (we already found that the elevation was roughly between 25 and 45°.) Assuming that all three pictures were taken with the camera pointed in more or less the same direction and within a short time span (“about one minute and a half”, according to Muyldermans), similar lighting conditions should also apply to the other two shots. Shadows within the smoke trail in picture #2 are not articulate enough to conclude with a 100% certainty where the Sun was in this scene, but the best match with the Sun illuminating the scene from the right seems to be the orientation that is shown in combinations D-E-F and G-H-I (object appears dark on the left with a small glint on the right and brightest parts from the trail also on the right-hand side). Picture #3 is much more informative in this regard. It shows that the upper part of the object—assuming this is the same highly reflective object as in picture #1—is completely dark and not illuminated, thus suggesting that this side was turned away from the Sun. With the sunlight coming from the right, this would match the orientation shown in B-E-G. So a first look at the images would favor the orientations shown in D-E-F-G-H-I for picture #2 and the orientation B-E-G for picture #3, the common denominators being combinations E and G. The variations in sky brightness that can be

distinguished in the three images can help us to decide which is the most likely combination of shots.

With the Sun in the bottom half of the sky, the sky should appear brighter in the lower part of each image. Still assuming that the pictures were taken within a short period of time and with the camera pointed in more or less the same direction, this should be the case for all three shots. A look at combinations E and G tells us that G is the only combination in which all the shots display a noted gradation from grey at the bottom to darker grey at the top. The effect is clearly visible in the large prints from the LSI article (see also our contrast enhanced composite image below.) The contact prints, however, seem to show a reversed gradation, which is probably an artifact due to the reproduction technique that was used.)

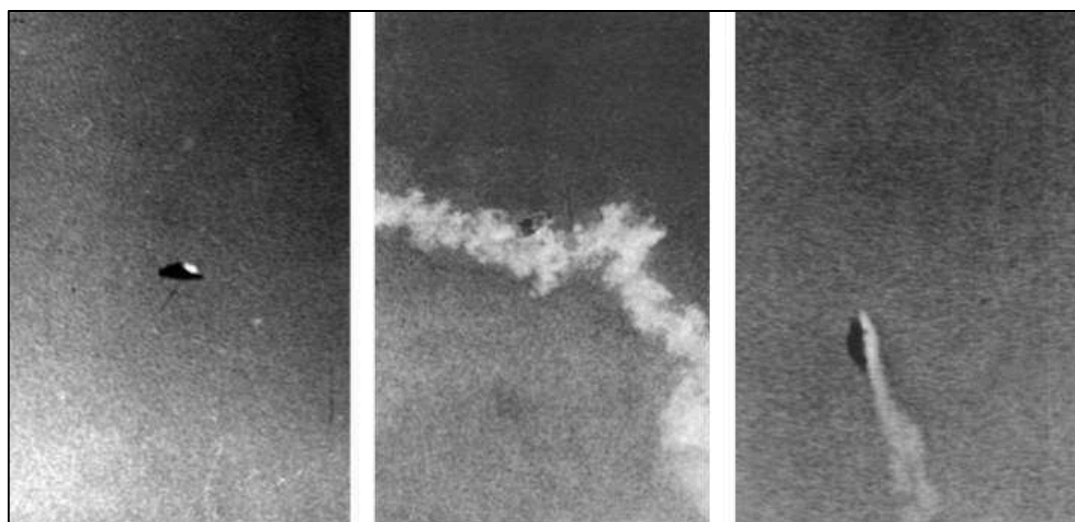


Fig. 50. The most likely orientations for pictures #1, #2 and #3.

Interestingly, the selected combination shows the three images exactly as in the negative strip, but rotated 90° anti-clockwise, i.e. **with the camera held in the same portrait mode for all three pictures**. This in itself is a strong argument that the found combination is the right one, as it is the only one from the nine remaining combinations that does not require a change in camera position between shots. If our reasoning is correct, this would mean that both picture #2 and picture #3 were printed with a wrong orientation in the original article and in all articles that came next.

The newly established orientation is further corroborated by the fact that the curved pattern followed by the motion blur of the grain in picture #1 appears to continue in picture #2 (see “position of the targeted subject” diagram above). Whilst it is not clear why this is so, it seems to be too much of a coincidence for the motion blur to follow such a smooth continuous path.

The combination we found reveals a new particularity: both picture #2 and #3 contain a smoke trail that starts near the bottom of the picture frame and goes upward. This can also be inferred from the fact that in picture #2 the trail is wider at the bottom and smaller at the top.

The (unnamed) meteorologist quoted in *Le Soir Illustré* stated that the diameter of the object should have been at least 12m (note that Muyldermans himself estimated the size at only 2 to 3m.) He based his calculations on the assumption that the object was at a minimal altitude of 3,000m, which he found to be the required altitude for contrails to form on that particular day and time [8]. Unfortunately, we have no balloon soundings that enable us to verify this statement. Still, anyone who regularly contemplates the sky will agree that the white trail in picture #2 looks more like white smoke than a condensation trail. (“Smoke” is also how Muyldermans described the trail in the initial interview with Vervisch.) Since no background details appear in the picture, nothing can be said about the distance of this trail to the camera. It can be several thousands of meters or only a couple of meters away.

Images of saucer-shaped objects going upward and producing a trail of white smoke are fairly unique in the world of flying saucers but they are not uncommon in the world of model rocketry. In fact, there exists a special discipline among rocket hobbyists, in which not miniature space rockets but flying saucers are fired into the sky. The telling images below are from a site maintained by the Dutch Amateur Society for Rocket Research.



Fig. 51. LEFT: a model flying saucer just above the launch pad. RIGHT: the saucer in full flight. Borrowed from http://www.navro.nl/en/news/fts08_5picture

Before elaborating further on this theory, we wish to point out the similarities in shape between the saucer in the above images and the object photographed by Muyldermans. The latter described the unknown object as “composed of three superimposed discs, of decreasing dimensions and topped by a small dome or ring.” Accidentally or not, a ring is what most saucer rockets are equipped with to retain the cylindrical motor casing that propels them into the air.

Further similarities become obvious when one compares the white smoke trail in picture #2 with these screen captures made from two separate launches of “saucer rockets”:



Fig. 52. Saucer-shaped rockets with white smoke trails.
Borrowed from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7PD3ZjUe1w>

When saucer rockets reach their highest point and tumble back to the ground they may enter the smoke trail they left behind. This is nicely illustrated by the following stills from videos taken at different U.S. rocket festivals. Again, the similarities with picture #2 are obvious.



Fig. 53. Descending rocket saucers.
Borrowed from the abovementioned video and
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tix6IGIV3KM>

The next screen capture is from a video shot on October 29, 2001 at a Texas Rocket Club meeting in Asa, Texas. It shows a saucer of nearly 1m diameter propelled upward with a rocket motor. If, by way of experiment, one would attach the saucer to the longest side of the motor casing, this image would have looked nearly identical to Muyldermans' third shot.



Fig. 54. Rocket saucer shortly after launch. Screen captured from:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0ipW7jxRVc&index=16&list=UUL93lu5nHLSjYx5kBIC19ow>

The theory seems solid but how did Muyldermans manage to obtain picture #1? This photo shows a saucer in a horizontal position with no trail of smoke or fire behind it. Also, to take clear pictures of a rocket launch, a photographer should be standing relatively close to the launch pad, meaning that he would be viewing the saucer from below during most of its ascend. Yet, in picture #1 the saucer is seen in profile. Saucer-shaped rockets tend to flip during their downward trajectory and fall to the ground upside down with a smack. Exceptionally, lightweight saucers made of cardboard or thin plastic can drift to the ground in a gentler manner but will usually do so under a distinct angle (as can be viewed in the videos mentioned above). Waiting for the saucer to sail down could be a way to capture it in a more or less horizontal position, but in the Saint-Marc photos the thick body of the object and the sun glints suggest a more solid construction, and therefore an object that would have fallen down with considerable speed and not in an horizontal fashion. There is a way out though: the photos below illustrate how even a heavyweight saucer rocket can appear nearly horizontal in a picture. In the left photo, the saucer has reached the highest point of its trajectory where it remains horizontal for a second or two before flipping over and falling to the ground. When photographed from a distance, and with the shutter button pushed at the right moment, this may produce a convincing shot. Another possible explanation for the more or less horizontal position of the saucer in picture #1 is shown in the photo on the right. Here the saucer is still moving upward but the trail is barely visible because of the lighting conditions. The exhaust plume would even be less apparent in black & white photography. A third option would be that, for his first picture, Muyldermans simply suspended the model from a thin wire but, considering the great amount of sky above the object, this seems unlikely.



Fig. 55. Additional images from the website of the Dutch Amateur Society for Rocket Research.

The saucer rocket explanation implies that at least two different launches were photographed, namely:

- Picture #1: saucer at the pinnacle of its trajectory or suspended on a wire;
- Picture #2: saucer descending into the smoke trail;
- Picture #3: new launch with visible fire exhaust.

In summary, we have the following elements in favor of the rocket theory:

- Mention is made of a solid ring-like structure on top of the saucer.
- The smoke trail in picture #2 is identical to a rocket trail.
- The flame-like streak and smoke trail in picture #3 are comparable to a rocket exhaust.
- Pictures #2 and #3 were found to show an object or objects entrained in an upward or downward movement.

With regard to the availability of miniature rockets in the 1950s, Geoff Quick, U.K. imagery analysis management member of IPACO (www.IPACO.fr), shared with us some informative recollections:

Like many boys in the 50's I built models powered by these motors —mainly jet aircraft types (Venom, Midge, etc.) There were also helicopters, rockets and even speedboats available as kits. The most popular was the little Jetex "50". The rocket motor (although called a "jet" it was a miniature solid fuel rocket motor) was a small hollow metal cylinder about 5cm long with a cap with a small hole in its center, held on to the main cylinder by a clip. The whole motor came itself with a clip for mounting on the main vehicle.

To load the motor you took the end cap off and inserted one or two solid propellant tablets, which were small cylinders of solid fuel. On top of these you put a small circular piece of metal gauze. Just before putting the top cap on you inserted a short length of a metallic centered chemical fuse wire through the hole so that the inside end would touch the gauze well, leaving enough on the outside to enable you to light the fuse. The whole assembly was then clipped in to the model. The fuse was then lit before launching and a pair of tweezers held ready to pull out the burning fuse once the main engine ignited. In fact, the fuse wire was usually "spat out" by the rocket anyway when it ignited. You then launched the main model. The engine ran for about 10-20 seconds depending upon one or two fuel tablets being loaded. The sound was a quiet hiss, rather like a car tire being let down. There was a very faint smoke plume, but by memory this was almost invisible. On landing the engine was VERY hot, most of us leaning the hard way by burning our fingers.

Hopefully this, with the Google reference, should give you a bit more information on the Jetex motors (there was also the bigger 100 and 200 motors but these were uncommon and I never saw one).

An Internet search revealed that these Jetex 50 & 100 size motors were of British make and, indeed, quite popular in the 1950s. The French journal *Modèle Magazine* ensured their popularity throughout the French-speaking part of Europe. Jetex powered models in the shape of flying saucers and plans on how to build them were available to all hobbyists. Most of these early models were lightweight craft made of balsa wood and cardboard, but in the aftermath of the big French saucer craze of 1954, any disc-shaped object may have been considered a tempting candidate to fire off into the sky. (A video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlUBZgVN2mY> shows that it takes only a small firecracker to fire a sizeable cooking pot tens of meters into the air.)

Below left is a magazine advertisement showing a boy ready to launch a "Jetex 50-powered Skyrocket" (*Popular Science*, July 1954). The image of the right, published in the February 1951 issue of *Model Aircraft*, shows a

saucer-shaped model for use with this type of rocket. The procedure was to attach the *Jetex* motor to the bottom of the model.



Fig. 56. Rockets and saucer rockets from the 1950s.

Even though small rockets became a popular toy in 1954, we found no photographic evidence from the fifties that documents rocket launches with saucer-shaped models. Still, placing a small rocket in a disc-shaped object that has a hole in the center, does not take great expertise. Muyldermans himself compared the aspect of the object to “black” or “dark green”, “like certain glass insulators”. Perhaps he used a combination of high-tension insulators of different sizes to create his famous flying saucer shots. The hole in the center of these discs would suit well for inserting a small rocket. On the other hand, these glass discs are quite heavy and it is difficult to conceive that they will maintain a horizontal position for more than one or two seconds.

What immediately strikes the eye when viewing the Namur photos is that the shape of the “saucer” (basically, several superimposed domes with something on top) reflects the typical design of many common objects from the mid-1950s. Take a look at these vintage metal desk lamps for example: both the shades and the bases of these lamps would make convincing flying saucers when detached from their stand and photographed against a sky background.



Fig. 57. Typical desk lamp designs from the 1950s

The saucer rocket theory is supported by several anomalies in Muyldermans' pictures. One is the very unusual composition of each shot. When confronted with an extraordinary event, even an amateur photographer will be inclined to also include a part of the landscape in the picture. (In the case of an unidentified flying object, it may give investigators an idea about the size of the object and its distance to the camera.) Muyldermans seems to have deliberately avoided this. The unidentified object is, indeed, abnormally close to the bottom frame in each shot, with respectively only 16%, 30% and again 16% of the total vertical image field used (the remaining part of the images showing an uninteresting, featureless sky.) We suspect a deliberate attempt at hiding what was going on closer by. Perhaps there were objects on the ground, or people standing around whose presence would have given away the true nature of the photographed object or objects.

The blurred grain may point in the same direction: perhaps prints from a larger collection of photos were re-photographed and reframed because details in the originals would otherwise have revealed the trick. On the other hand, the fact that Muyldermans opted for the more unusual portrait mode to capture the scene suggests that he knew he was photographing an object that would be ascending or descending within a relatively narrow horizontal field of view. We can think of no other reason to change the natural camera position from horizontal to vertical when photographing the sudden appearance of a horizontally oriented disc-shaped object (unless if the object is high in the sky and you want to photograph a part of the landscape as well, which Muyldermans clearly did not attempt.)

Conclusion

Our analysis of the Namur case revealed so many inconsistencies that one may ask oneself whether Vervisch or someone else at *Le Soir Illustré* may not have conspired with Muyldermans to concoct a hoax. In fact, false UFO stories had been endorsed by *Le Soir* in the months prior to its companion magazine publishing Muyldermans' photos. [9] A joint hoax would help understand how Vervisch got away with promoting these pictures as real without the photo experts of the magazine pointing out obvious anomalies like the blurred grain. It would also explain why two of the shots were published with an orientation that did not match that of the negative strip. Putting experts on stage who endorse the evidence but whose names are not mentioned, is a recurrent trade with journalistic hoaxes. This also goes for the "lost" negatives, and a vague mention of other UFO sightings in the region. [10] The phototechnical anomalies we considered above, together with the circumstances in which the pictures made their way into UFO lore (via a photographer who was in close contact with a fringe group of flying saucer enthusiasts), point towards a hoax. At present, the saucer rocket theory is believed to offer the best explanation for some of the visual characteristics of the photographs.

[1] According to Jacques Vallée, Roger Vervisch was one of the few French-language pioneers in amassing reports of flying saucers before 1958 ("The Pattern Behind the UFO Landings" in *The Humanoids*, Charles Bowen (editor), *Flying Saucer Review* Special Issue, October-November 1966, pages 8-9.)

[2] For example: Felix Zigel, "ЧТО ЭТО ТАКОЕ?", *Smena* (Moscow), No. 7, 1967, page 29. Jacques Vallée & Janine Vallée, *Challenge to Science. The UFO Enigma* (Neville Spearman, London), 1967, plate III; Julien Weverbergh & Ion Hobana, *UFO's in Oost en West* (Uitgeverij N. Kluwer, Deventer), 1971; G. de Turris & Sebastiano Fusco, *Obiettivo sugli UFO. Fotostoria dei dischi volanti* (Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome), 1975, page 126; J. Allen Hynek & Jacques Vallée, *The Edge of Reality* (Henry Regnery, Chicago), 1975, plates 7-9; Guillermo Roncoroni y Gustavo Álvarez, *Los OVNI y la evidencia fotográfica* (Cielosur, Buenos Aires), 1978, page 231; David C. Knight, *UFOs. A Pictorial History from Antiquity to the Present* (Mc Graw-Hill, New York), 1979, page 73; Michael Hesemann, *UFOs. Besucher aus dem Weltall* (Könemann, Köhl), 2001, pages 52-53, etc.

[3] Thinking the pictures that illustrate Aimé Michel's article in *Flying Saucer Review* (FSR) might be first- or second-generation copies, we requested a search in the photographic archives of FSR, currently owned by Archives For the Unexplained (AFU) in Sweden. But, given the huge pile of materials to review, the published prints have not been found yet (Clas Svahn, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, January 6, 2014.)

[4] It is believed that the astronomer who studied the pictures was Dr. Pierre Guérin, a close friend of Aimé Michel (Franck Boitte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, December 30, 2013.) Professor Guérin was a well-known French astrophysicist, but his scientific background did not keep him from labeling as 'authentic' UFO photographs that subsequently turned out to be hoaxes.

[5] Synoptic data extracted from "Observations du réseau synoptique belge", climatological data from *Bulletin Mensuel – Juin 1955 – Aperçu climatologique*. Institut Royal Meteorologique/Koninklijk Meteorologisch Instituut, Uccle, Brussels.

[6] It was Roger Lorthioir himself who told Franck Boitte that he knew Muyldermans. Lorthioir also said that Muyldermans practiced fortune telling and conducted "psychic experiments." (Franck Boitte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, December 9, 2013 and March 23, 2014.)

[7] There is an exception to this rule, namely when the targeted subject is almost overhead. In that circumstance, the camera orientation can be somewhere in between landscape and portrait. This may have been the case for picture #2, which is purported to show the object from below. It seems very unlikely, though, that such an unusual camera angle was also used for pictures #1 and #3, which show the saucer in profile. Even if the camera was held crooked for picture #2, this would have little bearing on the rest of our discussion.

[8] In an e-mail to one of the authors, British researcher Martin Shough points out that "The meteorologist in question must have been referring not to jet exhaust contrails, which are nucleated ice particles at altitudes much greater than 3,000m, but to an aerodynamic contrail. The latter is a true water vapor trail caused by the pressure drop in the wake of a high-performance aircraft. This effect can occur at any altitude where the relative humidity is close to 100%, or even supersaturated, but it prefers warmer moister air and this is usually nearer the ground. In these conditions the vapor clings close to the aircraft and evaporates behind it, so there is no persistent trail as such. But if the aircraft is just high enough to be at or near the freezing level then the condensed droplets can freeze. Then they can persist in the wake of the aircraft and even grow. Most commonly you see it in wing tip vortices where the pressure drop can be dramatic." In summary, the reason why the meteorologist settled for 3,000m to explain a persistent contrail is probably because that was the freezing level recorded by the day's radiosonde, but the essence is that the flocculent effect we see in Muylderman's photos does not resemble the usual aspect of a high-altitude contrail.

[9] One example of such a false story is that of gardener Martial Pipers who was driving with his bike near Briffoeil (Hainaut) and got his clothes partially burned when he came too close

to the blinding light of a landed spacecraft. The story was published in *Le Soir* of November 16, 1954. According to follow-up inquiries in 1971 and an article in the Flemish Sunday paper *Ons Zondagsblad*, Mr. Pipers was the victim of a journalistic prank played on him. Whether it was *Le Soir* itself who perpetrated the hoax is not clear.

[10] In his 1972 article in *Inforespace*, Patrick Ferryn writes: "Apparently, this object was also sighted from Namur and in the evening from Brussels". However, a search of the Belgian case files showed no additional sighting reports for June 5, 1955.

(References: Roger Vervisch, *Le Soir Illustré*, No. 1199, June 16, 1955, pages 6-7, and *Le Soir Illustré* No. 1448, March 24, 1960, page 46. Aimé Michel, *Science et Vie*, No. 516, September 1960, pages 94-95. Aimé Michel, *Flying Saucer Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, January-February 1961, pages 13-14. Patrick Ferryn, *Inforespace*, No. 4, 1972, pages 21-22. Christiane Piens, unpublished report, June 19, 1977. Adolf Schneider & Hubert Malthaner, *UFO-fotoboek*, Uitgeverij Ankh-Hermes bv, Deventer, 1977, pages 152-153. Patrick Ferryn, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, November 17, 2013. Marc Hallet, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, December 11 and 13, 2013. Jan van Eetvelt, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, May 7, 2014. Geoff Quick, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, June 18, 2014. Ronny Blomme, personal communications to Wim van Utrecht, July 11 and August 19, 2014. Martin Shough, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, August 23, 2014.)

Date: Thursday, December 19, 1957

Location: Grivegnée (Liège)

Time: ~18:00

Duration: 5 or 6 minutes

Assessment: Venus plus lens flare

On December 20, 1957, the Liège newspaper *La Meuse* ran a short article about two "flying saucer" sightings reported in Italy a couple of days earlier. One concerned a luminous, egg-shaped object that slowly crossed the sky and disappeared towards the Northeast, the other mentioned a round light with a comet-like tail, also heading in a Northeast direction.

Three days later, the same newspaper published a photograph taken by one of its employees, a certain Van Schoote, chief of the paper's photo services. A brief description informs that Mr. Van Schoote had observed "a luminous ball around which evolved an elongated object." The phenomenon reportedly crossed the sky in 5 or 6 minutes from the Northeast to the Southwest, during which passage Mr. Van Schoote managed to take a 20-second time exposure. The newspaper further claimed that the photograph had been submitted to the Royal Observatory at Uccle, Brussels, and that astronomers had found that the time at which the photo was taken ruled out the possibility of the object being "a Sputnik". A meteorite (*sic*) was also ruled out. In a final paragraph, *La Meuse* mentions that one of its reporters, Mr. J. Clément, spotted "the same ball of light" with his family, but that Mr. Clément "did not see the elongated object." A caption that accompanied the photograph read: "a close-up of the *still unidentified celestial phenomenon*."

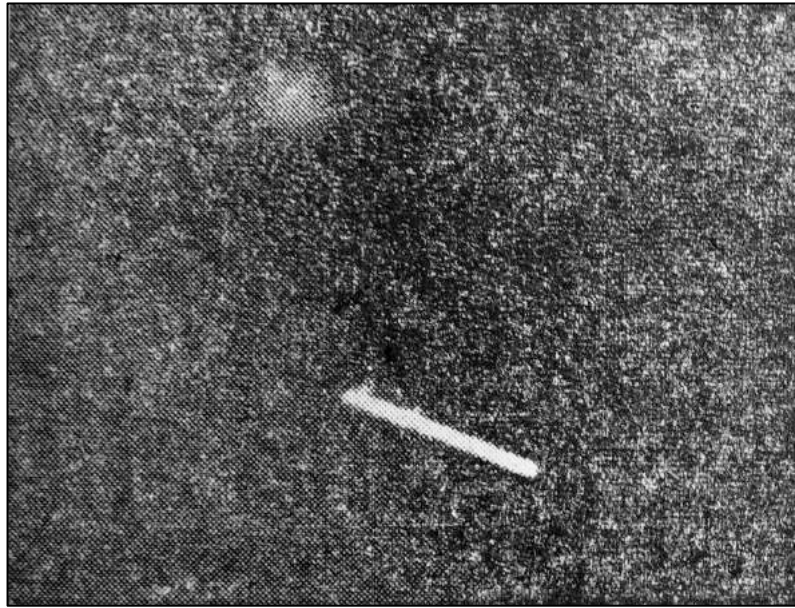


Fig. 58. December 19, 1957, Grivegnée. Mr. Van Schoote's picture as it was printed in *La Meuse*. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

The luminous bar in the picture strongly resembles a star- or planet trail. The obvious candidate would be Venus with a brightness of no less than -4.55 magnitude. At 6:00 p.m., the planet was in the Southwest at an altitude just over 13° , descending towards the west-southwestern horizon.



Fig. 59. The bright planet Venus in a *Stellarium* sky chart for December 19, 1957 at 6:00 p.m. The inset shows an example of a 30 sec time exposure of Venus. Courtesy of and photo by J.C. Victorio Uranga.

It is not clear what the circular spot close to the top frame of the picture is. Its fuzzy contours and the fact that it produced no trail during the 20-second exposure, suggest a lens flare (caused by a light source that is not visible in this cropped reproduction), or a printing or developing flaw. The appearance of accidental film or camera artifacts in a picture of Venus may have prompted the photographer to invent a story that incorporated what was often found in flying saucer reports of those days: a cigar-shaped mothership accompanied by ball- or disc-shaped satellite objects (if there really had been a **moving** luminous ball in the sky with a second object **evolving around it**, such a display would have shown up very differently in a 20-second exposure.) The fact that Mr. Clément did not see the elongated object but only a “ball of light” seems to corroborate the theory that the ball he witnessed and the white bar in Van Schoote’s picture were actually one and the same object: the very bright Venus that should not have gone unnoticed by anyone watching the southwestern sky that evening.

(References: Juan Carlos Victorio Uranga, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, October 23, 2014. Others, as noted.)

Date: Monday, January 2, 1961

Time: nighttime

Location: Bruges (West Flanders)

Duration: unknown

Assessment: insufficient information

Between 1975 and 1980, in consecutive issues of the British magazine *UFO Register*, edited by Frances Copeland of Contact International UFO Research (CIUFOR), J. Bernard Delair, E. Cox and R. Twine presented the first known catalog of UFO photographs from around the world. The catalog provides only minimal data for each case but it does include all published references known to the compilers. An entry for January 2, 1961 mentions a “fiery globe” photographed over Bruges city during the night. For this entry, however, the source is not disclosed. Moreover, no reference to such a photograph could be found in any of the Belgian UFO catalogs (Simons/Bonabot, Vander Elst, Van Overmeire, Boitte), nor is there any information on a 1961 photograph from Bruges in the archives of the country’s major research groups (GESAG, SOBEPS, CAELESTIA). In addition, the picture could not be located in the personal files of Bernard Delair, President of CIUFOR, when these were donated to the Swedish Archives for the Unidentified (AFU). The entry in the CIUFOR catalog is therefore believed to be in error. With too little information available, it is impossible to even verify the existence of the photograph, let alone identify the phenomenon that was supposedly photographed.

(References: *UFO Register*, Vol. 7, Data Research, Oxford, 1976. Clas Svahn (AFU), personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, October 31, 2014.)

Date: June 1965
Location: Duffel (Antwerp)
Time: daytime
Duration: not applicable
Special Features: unseen by photographer
Assessment: developing flaw

Some time between 2007 and 2014, Mr. Danny Couwels, a student of local history and geography from the municipality of Duffel, sent the following photograph to a popular U.S. web site devoted to UFOs (ufocasebook.com). In an accompanying e-mail, Mr. Couwels commented: "While I was scanning some old negatives (these are from June 1965), I discovered this spherical object on one of two almost identical photos. They must have been taken within a few seconds." Mr. Couwels added that the photos, which show the village's junior soccer team, were taken by a local press reporter. The mail itself is no longer on the site.



Fig. 60. June 1965, Duffel. The unknown "object" is encircled.
Borrowed from <http://www.ufocasebook.com/teamphoto2.jpg>

The anomaly in this image is a grey circular shape above the players and the team staff on the soccer field. Judging from the unconcerned attitude of the people in the picture, it is our guess that this “object” was not physically present when the photo was taken. The other photograph, taken instants before or after, does not show anything unusual (this second soccer team portrait can be viewed at <http://www.ufocasebook.com/teamphoto1.jpg>).

The grey circular spot is almost certainly a bubble of air that got stuck on the negative when it was submerged in the developer liquid, as in the example below. The picture’s low resolution (640x426) does not permit closer examination, but the similarities between the round blob and this common film artifact are clear.

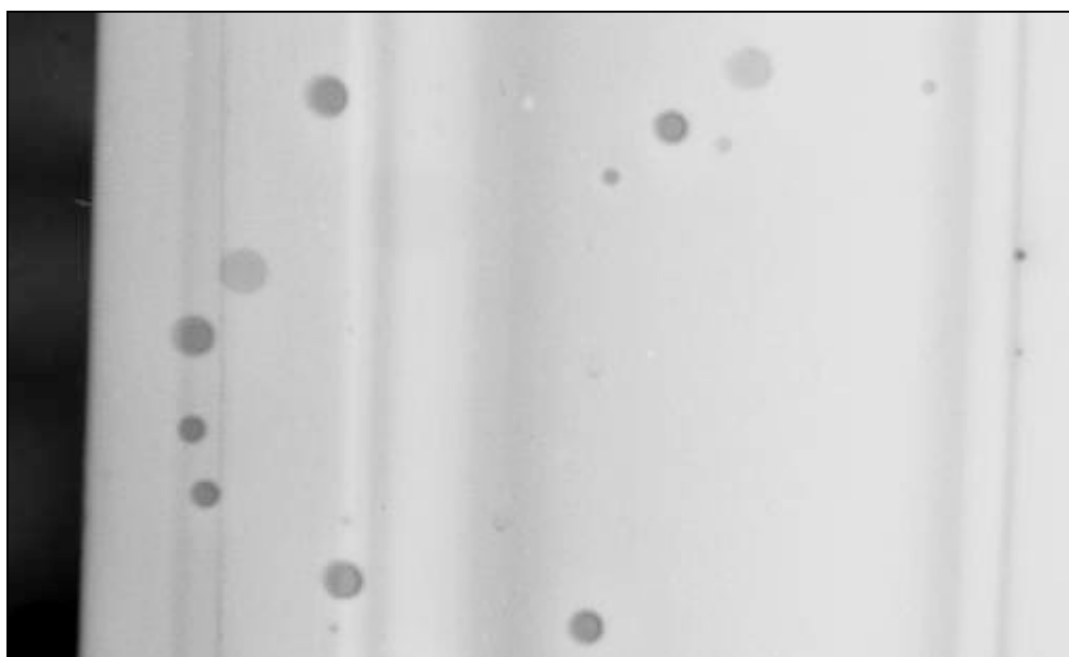


Fig. 61. Air bells. Cropped enlargement from a photo taken by Maximiliano Braun.
Borrowed from
<http://photo.net/black-and-white-photo-film-processing-forum/00PTSo>

(References: as noted.)

Date: Tuesday, June 25, 1967

Location: De Panne (West Flanders)

Time: afternoon

Duration: fraction of a second

Special Features: negative lost

Assessment: camera flash reflection on environmental medium?

In its June 29, 1967 edition, the Brussels-based Dutch language newspaper *Het Volk* published an unusual picture under the heading "Fireball over the Sea". The accompanying text read as follows:

This is not a surrealistic painting, but a photographic recording submitted by Mr. J. Valgaeren from Grimbergen. He offers the following explanation: "Sunday afternoon I was in De Panne, when a short but fierce storm came up. The sky, which was an eerie black, contrasted strongly with the sea, which suddenly appeared milky white. I wanted to take a picture and when I pushed the release button, I saw a flash. While developing the film and the picture, I noticed the weird phenomenon that was probably a fireball with a luminous trail behind it. The exposure was made at 1/500 of a second with a light orange filter." Definitely a unique plate.



Fig. 62. June 25, 1967, De Panne. Photo by Jos Valgaeren, as published in *Het Volk*.

The background info given in this brief article is all we know about this incident. A better, though more cropped version of the photograph appeared in a 1984 Flemish book that discusses the physical and medical aspects of lightning. The book gives no further details, just the photo with a caption that says "ball lightning".

Passing judgment on photographic images with poor background information is difficult.

Having checked the weather data, we found that June 25, 1967 was one of the darkest days in Belgian weather history. After a hot and sunny day, a cold

front had rolled in from the Atlantic Ocean spawning a tornado of F3 strength inland. The tornado hit the village of Oostmalle, Antwerp, at 4:10 p.m., destroying most of its buildings and injuring hundreds of people. In the following hour, two more F3 tornados caused damages and deaths in The Netherlands (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oostmalle>).



Fig. 63. A more detailed reproduction of the photo published in Verstreken & Schwagten, 1984.

Presumably, Verstreken & Schwagten labeled the photo an example of ball lightning on the sole basis that it depicts a luminous phenomenon photographed during an upcoming storm. With the existence of free-floating ball lightning still in dispute to this day, their conclusion should be considered as purely intuitive.

The authors consulted Mark Stenhoff, a UK physicist with a long-time interest in ball lightning (BL) reports. Stenhoff shared our initial doubts about the photo showing such an event and comments: “The quality of the photograph is poor and the details spare, and it is impossible to eliminate a photographic developing flaw, or a number of natural or artificial phenomena.” We also solicited the opinion of a Russian expert on ball lightning, Prof. Vladimir Bychkov. He and a colleague, Prof. A.I. Nikitin, who specializes in BL photographs and videos, precluded ball lightning and concluded that the image is more likely to represent “a meteorite which left luminescent material behind it”.

Taking into account the apparent size of the “fireball”, we consider the passage of a bright meteor even more unlikely than ball lightning. A meteor of this magnitude would undoubtedly have produced numerous additional reports from other coastal areas in Belgium and neighboring countries. A re-entry of space debris is to be discarded on the same grounds. Moreover, the object is depicted in front of a cloud-deck, meaning that, if it is a true flying object, it must have been relatively close by.

A water drop illuminated by the camera's (automatic?) flash seems a better candidate to explain this anomaly (remember that Mr. Valgaeren “saw a flash” when he pushed the release button). The photograph below shows the typical comet-like aspect of a flash-lit raindrop. [1]



Fig. 64. Image borrowed from <http://www.baptistboard.com/threads/the-bible-the-supernatural-revisited.97869/>

The fact that the (hypothetical) water drop in Valgaeren’s photo appears to be moving in a nearly horizontal plane, would indicate that we are not dealing with a raindrop as such. It is more likely an isolated water drop splashed up from the sea or blown towards the beach from the approaching thunderstorm. Asked to comment on an early version of this summary, FOTOCAT’s photo consultant Andrés Duarte replied:

I think it is a small object carried by the wind that passed near the camera and reflected the light from the flash. Your text [Referring

to an early unedited draft of the present case summary] *says that the image is different from some examples of water droplets illuminated by the flash, but it does not necessarily have to be a drop of water, and the appearance of this kind of reflection may vary depending on various factors. One possible evidence in favor of this hypothesis is that there appears to be a faint dark wake to the right of the reflection, which may correspond to the passage of the object before being illuminated by the flash.*

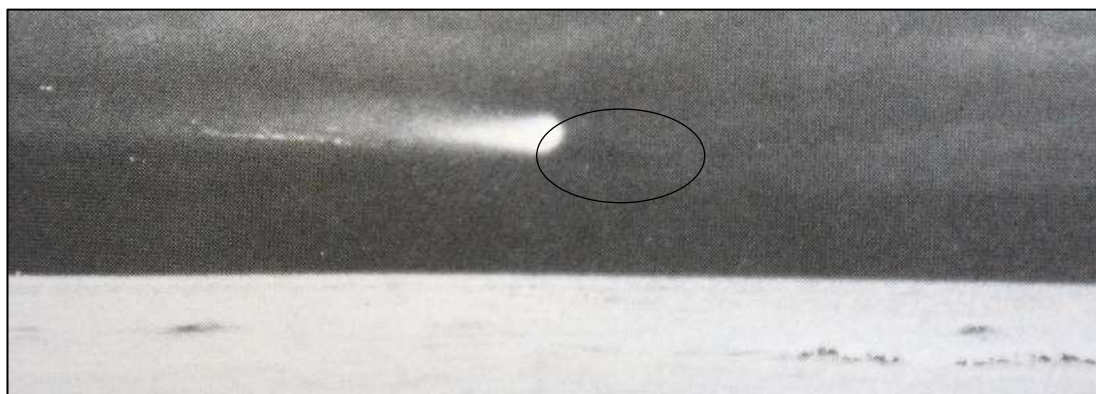


Fig. 65. Cropped enlargement of Mr. Valgaeren's photograph. The darker area referred to by Duarte is marked with an ellipse.

Post scriptum

In early 2017, during a telephone conversation with one of the authors (WVU), the daughter of the photographer informed us that her father had passed away in 1985 at the age of 69. Although she remembered the incident well, Mrs. Valgaeren was unable to locate the original negative. She is fairly certain that the original black & white negative and all other documents pertaining to the photograph were destroyed because of moisture problems in the basement where her father's photos used to be stored.

[1] Readers may wonder why the raindrops in this shot seem to travel upward instead of downward. This false impression is created by the duration of the flash, which was shorter than the interval during which the shutter remained open. The result is that the drops were illuminated more intensely at the beginning of their photographed path, i.e. at the moment the flash fired. A more technical *exposé* on "tailed orbs" can be found at:

<http://www.assap.ac.uk/newsite/htmlfiles/Tailed%20orbs.html>

(References: F. Verstreken & K. Schwagten, *Blikseminslag. Fysische & medische aspecten*, Kempische Boekhandel, Retie, 1984, page 59, Plate 4. M. Stenhoff, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, March 15, 1974. V. Bychkov, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, November 16, 2014. Andrés Duarte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, January 10, 2017. Jeanne Valgaeren, telephone conversation with Wim van Utrecht, January 19, 2017. Others, as noted.)

Date: Between mid-1960s and early 1970s
Location: Beveren-Leie (West Flanders)
Time: daytime
Duration: unknown
Assessment: fake

The photo below (a 12.5x8.5cm print) was found in a box that contained several other UFO-related items from the past and was handed to Frederick Delaere of the Belgisch UFO-meldpunt (Belgian UFO Reporting Centre) by former ufologist Marc Broux. Handwritten on the back of the print are these coordinates:

Debode Jozef, Grote Heerweg 73/4, 8749 Beveren-Leie, Waregem.

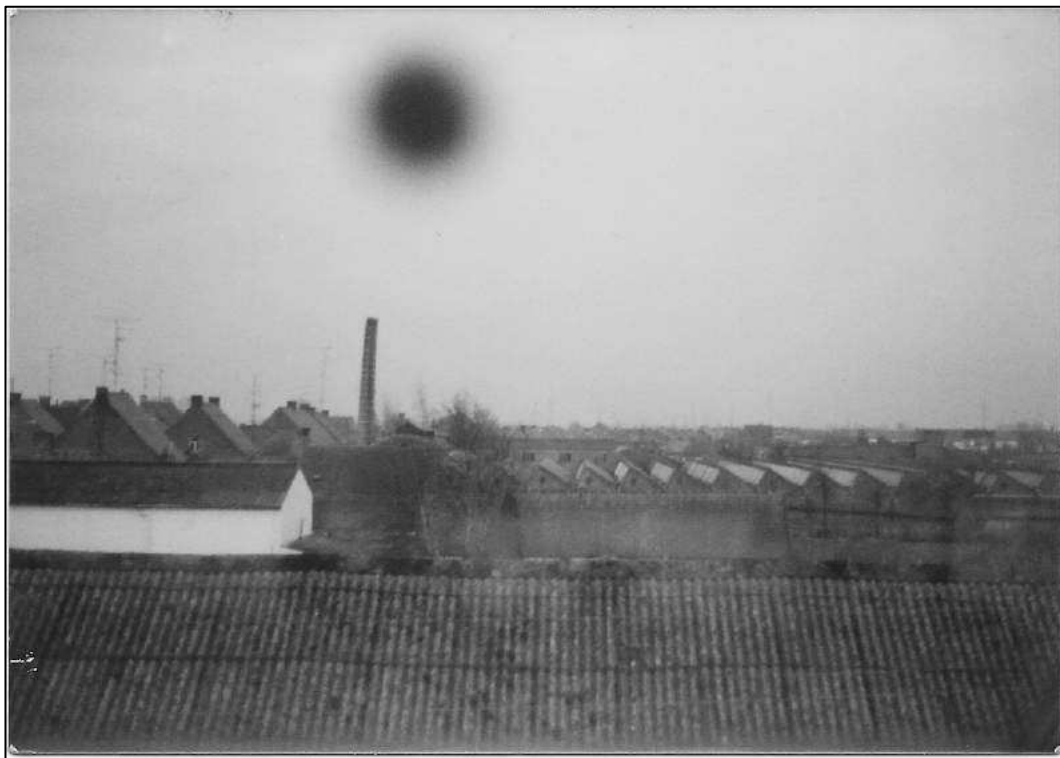


Fig. 66. 1960s-1970s, Beveren-Leie. Photo by Jozef Debode.

No other details are known, not even the year. From the old-style TV aerials on the roofs, our estimation would be that the picture was taken between mid-1960s and early 1970s. A virtual visit to Beveren-Leie using Google Earth revealed that the photo was taken from a spot very close to (if not at) the address mentioned on the back of the print (presumably it was taken from a window on the second floor of one of the average-sized family houses that

border the Grote Heerweg). In the shot there is a dark circular patch. We suspect that this anomaly is an out-of-focus image of either a circular stain or a piece of paper that was pasted onto a windowpane. A small piece of round paper confetti, for instance, will produce a very similar result, as is shown in the photo below taken by one of the authors from his apartment window in Antwerp.



Fig. 67. Simulation photo by Wim van Utrecht.

(References: as noted.)

Date: 1969 (approximate year)
Location: Brussels (Brussels Capital Region)
Time: daytime
Duration: not applicable
Special Feature: unseen by photographer
Assessment: film or developing flaw

The French-language edition of the Belgian magazine *Panorama*, issue number 20 of May 13-19, 1969, published an article on page 61 by Nicole Lecluse presenting the work of Belgian pioneer ufologist Jean Gérard Dohmen. Below is one of the pictures that illustrated the article:

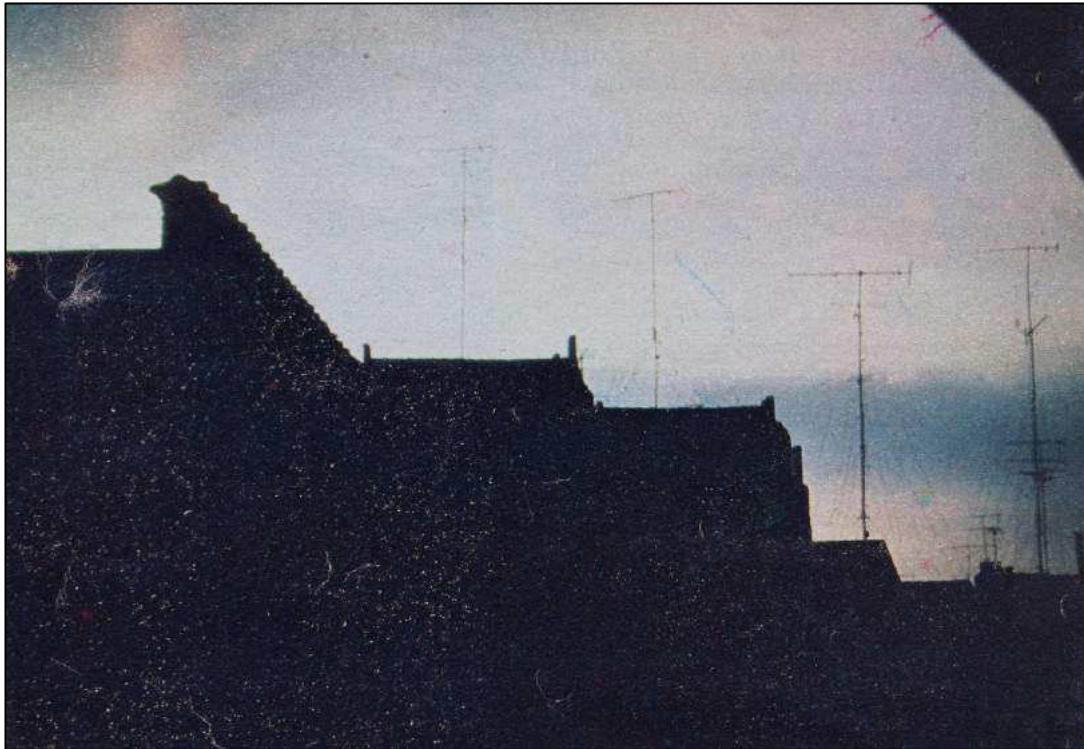


Fig. 68. 1969, Brussels. Borrowed from *Panorama*.

The only information given is in the following brief caption: “This red coloration in the sky over Brussels is believed to testify to the passage of an *M.O.C.*”, *M.O.C.* being the French acronym for *Mystérieux Objet Céleste*, a term coined by well-known UFO philosopher Aimé Michel. We assume that the red coloration that is alluded to is the crudely round pinkish blob in the upper left corner of the photograph.

The picture shows a clouded scene backlit by a low sun. It has a general rosy tone all over the image. In addition to the pink chromatic patch (marked with a black arrow in the contrast-enhanced version of the photo below), there are similar but smaller reddish color anomalies in other parts of the image (marked with red arrows). Besides that, we also detect a blue-green blob in the bottom right quarter (green arrow), a series of linear scratches (like the one marked with the blue arrow), two purple fibrous structures in the upper right corner (purple arrow) and numerous smaller sharply defined specks.

The sum of these artificial anomalies indicates that the film was processed in an unprofessional manner (pink stains on prints, for instance, are sure indications of inadequate fixing.)

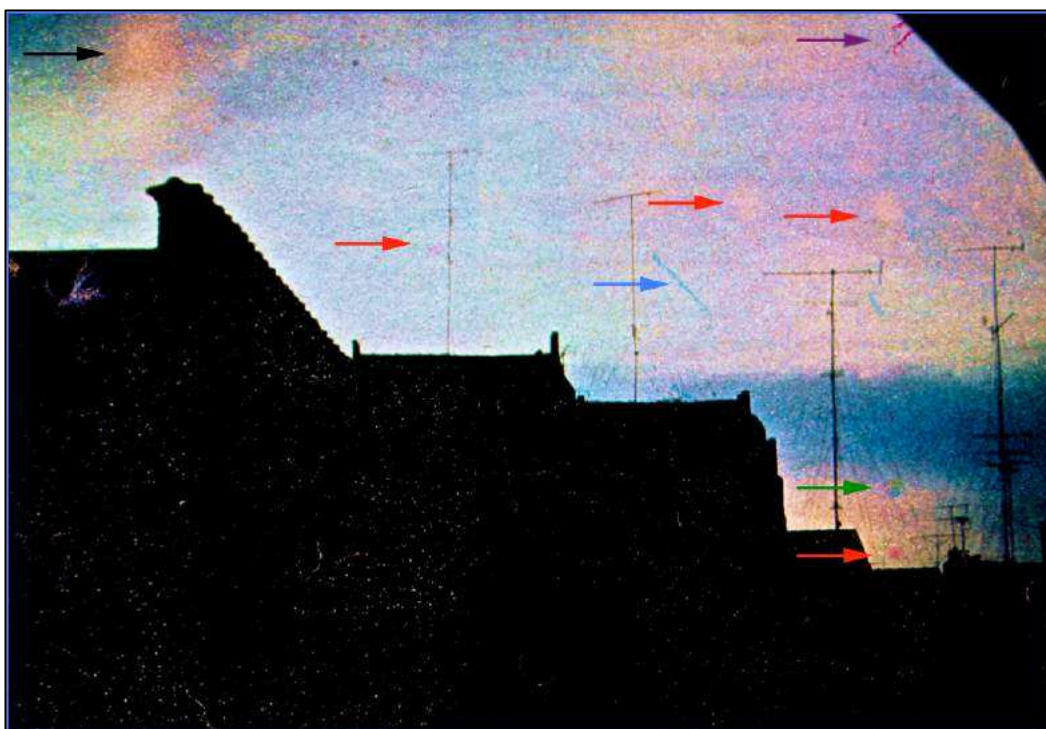


Fig. 69. Contrast enhanced version of the photograph.

An alternative explanation for the rosy patches in the background sky is that they result from a low sun illuminating the lowest segments of a vast cloud deck. However, the systematic round to square shape of the pink blots, and the fact that some of them are of a darker color than the rest of the cloudscape, make us lean toward a film or developing problem.

From the caption that accompanies the photo, it is impossible to infer if an unusual sky phenomenon was also witnessed with the naked eye. But even if that were the case, the sighted object would probably have been unrelated to the reddish blob, because it is nowhere near the center of the picture frame and therefore unlikely to have been the target of the photograph.

(References: as noted.)

Date: 1969 (no exact date known)
Location: Zemst (Flemish Brabant)
Time: daytime
Duration: unknown
Assessment: fake

On May 8, 2011 reporter Amy Baudalet, of the Belgian monthly magazine *De Zemstenaar*, contacted Flemish ufologist Frederick Delaere asking him for

any back-up information concerning an unusual postcard she had found. The card displays a picture of a UFO with a typical disc shape. On the back, there was the following caption: "13. Zemst. UFO above the church field/1969, published by VAB Zemst-Weerde-Eppegem (A. ver Elst, Veldenstraat 8, 2940 Zemst), 1974."

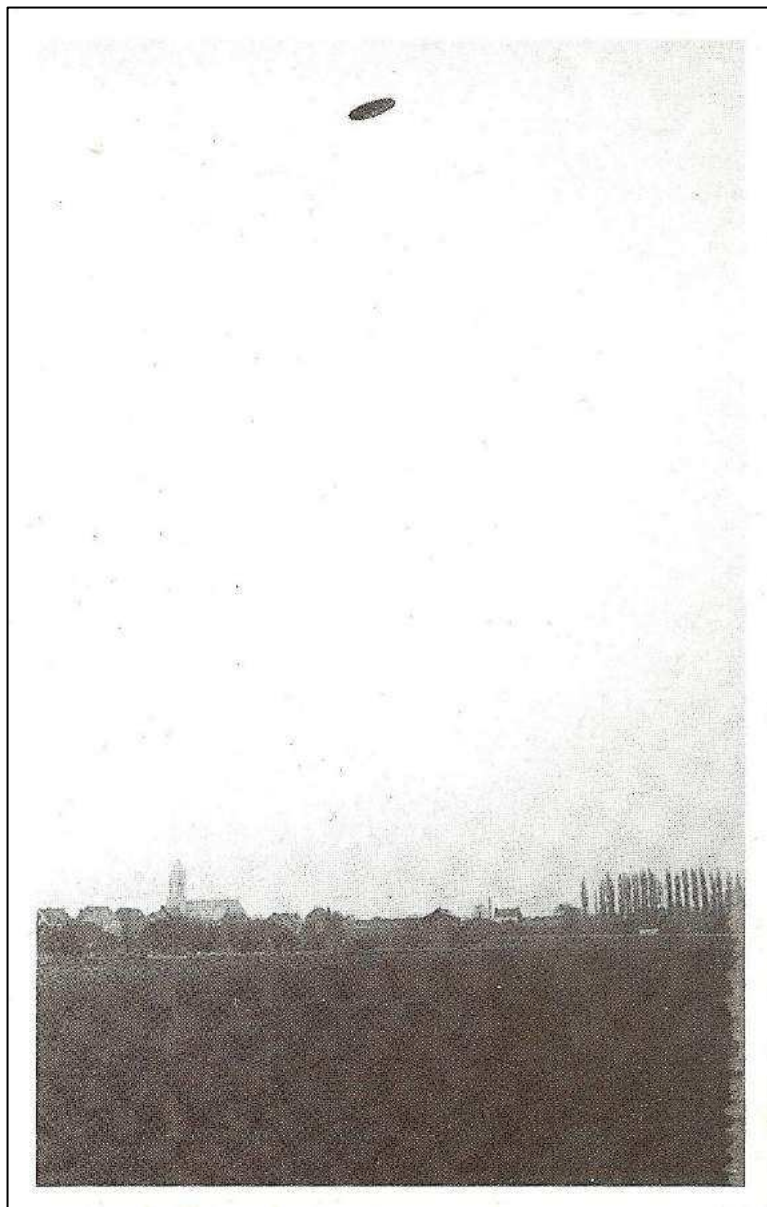


Fig. 70. 1969, Zemst. The flying disc in the postcard. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

Mrs. Baudalet and coauthor WVU established that the photograph was taken from a field a few hundred meters South of the church of Zemst, a municipality that comprises, among others, the villages of Weerde and Eppegem. Further attempts to find out more about the picture failed. There is no record of the photograph in the files of Belgian UFO students and

groups, nor is it mentioned in any catalog (Simons/Bonabot, Vander Elst, Van Overmeire, Boitte).

An new article on the mystery postcard, written by Mrs. Baudelet for the August 2011 issue of *De Zemstenaar*, did not yield anything new either.

In 2016 a copy of the postcard was put on sale at www.delcampe.net, a Belgian site where collectors of (mainly) coins and postcards can buy and sell items. The auction's price was 7.50 €, not much for a genuine flying saucer photograph! The absence of corroborative witnesses, the fact that no local ufologist had heard about the photo before we contacted them, plus the characteristic tilted position of the object (which is typical for hand-thrown models) are three aspects of the case that suggest a fake. Also, the image of the disc appears to be unaffected by atmospheric perspective: not only is the black tone of the object darker than the surrounding landscape, its contour is also sharper than that of the trees in the background. This implicates that we are probably looking at a small object close to the camera.

(References: Amy Baudelet, <http://tinyurl.com/pgs84k7> Auction item—bought by F. Delaere—was in <http://tinyurl.com/poaz2q3> Others, as noted.)

Date: Wednesday, August 6, 1969

Location: Jemappes (Hainaut)

Time: ~22:00

Duration: 45-60 seconds

Special Features: repeater witness

Assessment: fake

At the end of March 1970, in a letter sent to the Belgian research group LAET, Mr. Alfred Demouselle of Jemappes related that on several occasions during 1969 he had observed “luminous objects behaving in a bizarre way.” On one such occasion, Mr. Demouselle was able to photograph what he described as “a very big yellow ball of light (two times the apparent diameter of Venus).” The ball had fuzzy edges, Demouselle wrote, and he remembered that, despite the late hour, the sky had been “very clear with a yellow pink band” still visible near the horizon. 8x30 binoculars were used to observe the phenomenon as it moved slowly in a straight line from Northwest to Northeast just over the rooftops in front of him. The phenomenon remained in view for 45 to 60 seconds, during which its luminosity and size diminished quickly.

Mr. Demouselle further alleges that, when the film came back from the lab, he was surprised to find that he had captured not one trail, but two. This second trail is even more outspoken than the first, has a wavy appearance and runs from the top left corner of the image, over the center, to the top right corner.

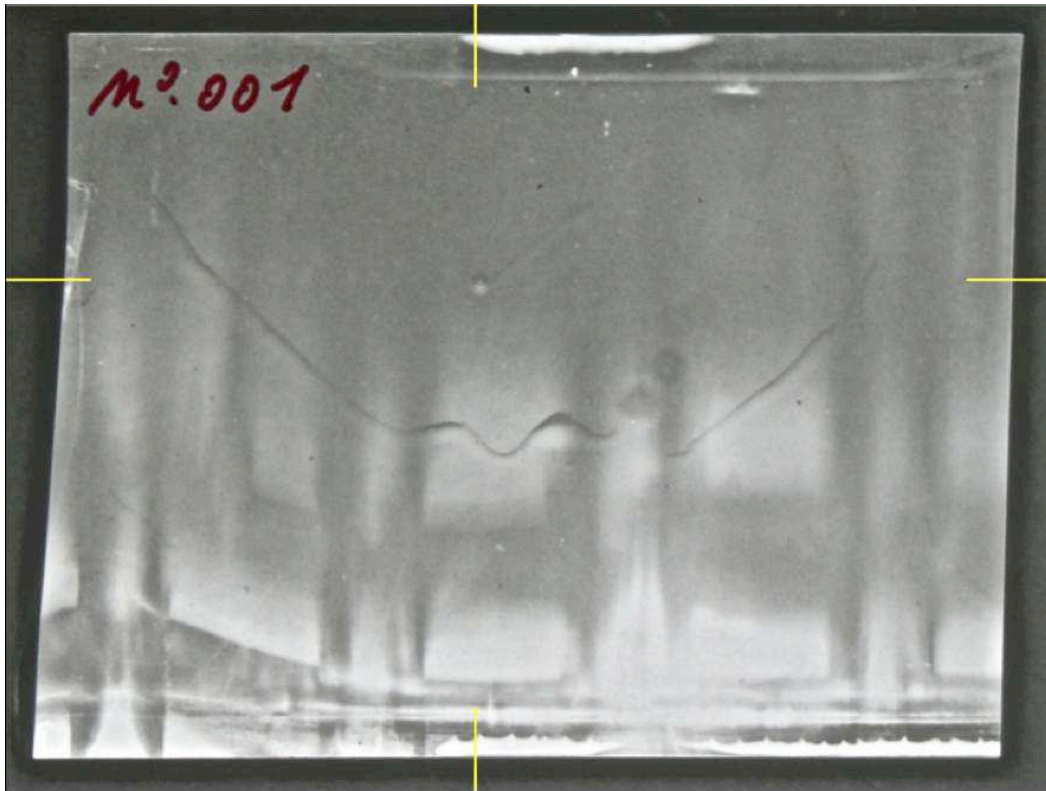


Fig. 71. August 6, 1969, Jemappes. Positive contact print made directly from the negative that accompanied Mr. Demouselle's letter. According to the witness/photographer, the unknown object is the spherical dot in the upper half of the picture (marked with yellow lines by the authors). The obliquely upward running trail on its right is supposed to depict the path it covered. Photo by Alfred Demouselle. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

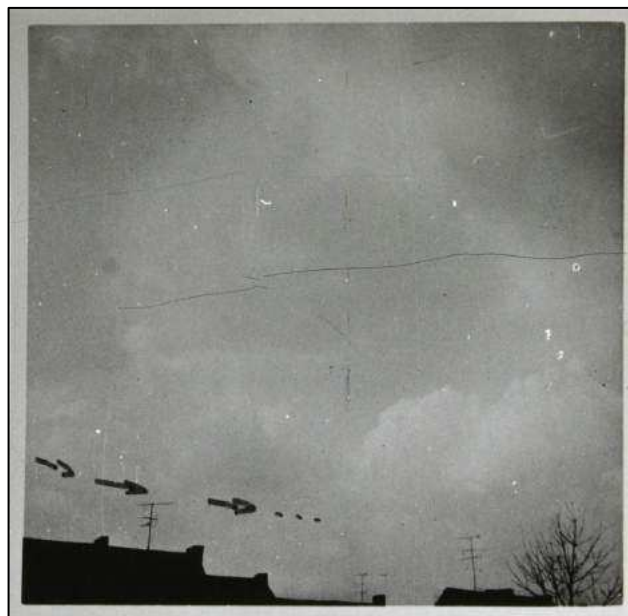


Fig. 72. Picture taken by the witness at the sighting location. The arrows, added by the Mr. Demouselle himself, denote the position and the direction of travel of the luminous ball. Photo by Alfred Demouselle. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

Mr. Demouselle, who wondered if the sinusoidal trail might have been caused by a second unknown object, included the following sketch with the relative positions of the two mystery trails. He denoted them as (1) and (2) and added an arrow and the word “déplacement” to indicate the direction in which the unknown object had traveled.

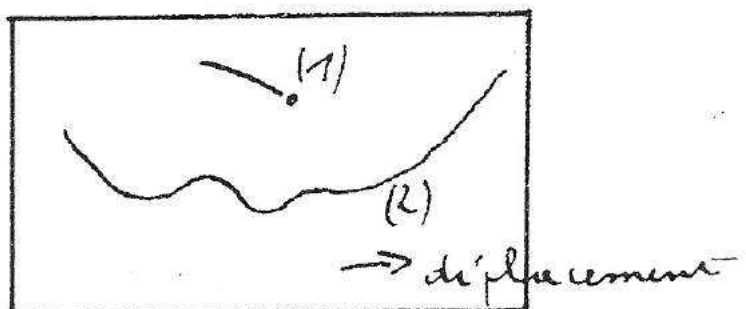


Fig. 73. Witness sketch.

Asked by LAET investigator G. Delcorps why his sketch appears to be a reversed version of the photograph, Mr. Demouselle responded somewhat cryptically: “Yes, I reversed the scene, simply because I thought the object I saw was the one with the short trajectory [trail (1)]. So the reason why I present the sketch the other way round, is to show that this object travelled in an opposite direction than the object I saw.”

From the case file that we obtained via Belgian researcher Jacques Bonabot, the authors collected the following additional info about the camera and picture:

- Camera used: *Zeiss Ikon*
- Lens: accordion style, f/75mm; aperture set at 4.5; shutter speed: B mode
- Image format: 60x60mm
- The camera was pointed towards the Northwest (azimuth: 320°) and 30° upward
- A professional processed the film at Jemappes by using a developer tank for 30 films. The technique was to suspend the films in a vertical frame between two clips.

In a technical report dated August 13, 1970 Mr. Delcorps summarized his findings. Attached to this 3-page text was the image presented on the next page as Fig. 74.

Scrutinizing the evidence, Delcorps revealed several more anomalies. He numbered and interpreted them as follows:

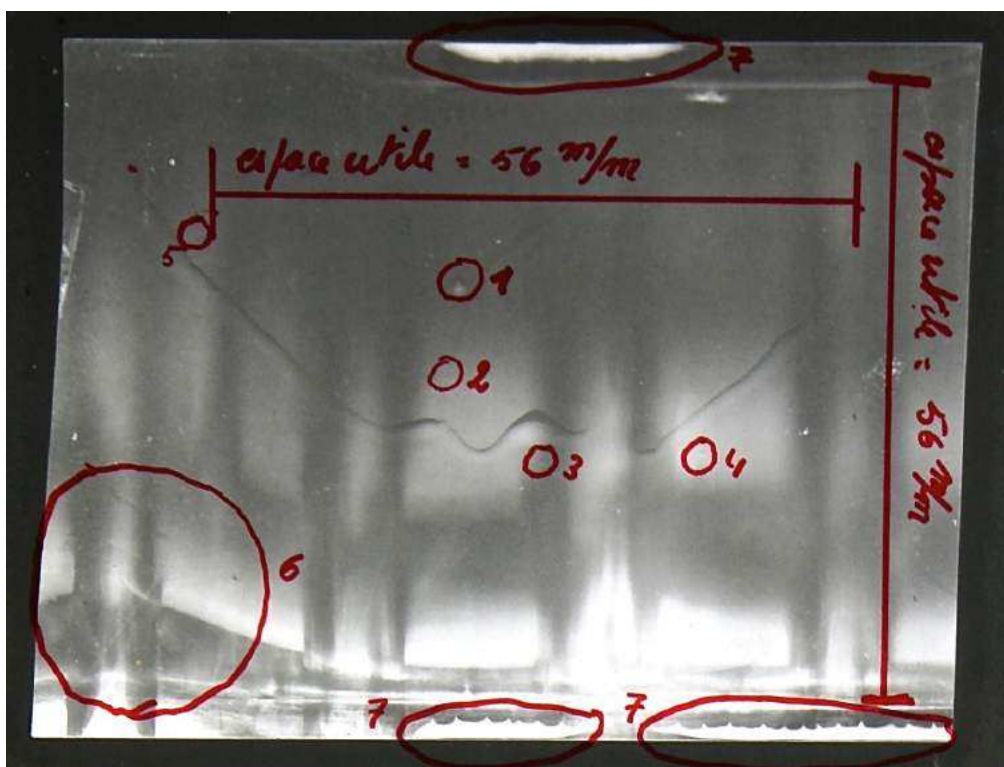


Fig. 74. The Jemappe 1969 photo with indications added by G. Delcorps

(1) denotes the anomaly that the witness believes shows the visually sighted unidentified light.

(2) to (6) mark areas with spherical anomalies identical to the anomaly mentioned in #1 above. [Actually, there are many more white specks in this image, but the majority of these can be identified as dust particles on the negative. The anomalies marked by Delcorps distinguish themselves from the other specks because of their three-dimensional aspect.]

(7) concern areas showing intact gelatin layers, meaning that these borders were attached to a surface that prevented the reactive fluids to reach these areas.

The LAET investigator made some additional remarks, which we paraphrased as follows:

- The rectangular format of the provided image is not compatible with a 60x60mm format (note that the photo taken at the sighting location does have a square format).
- The orientation of the trail attributed to the unidentified light is different from what was observed visually (reversing the image, of course, does not alter that fact).

- The rooftops or antennas are not distinguishable in the picture despite the fact that the unidentified light was placed very close to the rooftops in the photograph that was purportedly taken with the same camera, from the same position and in the same direction.
- According to the witness, the vertical and horizontal streaks did not show up on any other images of the film roll (Demouselle believes that these streaks may have been caused by some sort of magnetic field or weird polarization effect).

Delcorps concluded that the photo holds no scientific value whatsoever and that there is nothing strange about the picture that cannot be accounted for by development flaws or accidental exposure to light. LAET's final verdict on the case ran: "probablement canular" (probably fake).

While it is obvious that what the photo shows is unrelated to the visual sighting, we fail to see how film flaws and an accidental exposure to light can explain the anomalous features in the image. Film artifacts usually show little or no three-dimensional detail, whereas the sinusoidal trail has a distinct, physical appearance of a fluid that flowed downward and hardened halfway the image. The spherical anomalies, too, have an illuminated side and a dark side, not unlike tiny bumps or pits created by pressing a pointed object against some half-hard material. Both types of anomalies appear as physically distinct structures that are illuminated by the same light source. We illustrated this in the cropped enlargement below.

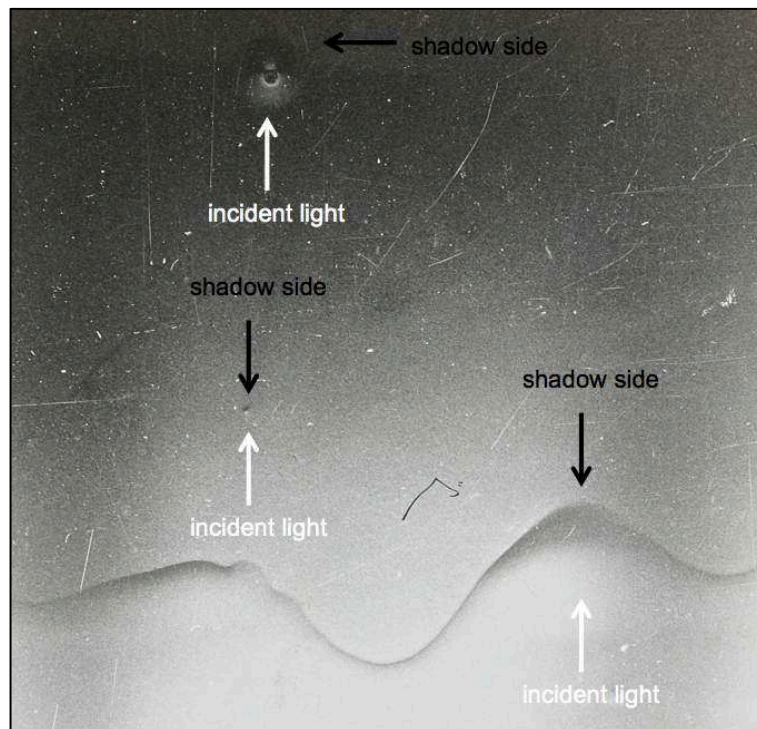


Fig. 75. Cropped enlargements with indications added by the authors.

If these features were film damages, then it is also difficult to understand why investigator Delcorps was unable to physically detect them on the negative. Both the “pinholes” and the wavy, rib-like edge of hardened fluid should have been easy to detect by simply moving one’s finger over the negative or by viewing it under low-angle light with a magnifying glass.

Photo expert Andrés Duarte offers a more likely interpretation of Demouselle’s picture and thinks we are looking at “the photo of a container of corrugated plate glass with liquid, where you observe everything one would expect from such a thing: liquid dripping, menisci, refraction effects, etc. Aside from the scratches and other typical defects of any photo, all other supposed objects, lights, trails, anomalies, lines, etc. mentioned in the report are only effects of glass and liquid. I see no unusual defect in the film. The two ‘pinholes’ that are indicated in the enlargement are glass defects. Being a well-focused image at close range, it is clear that the picture was taken in a completely deliberate manner. I would not expect a close photo in good focus if taken in an impromptu way”. Our Chilean correspondent added two images that illustrate these effects:

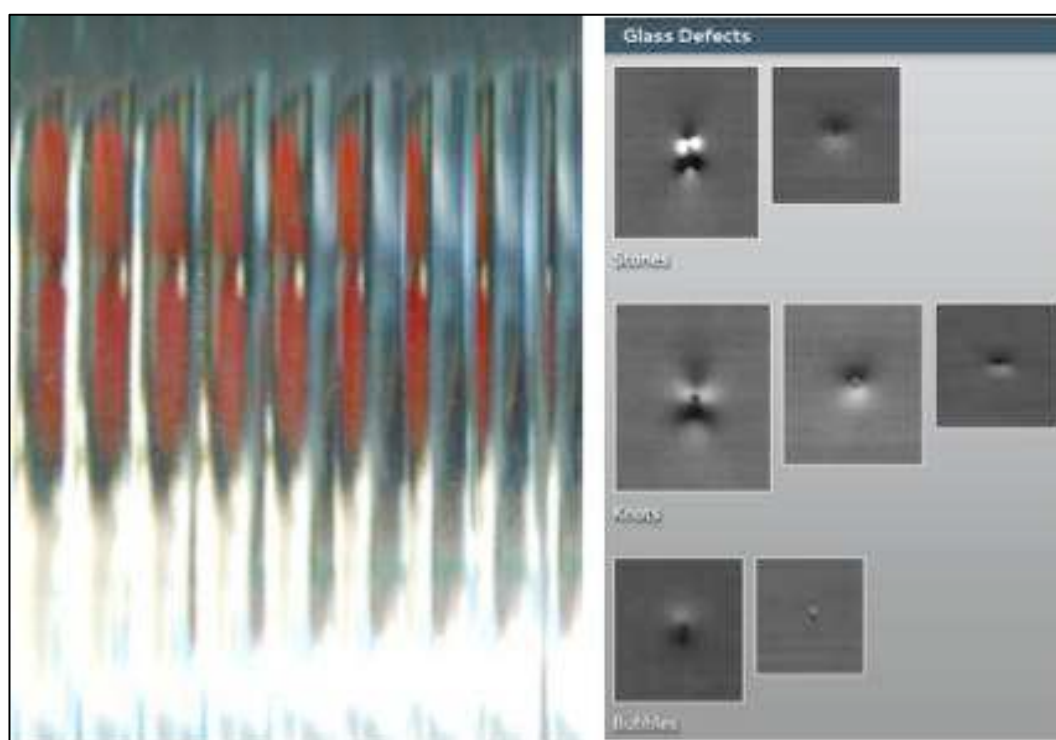


Fig. 76. LEFT: photo of a corrugated glass plate.

Borrowed from <http://articulo.mercadolibre.com.ar/MLA-534372298-vidrio-acanalado-medida-20-x-30-cm-solo-envios-JM>).

RIGHT: examples of common glass defects.

Borrowed from <http://www.weco.com/uploads/images/defects/combined-glass.jpg>

The key issue in this case is that the witness presented a photograph in a format that is different from what his camera should have produced, and with

an image that shows something completely alien to what it is supposed to show. Obviously, a luminous object moving in a straight line from NW to NE whilst diminishing in size and brightness should have looked very different on a B&W print. The image we expect to see is that of a white, nearly horizontal line, thicker on the left than on the right, and with the right end pointing slightly downwards. It is clear that what is on the picture is totally irreconcilable with a light moving through the night sky. The inevitable conclusion is that either Demouselle himself, or someone at the photo lab (Demouselle's letters to Delcorps suggest that the people from the lab knew of his unusual hobby) perpetrated a prank by linking an abnormal-looking photograph to an uninteresting UFO report.

(References: A. Demouselle, letters to G. Delcorps, March 30 and April 10, 1970. G. Delcorps, letter to A. Demouselle, April 7, 1970, and investigative report No. P.5/70, LAET, Liège, August 31, 1970. Andrés Duarte, personal communications to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, December 4, 11 and 14, 2014.)

Date: Saturday, July 25, 1970
Location: Baasrode, Ghent (East Flanders)
Time: 23:25
Duration: 3 hours
Special Features: repeater witness
Assessment: crimp marks on negatives

Following the publicity that surrounded the pictures he took near Bruges in 1972 and 1973 [1], repeater witness Werner Bruyneel was contacted by several people who claimed to have taken similar photos of unidentified aerial phenomena. One of the letter writers was a certain "Emm." [Emmanuel] Stassijns from the municipality of Baasrode, just East of the city of Dendermonde. We quote from a long handwritten letter Mr. Stassijns addressed to Bruyneel on October 9, 1973:

It is now over three years ago. One night, while I was observing through my telescope, I noticed, at a given moment, between the stars γ and β Lyrae, an arc-shaped, luminous object that moved slowly. Filled with excitement I ran indoors to fetch my camera and, if possible, take a picture of this strange object. By the time my camera was mounted on the tripod, the craft had already travelled past α Lyrae. That is when I took a first shot of this weird craft. I intended to take a couple more, but my hopes were quickly dashed as clouds were drawing in and blocked the apparition from view. It literally broke my heart! That wonderful night, I went outside over and over again hoping for the sky to clear up! To my greatest joy, this happened around three o'clock! And... the spaceship was still there! It radiated a yellow-white light and it stood motionless in the sky. At that time, I took the picture I am

hereby enclosing. I kept observing the object for a long time after that. I had no idea what was still in store, because several minutes later I was confronted with a reality that knocked me off my socks! Suddenly, I saw the craft spin around its vertical axis! First to the left, then to the right. This maneuver happened slowly and at the same time the colors of the spaceship changed from yellow-white to ruddy-red!! In a split second the vehicle suddenly started to move in a straight line with a tremendous speed!! All of a sudden, this speed increased in an abrupt manner! And during this incredible maneuver the craft—without dropping its speed!—made a 90 degrees turn and shot straight up into space!! Someone who's never experienced something like that cannot understand what that means!! That same night I made a report of everything that had happened and sent it, accompanied by two enlarged shots of the craft, to Mr. De Meyer, Chairman of the Vereniging Voor Sterrenkunde.

Enclosed with the above-cited letter was a short undated note, which Mr. Stassijns had received from Harry De Meyer, chairman of the Vereniging voor Sterrenkunde (VVS), the largest association for amateur astronomers in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. The note informed Mr. Stassijns that his letter, which was dated August 31, 1970 (and therefore not “sent to Mr. De Meyer that same night” but about a month later), had been forwarded to Dr. Wim Aerts of the Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy (BIRA). On September 10, 1970, engineer Aerts responded that the anomalies in the photographs were most likely lens flares.

There were two prints attached to the letter Mr. Stassijns had sent to Werner Bruyneel: an 18x13 enlargement made by the photographer himself, and a smaller print. Stassijns wrote Bruyneel that he could keep the enlargement but asked him to return De Meyer's note and the small print. The enlargement could be retrieved from the personal archives of Bruyneel, which are in the possession of one of the authors (WVU). It is shown on the next page.

Handwritten on the back of the print were the “coordinates of the craft”, namely: α [right ascension] = 18h59min, and δ [declination] = +44°40'.

Further, in his letter to Bruyneel, Mr. Stassijns complained that he never got a response from Dr. Aerts and underlined his conviction that the phenomenon he had photographed was undoubtedly “from another solar system, if not, from another star system” (*sic*).

In a final note, the photographer added the following details about the picture: “The photo was made with a steady camera while the object remained motionless in the sky. The bright luminous streak on the photo is the star α Lyrae (Vega).”



Fig. 77. July 26, 1970, Baasrode. The 18x13 enlargement that survived.
Photo by Emmanuel Stassijns. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

In May 1977, Mr. Stassijns sent a similar letter to EXO, a UFO & paranormal research group in Ekeren, just North of Antwerp. Several meetings were organized and on March 8, 1978 the group obtained the negatives of the two shots for analysis. A 29-page long report was released by EXO in December 1978. It mentions that the film used was a black & white *Ilford HP4 Plus* 120 film of 17 Din with a negative format of 60x60mm. Camera details or settings are not given, but included in the final pages of the report were the following poor quality photocopied versions of the photos:

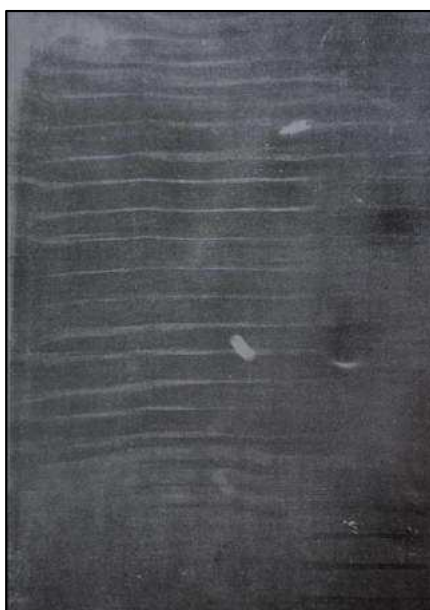
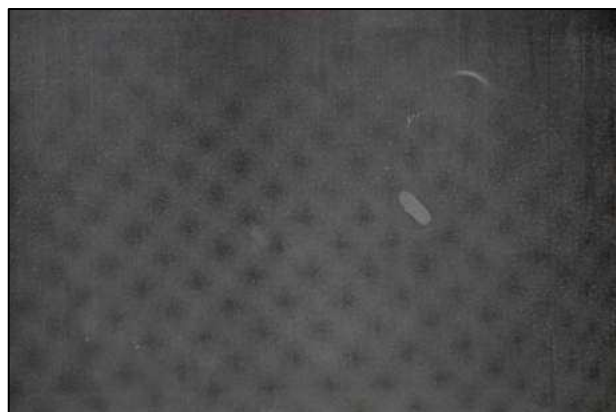


Fig. 78. LEFT: cropped print from negative No. 5, reportedly taken at 23:25 on July 25, 1970.
BELOW: cropped print from negative No. 6, reportedly taken at 02:32 on July 26, 1970.



The arc-shaped features in the pictures that supposedly represent what Mr. Stassijns saw, are well known in the field of photography: they are the result of crimp marks on the negatives caused by severe local bending of the film. Below are two examples of this type of damage:

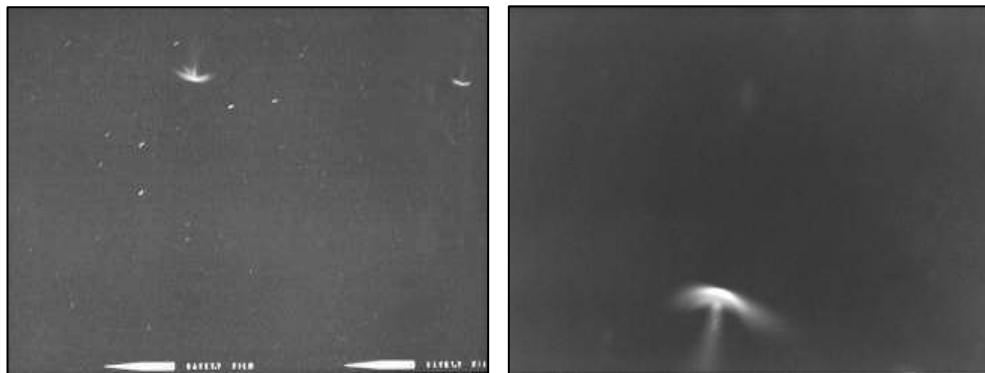


Fig. 79. LEFT: night sky photo by Ian Musgrave, borrowed from http://astroblogger.blogspot.be/2010_04_01_archive.html
RIGHT: photo by Marc Hallet, sent to one of the authors (WVU) in May 1993.

In an exercise of comparative ufology, we found similar crimp mark images in the UFO literature. These photos, too, were pretended to show Unidentified Flying Objects.

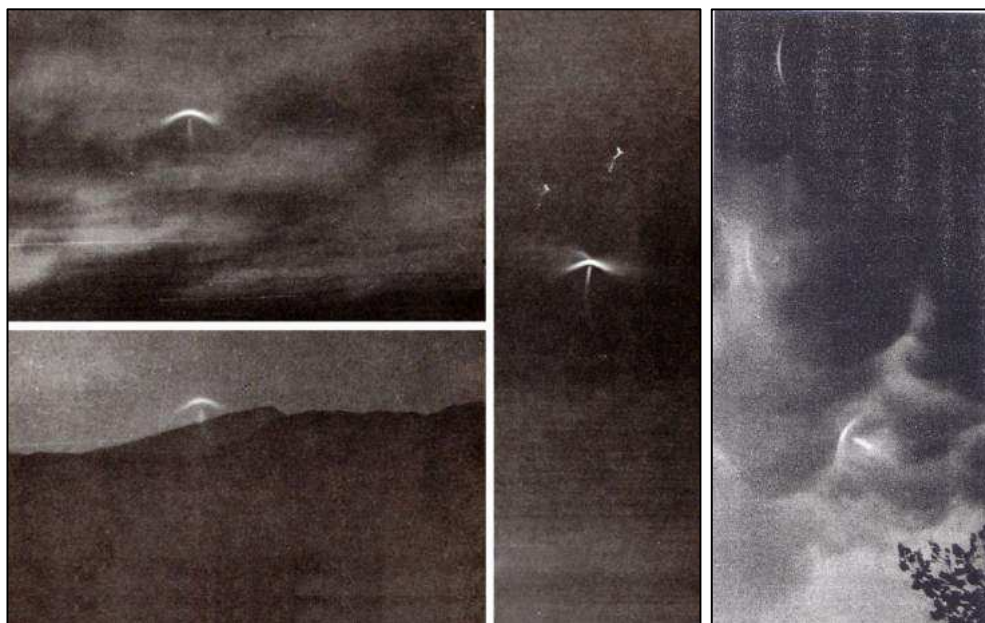


Fig. 80. LEFT AND CENTER: 1968, Wales, U.K. Borrowed from Glenn McWane & David Graham, *The New UFO Sightings*, Warner Paperback Library, 1974, photo pages. © Other Dimensions Inc. RIGHT: April 4, 1950, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.. Photograph by Ira E. Maxey. Borrowed from Kenneth Arnold & Ray Palmer, *The Coming of the Saucers*, Boise, 1952, page 175. The photo was also used to illustrate Ray Palmer's editorial in *Flying Saucers*, Nov. 1962, page 5.

The possibility of the anomaly in Mr. Stassijns picture being this specific type of film flaw is corroborated by the fact that the images of the stars are out of focus, whereas the arc-shaped streak is sharply delineated (next to the bright trail that Mr. Stassijns attributes to Vega, several other much fainter star trails can be distinguished.) This makes it unlikely that the white arc represents a real distant object.

The EXO report reached the same conclusion and located the two dents in the negatives. Their positions coincided with those of the arc-shaped lights. During the interviews, the EXO team also noted several contradictions in the photographer's narrative and also found that the date and times given in the letter Stassijns had sent them in May 1977 (namely, "June 26, 1970", at "22:25 CET" and "around 03:30 CET") were different from those mentioned in the letter he had sent to Mr. De Meyer in 1970 (namely, "July 25, 1970" at "22:25 UT" and "01:32 UT", i.e. 23:25 CET and 02:32 CET). Further comparison between the letter from 1970—which is cited in the EXO report—and the one sent to Bruyneel three years later informs us that there is no mention of any spinning movement, changing colors or sudden acceleration in the initial 1970 letter. Instead, there is a brief statement by the witness saying that he "had to force [his] eyes to the extreme to see the arc shape of the object".

From the EXO investigation, it also transpired that Mr. Stassijns had spotted and photographed "UFOs" on other occasions, but no details about these events are disclosed.

In addition to all this, www.infoclimat.fr tells us that, during the night of July 25-26, 1970, the sky over Brussels was clouded with moments of drizzle. Not the ideal moment to study the stars through a telescope, which is what Stassijns claimed he was doing when the strange object appeared.

Whether the damage to the negatives was intentionally or accidentally inflicted is impossible to say, but there can be no doubt that the story of having actually seen an alien spacecraft was a pure invention.

[1] See, in particular, the entries for October 14, October 15 and November 17, 1972; February 27, May 19, June 15 and October 1, 1973.

(References: letter from Emmanuel Stassijns to Werner Bruyneel dated October 9, 1973, submitted by Marc Broux to Wim van Utrecht on July 12, 1988. EXO investigative report 'Dossier S', 1978.)

Chapter 2

1972-1980

Sightings Peak

The first half of the 1970s was marked by a global wave of developments in space travel and technology. Man had set foot on the Moon and home telescopes brought the universe within everyone's reach. Amateur astronomers searched for strange lights on or near the lunar surface. Official and private associations were formed worldwide to study the reports of what were now called Unidentified Flying Objects. In Belgium two major UFO groups were active: GESAG in Bruges and SOBEPS in Brussels. Both published their own journal and could rely on a network of field investigators to visit sighting locations and interview witnesses. The search for physical evidence was intense and any unusual speck in a picture was readily considered a potential UFO.

These 9 years contributed 60 photographic cases or 6.7 per year, a reporting incidence over 10 times higher than the previous period.

Date: Wednesday, July 5, 1972

Location: Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, Brussels (Brussels Capital Region)

Time: 10:15

Duration: 3 minutes

Special Features: repeater witness

Assessment: film or developing flaw

Before looking into the first episode of this chapter, we need to put it into perspective. On the evening of July 4, 1972, around 10:30 p.m. [1], a large number of Belgian citizens sighted the silent progression of three very bright star-like lights forming a triangle, moving slowly in an East-Southeast to West-Northwest direction along a wide arch. The phenomenon's passage illuminated the clouds. Estimates of the sighting duration varied from two to six minutes.

In our opinion, this phenomenon, reported over an area of about 30km wide and 170km long, lacks strangeness. Its characteristics point to a bright *sporadic* meteor or bolide, i.e. a meteor not associated with one of the known recurring meteor showers. The reentry of a manmade spacecraft was dismissed after consultation with a satellite-tracking specialist. We wonder if this multiple-witness sighting may not have been instrumental in creating the small wave of UFO reports that developed across the country during the weeks that followed. It is in the context of the media coverage given to the reports of July 4 that the present case surfaced.

At 10:15 a.m. on July 5, Clément Saillé, 26, was watching some pigeons from a back window of his third-floor apartment in the Boulevard Clovis when he noticed a peculiar object in the sky, to his right and above a 10-story building located two blocks away on the crossing of Avenue G. Pêtre and Rue du Louvain (azimuth was found to be approximately 270°). Saillé described the objects as stationary, oval-shaped, silver-colored object and oscillating violently, its apparent dimensions being smaller than those of the Sun. Realizing this was not a bird, the witness ran inside to fetch his camera. When he came back, he found the object had disappeared. Looking in every direction, he thought he relocated the object in another part of the sky, lower and moving linearly at a speed higher than an airplane from North to South, in the direction of the Hilton hotel (azimuth: 230°). The witness took three pictures. Instants later, the object disappeared from view, hidden by some buildings to the observer's left. No sound was heard. It was the second time in one year that Mr. Saillé, who was a member of several UFO groups, spotted an object like this following a similar flight path.

The camera used was a *Box Ferrania* with *Kodak VP 120* film of 125 ASA. When the pictures were developed, two of them showed a couple of pigeons, but nothing strange in the sky. The third, however, had a minute black dot with a short horizontal tail in it, positioned to the extreme right and almost out of the camera's viewing angle.

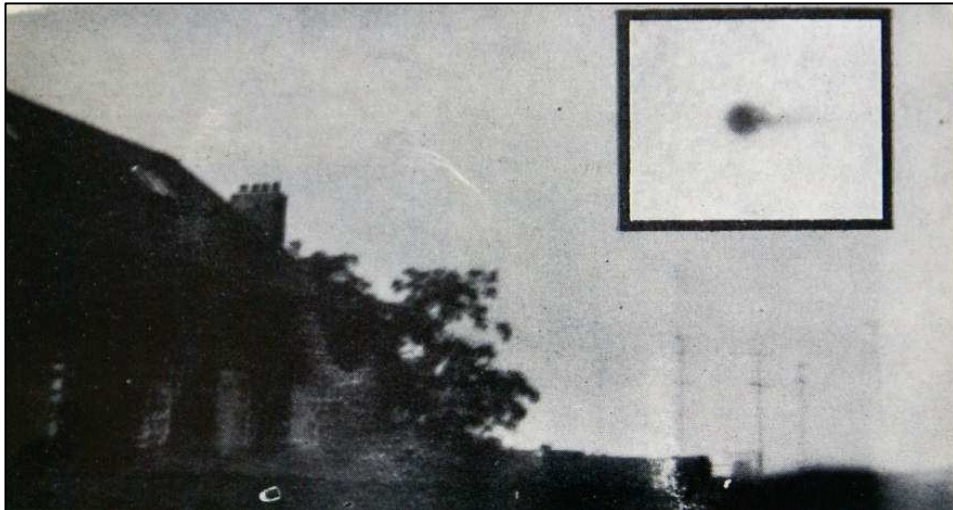


Fig. 81. July 5, 1972, Brussels. The picture as printed in a SOBEPS book written by Michel Bougard in 1976. The unknown object is the tiny spot that borders the right-hand side of the picture frame. The inset shows a close-up of the "object". Photo by Clément Saillé.



Fig. 82. First or second-generation print from the files of Jacques Bonabot. Orange markers indicate the position of the anomaly.

The following Google-Earth map shows the part of Brussels city where the incident took place. Indicated are: the location of the witness ("witness"), the estimated position of the hovering object ("object 1"), the Madou Plaza skyscraper (a reference point in the observer's visual landscape), the site of the Hilton Hotel in 1972 (years later, another Hilton Hotel was raised in another part of the city), the possible flight path (blue arrow) of the "second" flying object ("object 2") and the presumed camera viewing angle as found by SOBEPS investigator Yves Vézant. The red line marks the azimuth for the unidentified spot in the photograph (~235°).



Fig. 83. Aerial view of the sighting location.

"The negative", Yves Vézant reports, was "of poor quality (not very sharp), with fingerprints and an unexplained vertical band of a darker color [lighter color in the print.]"

The anomaly in the picture is equally unimpressive: it is totally off-center (meaning that the photographer was pointing to another part of the sky when

he took the picture) and it does not match with the description of a shiny, silvery oval-shaped object. Image analysis expert Andrés Duarte comments:

I suspect that this stain is unrelated to what was supposedly observed; if the object that was seen did not appear in the other pictures, then it is probable that the conditions were not right for the image of the object to be captured in any of the photographs. The quality of the image is very bad and we can only speculate upon its rough features. It could be a smeared developing spot, that is, the product of a drop of developing or fixer liquid deformed by sliding. Or, perhaps, a smeared stain on a window. [Note however, that the witness claimed he was looking through an open window.]



Fig. 84. A better blow-up of the unidentified object. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

Like Duarte, we feel that the tiny dot in the picture is unrelated to the visual observation. This is further substantiated by the observation that, when the witness was asked to make a sketch of the scenery, and this sketch was superimposed on the photograph, it was found that the object in the photo was markedly higher than the drawn trajectory, and this despite the fact that, Vézant notes, “[Saillé] did get all the other proportions quite right.” It is our guess that the unidentified object—which may well have been a toy balloon carried along with the light northern breeze that prevailed at the time of the sighting [2]—was either too distant or too small to be captured on film.

Another possible scenario is that Mr. Saillé had been photographing the pigeons in front of his window, found a UFO-like stain in one of the developed snapshots, and decided to concoct a false story in line with the newsmaking UFO reports. It is not unusual for dark comet-like stains to appear in positive prints when tiny grease drops from the gelatin find their way to the silver halide emulsion during the film’s fabrication process. When the emulsion pours out, it will flow around these emulsion-repellent spots, creating typical comet-like white dots in the negative. The vertical white bands may have been caused by similar flow problems, but might also be explained by light entering the camera, water damage, or part of the negative being temporarily covered by another negative during development. The overall state of the negative (fingerprints, crimp marks and other visible damage) suggests that the film was not processed in a professional lab.

[1] Reported times actually ranged from 9:50 to 10:40 p.m., a problem with time estimation often encountered when multiple witnesses report meteor fireballs or spacecraft debris entering the atmosphere.

[2] Wind data gleaned from www.infoclimat.fr

(References: Clément Saillé, letter dated July 29, 1972, GESAG archives. Jean-Luc Vertongen, *Inforespace*, No. 6, 1973, pages 16-18; and No. 7, 1973, pages 21-24. Yves Vézant, *Inforespace*, No. 15, 1974, pages 27-30. Michel Bougard, *Des soucoupes volantes aux OVNI*, SOBEPS (Brussels), 1976, pages 62-69 and plate 20. Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos (SOBEPS files). Andrés Duarte, personal communication to V.J. Ballester Olmos, June 1, 2014. Ted Molczan, personal communication to V.J. Ballester Olmos, June 3, 2014.)

Date: Wednesday, July 19, 1972

Location: Faymonville, Weismes (Liège)

Time: 22:35

Duration: ~7 minutes

Assessment: Moon

When the summer holidays of 1972 kicked off, UFOs became hot news again. Sightings had been piling up since July 4, when an 18-year old had reported seeing a bright white light in the sky over Faymonville, 47km Southeast of the city of Liège. The press reported extensively on the events and SOBEPS, then in its first year of operation, was ready to jump on the bandwagon. In an attempt to find out what was going on, the Brussels-based group dispatched its field investigators to the different sighting locations to interview the witnesses. The results of their inquiries were published in a two-part article in the group's journal *Inforespace*. The wave of sightings ended on July 19 with an incident that happened in the very same municipality where the commotion had begun some two weeks earlier. This time, however, one of the objects had been captured on photographic film. Below are the details of this incident, taken directly from an investigative report drafted two days after the facts by SOBEPS' chief of investigations Jean-Luc Vertongen.

Mr. [Herbert] Mathar [aged 30], his wife [Mady] and their two children [3 and 8 years old at the time] were at home watching "It's a Knockout" [a very popular games competition TV show from the 1970s broadcast simultaneously in various European countries]. Immediately after the program ended (the Radio Télévision Belge confirmed that the broadcast ended at exactly 10:29:10 p.m.), the entire family left the premises and went to the house of the parents of Mrs. Mathar. Coming from the rue Nouvelle, they took the route de Wevercé [since renamed rue de la Laiterie]. Mrs. Mathar and her eldest child walked in front; her husband followed several meters behind, carrying the youngest on his shoulders.

It must have been close to 10:35 p.m. when Mrs. Mathar, turned round to her husband and noticed, towards the South-Southeast, a red-orange point of light, larger than a star. It did not radiate and was situated over the chimneys of the village, at an elevation of more or less 4 to 5 degrees.

The object, which was several hundreds of meters away when the sighting began, approached the witnesses at a constant pace following a South-Southeast to North-Northwest trajectory.

Walking past the residence of Mr. Marcel Giet [aged 37], who was outside, Mr. Mathar and his wife directed his attention to the strange phenomenon that was slowly heading in their direction. It is at this moment that Mrs. Mathar recalled having read an article in the press about the UFO sightings of July 4. Remembering that the SOBEPS address was mentioned there, she ran to the house of her parents to phone the society's chief secretary [Mr. Lucien Clerebaut]. It took her 10 to 20 seconds to reach the house. Before crossing the doorstep, she turned her head one more time to take a look at the phenomenon. It had approached considerably. Her [8-year-old] son Frédéric, who was standing beside her, compared the shape of the object to a hat. Not totally at ease about this eerie apparition, the boy didn't stay outside any longer and went into the house.

Mrs. Mathar emphasized that the edges of the object were very clear and that its color was red-orange. Not a uniform coloring, though, and looking brighter at this stage than when she first spotted it. Darker areas created the impression of volume and its light, although diffused, did not illuminate the ground.

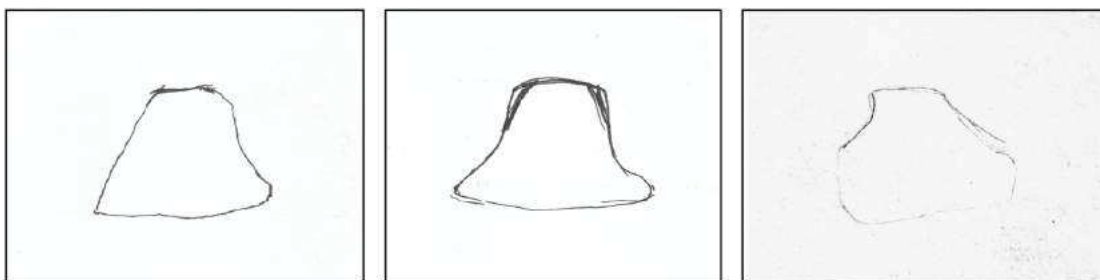


Fig. 85. Sketches of the object made by Mr. Mathar (left), his wife (center), and their 8-year old son. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

Mrs. Mathar interrupted her sighting and without further ado phoned SOBEPS to report the event. Still outside, her husband continued to observe the luminous phenomenon that had now come to a halt. From German origin, the testimony of Mr. Mathar could only be obtained with the assistance of his wife and her brother. His description of the object tallies with the description

given above. At no time did he hear any sound, or perceive any smell or heat emitted by the object.

Upon hearing her call, Mrs. Mathar's [15-year old] nephew, Freddy Sépulchre, came running out from the house, followed a bit later by the parents of his aunt.

Once outside, [Freddy] didn't spot the phenomenon right away because the roof of a neighboring house obstructed the view. It was not after he had ventured into the small garden in front of his house that he could, in turn, contemplate the stationary phenomenon in the sky. He gave a description similar to that of Mr. and Mrs. Mathar and stated that the size must have been approximately 1½ times that of the full Moon. According to this witness, the object was at an elevation of about 5° or 6°. After about 5 seconds, being summoned by his aunt, he interrupted his observation and went back into the house. While still on the phone with Brussels, Mrs. Mathar asked him to notify her husband that SOBEPS suggested they should take pictures of the phenomenon. Mr. Mathar ran into the house to get his camera. When he came out again, he crossed the garden and placed himself on a small road perpendicular to the main road so as to better capture the luminous object. All of a sudden, as he was adjusting his camera, the phenomenon vanished, the shape became blurred and the luminosity diminished until it was completely gone. Fortunately, after a couple of seconds, the phenomenon reappeared ("It went on again"), although this time it was little more than a red-orange streak of an imprecise shape, stretched horizontally, longer than tall, the biggest size of which must have covered an angle of about 2°. At that time Mr. Mathar took two pictures in a timeframe of about 3 seconds. The second apparition lasted about 8 to 10 seconds.

In his precipitation, he unfortunately put his camera in bulb mode, but as he pressed the shutter button in quick succession, it can be assumed that the diaphragm did not stay open much longer than a fraction of a second. Camera specifics: AGFA Color-Agnar, 1: 3.5/45, Silette-Vario. Speed: B to 1/200. Film: B/W 20 DIN).

According to Mr. Mathar, the phenomenon extinguished quite fast; it looked to him as if the luminosity got fuzzy and dissolved in the sky.

The eyewitness accounts of Mr. and Mrs. Hermann (the parents of Mrs. Mathar) contained no additional elements of note, but Mrs. Hermann did mention that, to her, the object looked like an oval of a fiery color.



Fig. 86. LEFT: the fields in front of Mr. and Mrs. Giet's house.
 RIGHT: the small road from where Mr. Mathar took his pictures.
 Photos by Jean-Luc Vertongen. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

Mr. and Mrs. Giet's version of the events are contained in a separate report compiled by Jean-Luc Vertongen. Although their narrative confirms the sighting of a reddish luminous apparition in the sky in the company of the Mathar family, it differs with regard to a number of details. Mr. Giet holds that the phenomenon first appeared as "a small point of light in the South-Southwest, passing in proximity of the church tower that is located in the center of the village". To him it was "red in color", had a "fuzzy outline", and was first seen "at an elevation of 5°". After it approached, its elevation was estimated to have been 30 or 35°. Still according to Mr. Giet, the object stopped for a moment. Looking bigger, though still fuzzy, it then moved away in the direction of Weismes (roughly West). Some two minutes later it reappeared in that same direction, now looking like a "luminous ball surrounded by small red lights" and "a kind of smoke that enveloped the bottom part of the ball". He compared the size of the ball to that of the Moon. Mrs. Giet was interviewed as well. She recalled that the object was "not quite round, more like the shape of a pear, having a size $\frac{3}{4}$ that of the Moon". The SOBEPS report further specifies that the weather was "warm with a cloudless sky littered with stars."

In a follow-up article in *Inforespace*, Jean-Luc Vertongen elaborated on some of the particularities of the two separate but similar trails in photo #1 and compared the Faymonville pictures to other images from the UFO literature. No conclusion was reached as to the origin of what was photographed. The pictures received a certain degree of notoriety in the 1970s and were published not only in major UFO journals like the British *Flying Saucer Review*, but in several books as well.

The images below are high-quality scans of prints made from the original negatives.



Fig. 87. July 19, 1972, Faymonville. Photo #1 (negative number 22/23). Full version of the first photograph taken by Mr. Herbert Mathar. The “UFO” is visible to the far left. Slightly lower and to its right is a dimmer light with a nearly identical “signature”.
Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.



Fig. 88. July 19, 1972, Faymonville. Full version of photo #2 (negative number 24/25) taken by Mr. Herbert Mathar. The smaller light is no longer visible. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.



Fig. 89. Blow-ups from photos #1 and #2.

In 2011 one of the authors (WVU) had the opportunity to examine the full file on the case and to discuss its specifics with Jean-Luc Vertongen and SOBEPS' photo expert Patrick Ferryn. Absent in the SOBEPS file were precise azimuths for each of the locations from where the phenomenon was sighted. A description of the astronomical situation during the night in question was also missing. With more tools available in 2011 than in 1973, a new investigation was set up. The first thing we did was to consult a sky map for the location and time of the sighting. What we found was quite revealing:

- at 10:35 p.m., from the house of Mr. and Mrs. Giet, a very bright Jupiter (magnitude -2.17) was visible in the South (azimuth 177°; elevation 16°);
- at 10:40 p.m., from the house of Mrs. Mathar's parents, a waxing gibbous Moon (65% illuminated) was visible near the Southwestern horizon (azimuth 225°; elevation 6°);
- also at 10:40, from the same location, the bright star Spica (magnitude 0.95) was visible in the West-Southwest (azimuth 246°; elevation 5°).

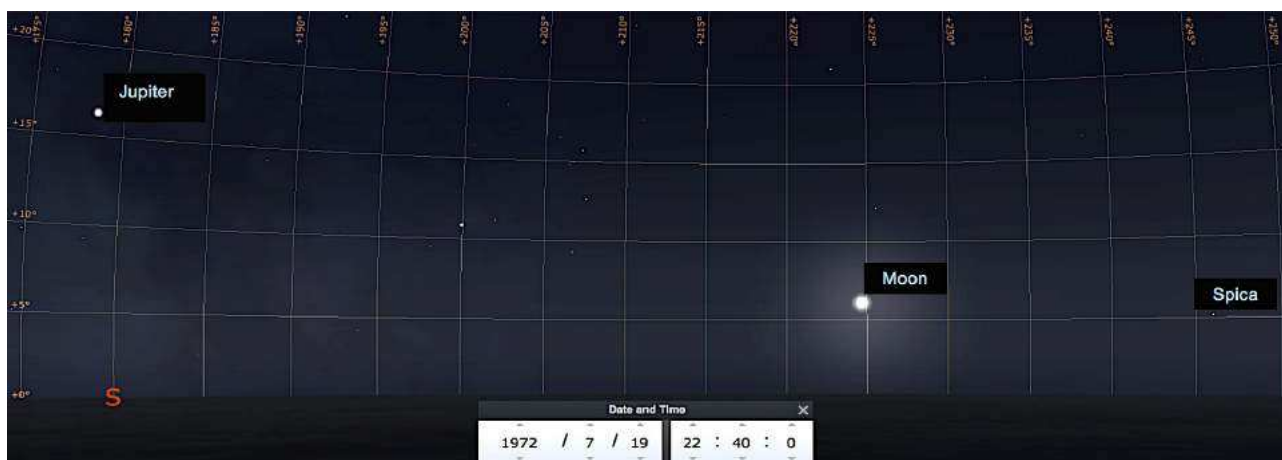


Fig. 90. *Stellarium* rendering of the astronomical situation for July 19, 1972, at 10:40 p.m.

Next, we turned to a topographical map that was used to illustrate the first *Inforespace* article on the case. It depicts the various locations that are mentioned in the summary above. We marked these locations in the *Google Earth* image below as A, B and C. The azimuths of Jupiter, the Moon and *Spica* have been added as well.

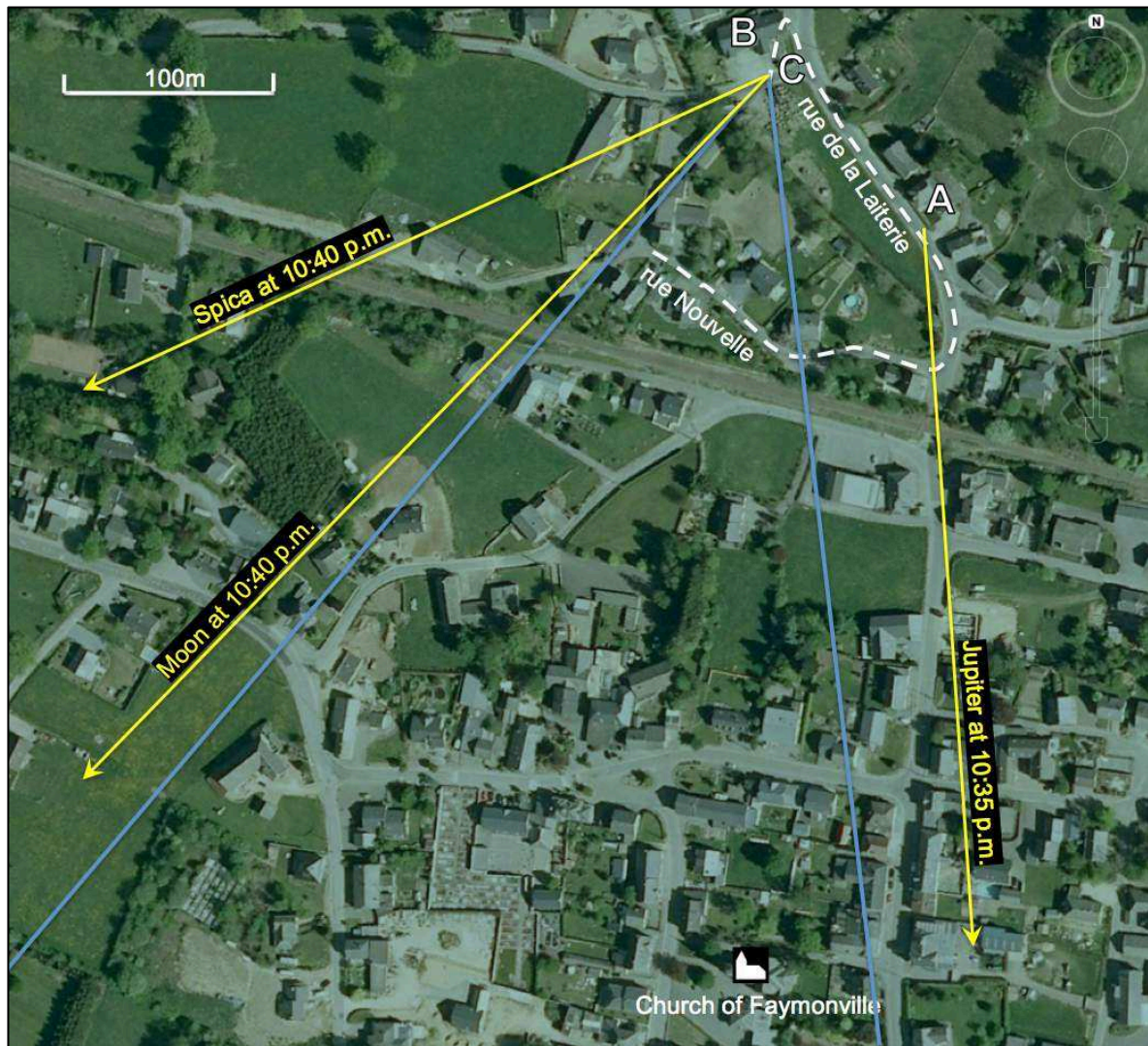


Fig. 91. 2007 *Google Earth* image of the sighting location with (A) the house of Mr. and Mrs. Giet, (B) the house of Mrs. Mathar's parents, and (C) the spot from where Mr. Mathar took the two pictures. The blue lines denote the horizontal picture angle for the daylight photograph included in the summarizing diagram further down the text. The white dashed line shows the path followed by the Mathar family from the rue Nouvelle to the rue de la Laiterie.

One the following pages we examine to what extent the presence of these three prominently visible celestial bodies, all of which were in the South-western quadrant of the sky, may help to understand what happened at Faymonville that summer night.

Jupiter

The direction in which the red-orange point of light was seen, is given as “South-Southeast” by Mrs. Mathar and “South-Southwest” by Mr. Giet. Mr. Giet specified that the light had appeared in proximity of the village church tower. This tower is located 360m from Mr. Giet’s house in the South-Southwest at azimuth 195° (see *Google Earth* image above). At around 10:35 p.m., Jupiter was visible almost due South, i.e. about 18° left of the church tower. In a “clear sky littered with stars”, the planet would indeed have appeared as “a point of light larger than a star”. Shining with magnitude -2.17, the witnesses should not have missed it [1]. Since only one powerful point of light was seen in the South, it seems logical to conclude that Jupiter was responsible for the first phase of the sighting. Stars or planets that are seen through a transparent layer of haze will increase in brightness when the haze becomes less dense. Such a brightening may have been interpreted as an approaching motion.

However, evoking a nearly stationary planet does not explain the reported movement from South to West. Nor does it explain the low elevation of 5° and the climb to $30/35^\circ$. We note in this regard that only Mr. Giet mentioned a change in elevation. In fact, the elevations given by the other witnesses were “4 to 5° ” (Mrs. Mathar’s estimate for the beginning of the sighting) and “5 to 6° ” (Freddy Sépulchre’s estimate for the final phase).

An elevation of approximately 5° does not, however, match Jupiter’s elevation of 16° . Elevations are almost never underestimated, and if they are certainly not by a factor of 3. In fact, elevations given by untrained observers are typically overestimated by a factor of ~ 2 . In that regard, Mr. Giet’s estimate of $30/35^\circ$ would match Jupiter’s true elevation much better. Faced with two different sets of elevations for what is supposed to be the same sighting, we cannot be a 100% certain that the luminous point near the church tower was Jupiter.

The Moon

Some five minutes later into the sighting—time is then approximately 10:40 p.m.—the UFO was seen in a more westerly direction. This is where the Moon should have been at that moment, plainly in sight and not too high above the rooftops in the Southwest.

The object is now described as having increased in size, orange-red in color with darker and lighter areas and shaped like a “hat” (young Frédéric Mathar), an “oval” (Mrs. Hermann), a “ball” (Mr. Giet) or a “pear” (Mrs. Giet). This description is indeed very close to how the Moon sometimes appears when it is close to the horizon and seen through a transparent layer of haze. Below is a picture taken by one of the authors of a gibbous Moon sitting close to the horizon. The striking orange color is due to the absorption and scattering of the Moon’s reflected light as it travels through much more

atmosphere than when the Moon would be higher up. The slightly distorted appearance of the lunar disc in this picture is caused by atmospheric refraction, but this is not relevant to our case because at 10:40 p.m. the setting Moon was still too high up—namely 6° —for these effects to occur. Horizontally stretched ripples of cloud obscuring the bottom part of the waning gibbous Moon would have sufficed to create a shape similar to what the witnesses reported (think of a combination of the first and second comparison photos below). Mr. Giet's mention of "a kind of smoke that enveloped the bottom side of the ball" is telling in this regard, as is his statement that the size of the ball was comparable to that of the Moon.



Fig. 92. Slightly distorted orange Moon looming 0.5° above the horizon. The photo was taken by Wim van Utrecht from the 7th floor of an apartment building in Antwerp, Belgium, on October 31, 2015 at 9:03 p.m. The image was flipped vertically for a better comparison with the illuminated part of the Moon on July 19, 1972.



Fig. 93. Another peculiar Moonrise over Antwerp photographed from the same location on October 17, 2010 at 8:16 p.m. The bottom part of the full Moon is cut off by a distant cloud, making the lunar disc look like a hovering deep yellow dome. Photo by Wim van Utrecht.

If the Moon was involved, we also need to address the reported movement from South to West. In this regard, we should not forget that the collected eyewitness accounts relate to different—usually short—episodes, during which different witnesses observed an object or objects from different places with all witnesses at one point or another losing sight of the phenomenon. In consequence, there is no guarantee that the phenomenon that was first spotted in the South, was the same phenomenon that was later spotted in the West. Perhaps also worth mentioning here is that the road that took the Mathar family from Mr. Giet's home to the house of Mrs. Mathar's parents runs Northwest. With the phenomenon supposedly having travelled to the West, it is therefore not excluded that any observed movements may have been due to the parallax effect, by which an observer mistakenly interprets his own movement as that of the object he is observing [2].

Spica

The presence of *Spica* in the West-Southwest proved crucial in our examination of the Faymonville photos. We call the reader's attention to the second smaller light to the right of the main light in the first photograph. We found that the distance between the bigger and smaller light in photo #1—as derived from the 43.6° horizontal viewing angle of the 45mm lens that Mr. Mathar used—coincides perfectly with the angular distance between the Moon and *Spica* at the time the picture was taken, namely 21° . Both astronomical bodies were almost on the same level, with *Spica* being about one degree closer to the horizon than the Moon. If the big and small light were indeed the Moon and *Spica*, it is logical to assume that a cloud “that enveloped the bottom side” of the Moon would also have made *Spica* disappear. Presumably, this explains why *Spica* is no longer visible on photo #2.

It is important to note that both luminous shapes in photo #1 have a similar Point Spread Function, meaning that the recorded response of the camera to the bigger light was similar to that of the smaller light. In other words, the luminous shapes in the picture do not represent the actual shape of the photographed lights, but the movement of the camera during the exposure. The similarities between the two lights are highlighted in this diagram drafted by Jean-Luc Vertongen:

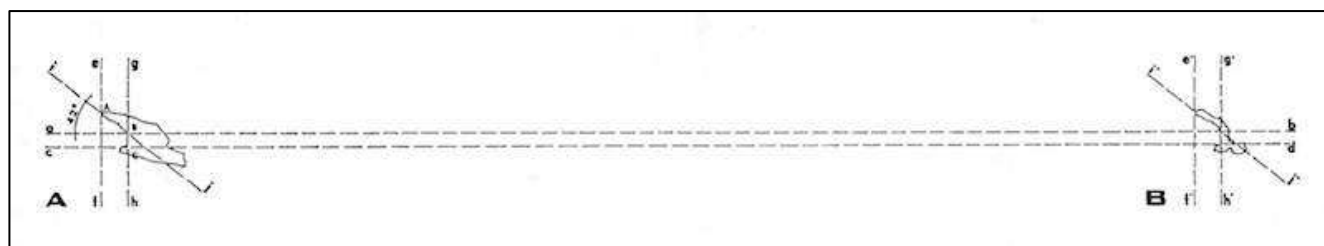


Fig. 94. Diagram published in *Inforespace* No. 29, September 1976, p. 27.

The picture contains a few hints as to how the lights would have looked to the naked eye. A blow-up of the smaller object in photo #1 reveals three distinct trails side-by-side. We denoted them as S, S' and S'' in the diagram below (image on the right). The bigger object (the alleged UFO) shows a similarly crooked, but much broader trail. If the camera motion produced three images of the point-shaped light (which we believe to be *Spica*), then the main object should also consist of three images of a single (though larger) shape, in this case a slanted elongated bar. Placing three scaled images of a 65% illuminated Moon (M, M' and M'') on top of the bigger object, we find that three of the illuminated parts of the lunar disc match the width of one bar-shaped element fairly well (image on the left).

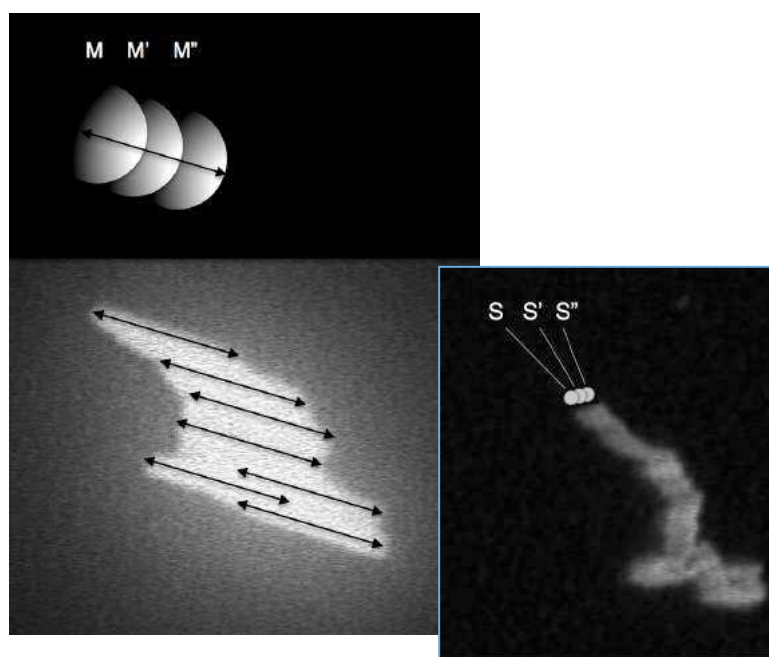


Fig. 95. RIGHT: smaller light with motion blur producing three separate trails.
LEFT: the bigger light displaying a nearly identical motion blur.

So far so good, but we still have to explain why the gibbous Moon appears as a bar and not as a near-vertically oriented oval shape. Obviously, a partly illuminated spherical object was not responsible for the luminous shapes in photos #1 and #2 (see, for instance, our entries for December 15, 1977 and August 1990 for images of a crescent Moon taken with an unstable camera.) The answer is in Mr. Mathar's description of the object's shape at the moment he took his pictures. In fact, at this point, the phenomenon is no longer referred to as a "hat" or "ball", but as having reduced in vertical size to "little more than a red-orange streak of an imprecise shape, stretched horizontally, longer than tall". This shape and its gradual disappearance into the night sky is precisely how the Moon sometimes appears when it is partly obscured by clouds, leaving only a small segment visible before completely

“dissolving“. In fact, when the photos were taken, the Moon may have appeared very similar to the partly cloud-covered Sun in this picture:



Fig. 96. Sunset photographed from Antwerp, Belgium. The authors believe that the visible part of the Sun in this picture compares well with how the Moon looked when Mr. Mathar took his UFO pictures. Photo by Wim van Utrecht.

Interesting in this regard is that, during a meeting in January 2014, Jean-Luc Vertongen told us that the photos were taken with the camera resting on one of the wooden posts that mark the boundary between the road and the field adjoining the road. Such posts are rarely perfectly horizontal on top, which might explain the roughly similar camera movement in the two shots: when the shutter button was pressed, the camera may have glided sideways in small successive shocks, creating the multiple images in the horizontal field in combination with a vertical downward movement. If we apply deliberate camera shake to the sunset photo from Antwerp, we get an idea of what may have happened at Faymonville:



Fig. 97. Same image as above, re-photographed with deliberate camera shake and shutter speed set at 0.5 seconds.

The result shows how a partially visible Sun photographed with an unstable camera can take a complex shape similar to that of the “object” in the Faymonville pictures.

By way of recapitulation, we present the following diagram that summarizes the visual and imaging information for photo #1.

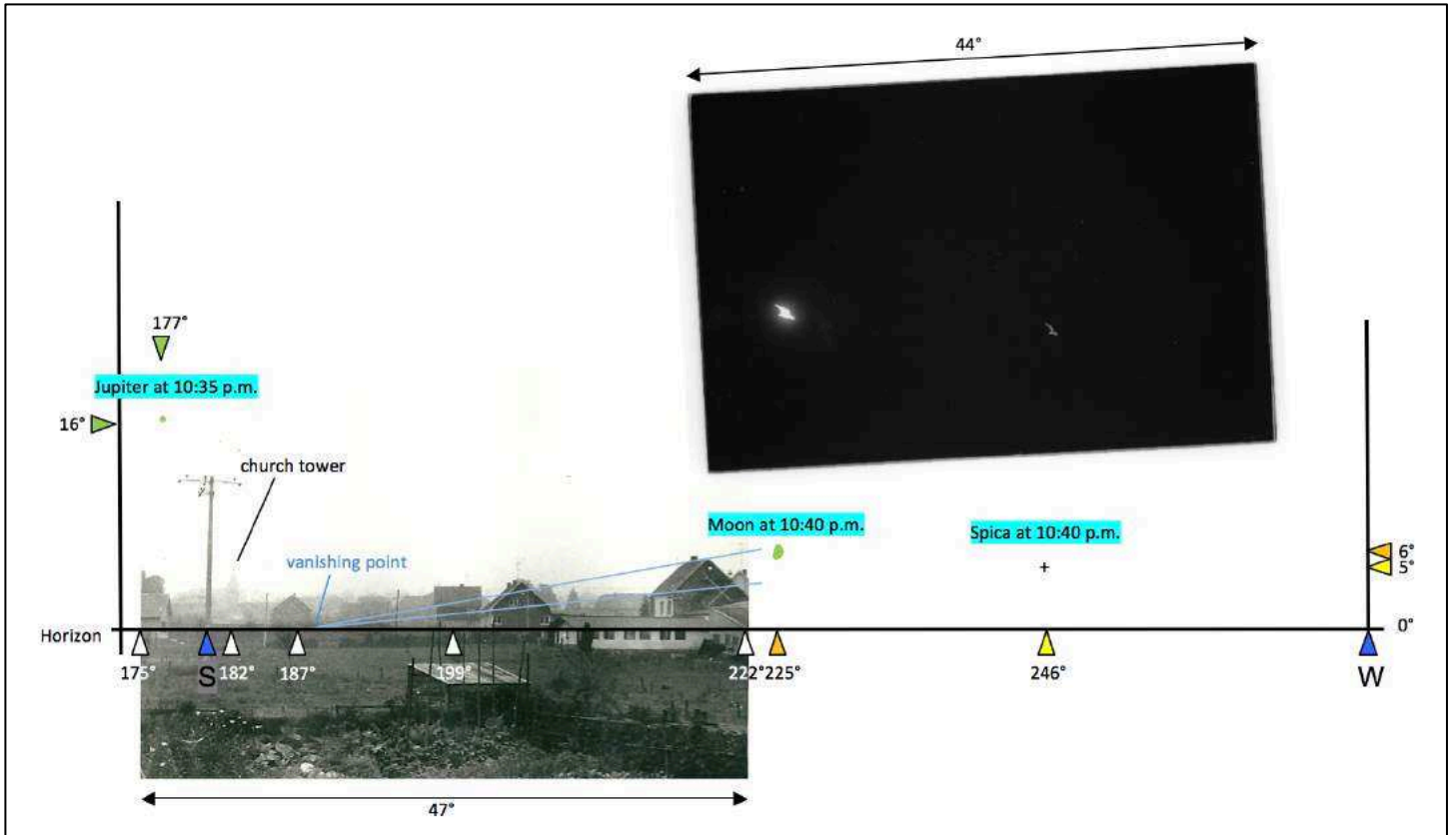


Fig. 98. Diagram with azimuth and elevation lines.

In the above diagram, the Moon and *Spica* fall outside the frame of the background picture taken by Jean-Luc Vertongen during his *in situ* inquiries at Faymonville on July 21, 1972. Yet, according to the handwritten caption that comes with this picture, it is purported to have been taken in the same direction Mr. Mathar took his photographs. The circumstance that the Moon and *Spica* were located more westward was a major concern when we first considered the Moon theory. However, in a letter addressed to one of the authors (WVU) in 2014, Vertongen clarified that he himself had taken his picture “with the camera pointed towards the South”, whereas “Mr. Mathar took his two photographs with the camera pointed more towards the West”.

For the sake of completeness, we should also mention that light-colored angular patches can be discerned on both sides of the bright light in Mr.

Mathar's photos. These features are clearly visible in the overexposed contact prints of the negatives we publish below. Judging from the position of the Moon in the summarizing diagram, and assuming that the big light in the shots is indeed the Moon, these luminous shapes appear to be very close to the roof tops on the extreme right of Vertongen's daylight photo. It would therefore be logical to assume that these are shiny structures (TV antennas, window panes) that reflect the moonlight to the camera.

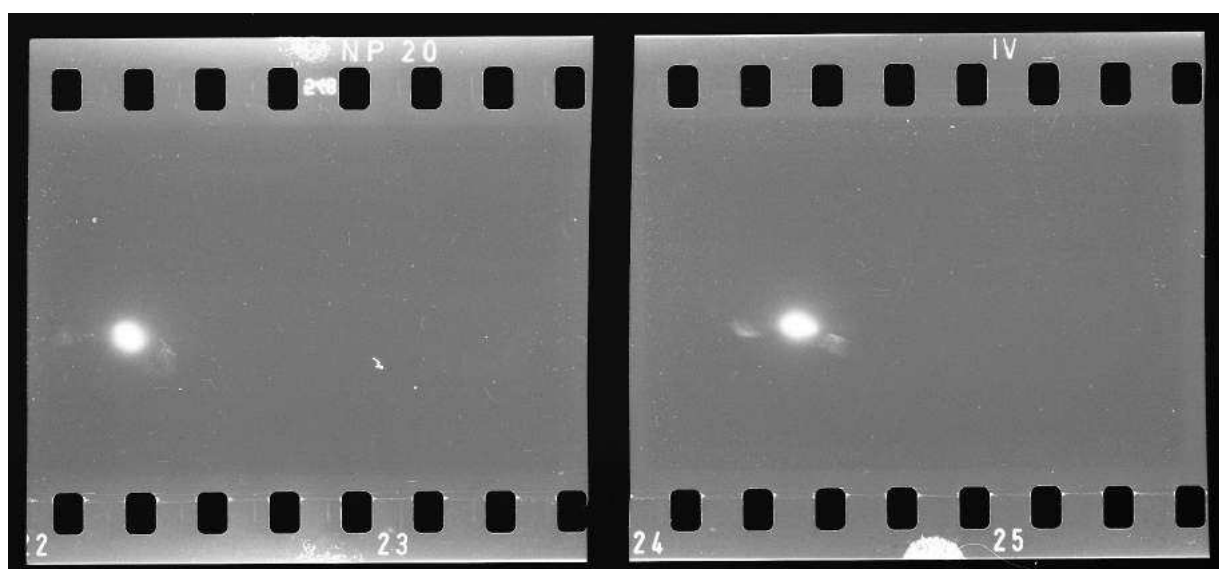


Fig. 99. Overexposed contact prints from negatives 22/23 and 24/25 show light areas left and right of the bigger light. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

Conclusion

To summarize our findings, we feel that there is sufficient evidence to accept that these photographs show the Moon setting in the Southwest. More than likely, the sighting of a bright but not intrinsically strange point of light in the South, combined with the media attention given to a series of sightings emanating from the same region a fortnight earlier, created the right atmosphere for what is actually a fairly common misinterpretation [3]. If the papers had not reported on the other incidents, probably the sighting of a bright planet followed by the appearance of the setting Moon would not have appeared strange to the Mathar family, Mrs. Mathar would not have phoned in the sighting and, consequently, would not have instructed her husband to photograph the phenomenon.

[1] The brightest star in the heavens being *Sirius* with an apparent visual magnitude of -1.46 , i.e. 1.5 times weaker than Jupiter that night.

[2] The effect often occurs when a very distant object (usually a bright star or planet) is seen from a moving car. To the people in the vehicle, telephone poles bordering the road will seem to move rapidly in the direction opposite the car's motion, while celestial bodies will seem to match the vehicle's speed and direction. The same goes for pedestrians: when

walking down a road looking at the Moon that is to the left or right of you, the lunar disc will appear to move over the landscape with the same pace and in the same direction you yourself are heading.

[3] The Moon regularly produces spectacular UFO reports. Not only the authors' personal files and the present catalog testify to that, such reports are also found in the files of other UFO researchers. See for instance the following two studies that focus entirely on UFOs and the Moon: Opération SAROS, edited and published by CNEGU, Fontaine-les-Dijon, 1994, and Thibaut Alexandre, Des OVNI au clair de lune, Editions Ecrit-Vain, 2015 (Les dossiers de S.O., No. 6).

(References: Jean-Luc Vertongen, SOBEPS investigative reports, July 21 and 22, 1972. Jean-Luc Vertongen, *Inforespace* No. 7, 1973, pages 21-26; and No. 29, September 1976, pages 24-28. *FSR Case Histories*, Supplement 16, August 1973, pages 3-5. Michel Bougard, Des soucoupes volantes aux OVNI, SOBEPS, Brussels, 1976, pages 71-73 and plates 21-25. Adolf Schneider & Hubert Malthaner, UFO-fotoboek, Uitgeverij Ankh-Hermes bv, Deventer, 1977, pages 220-221. Jean-Luc Vertongen, personal communications to Wim van Utrecht, July 4, 2011 and January 23 and 29, 2014. Email exchanges between Patrick Ferryn, Franck Boitte and Wim van Utrecht, throughout 2010 and 2011. Wim van Utrecht, unpublished report, December 2012.)

Date: Friday, September 1, 1972

Location: Ath (Hainaut)

Time: 21:16

Duration: 30 minutes

Special Features: nothing visible in photograph

Assessment: astronomical, Capella?

The slightly edited text below stems from the files of Jacques Bonabot, Director of the Bruges research group GESAG. It was Jean-Luc Vertongen, former Chief of Investigations at SOBEPS, a major UFO group with headquarters in Brussels, who forwarded the report to Bonabot

At 9:16 p.m., as 28-year old Françoise Deramaix was looking towards the northeastern sky, she suddenly saw a white point of light (like a light that was turned on); elevation was about 50° and it was moving towards the Southwest. This luminous dot came to a stop and seemed to flash, then it started to move again and came in the direction of the observer. It stabilized a second time, now appearing to be more luminous. Then it continued its way and extinguished. Three color pictures were taken during this sighting but after development nothing showed up.

No pictures were attached to the report and no explanation for the sighting was put forward at the time. From what we have—in essence not much more than a point of light that appeared to flash and remained visible for about half an hour—, there is little reason to believe that this light was anything but a bright star or planet that was sometimes obscured by thin, semi-transparent clouds. Noteworthy in this regard, is that the reported movements all seem to have occurred in the observer's line of sight and that no explicit mention is

made of a change in elevation. As such, these movements may equally well have been erroneous interpretations of fluctuations in the brightness of the light.

At 9:16 p.m., Capella, with magnitude 0.08, sat in the North-Northeast (azimuth: 21°). The star's elevation was 10° (climbing and reaching 12° thirty minutes later). The reported elevation was five times larger, but gross overestimations of angular altitudes are found in almost all UFO reports that can be attributed to astronomical bodies. Since no verifications of precise azimuth and altitude appear to have been carried out at the time, Capella remains the likely—though unproven—candidate explanation for this report. The fact that nothing showed up on the film is consistent with an attempt to photograph a star without the right equipment and/or settings.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Friday, October 6, 1972

Location: Sint-Denijs-Westrem (East Flanders)

Time: 18:01

Duration: 36 minutes

Special Features: repeater witnesses / slides lost / telescopic image

Assessment: fiber on film

On November 17, 1972, Bruno Heyndrickx (11) and his brother Cedric (15) sent a letter to Julien Weverbergh, a well-known Flemish literary man who had just published a two-volume-book on UFOs. In their letter, the youngsters described how, five weeks earlier, they had photographed what they thought was an unidentified object maneuvering in the skies just South of the city of Ghent. Weverbergh forwarded the report to GESAG where Rudy de Groote, then local investigator for the Dutch-language branch of the group (SPW), was found willing to investigate the case. The interviews took place on March 24, 1973. A report was published in the June 1973 issue of the GESAG journal. In it, Bruno and Cedric are described as the highly intelligent sons of a university professor and a pharmacist mother. Cedric would later develop an interest in UFOs and become an active member of the GESAG/SPW team. The details of the case—presented by De Groote—are as follows:

That day, Bruno was playing with five other kids (identities known) on a piece of wasteland close to his house. It was 6:01 p.m. when the boys' attention was drawn to a jet fighter that approached from the North-Northeast and left a clearly visible "smoke trail." Close to the trail, Bruno spotted a bright point of light. The young astronomy *aficionado* estimated it had a brightness magnitude of -7 and an apparent size comparable to that of Venus (at its brightest, this planet's magnitude is around -4.7). The light was positioned about 45° above the North-Northeast horizon. Having brought his 12x50

binoculars with him, he looked at the light but not being able to see what it was, Bruno decided to run inside his parents' house and mount his telescope, at the same time calling out to the other kids not to lose sight of the light. The telescope was a Japanese *Tasco* (magnification presumably 30x). Because the unknown object was "continuously moving," (presumably in a more or less linear path toward the South-Southwest), it proved difficult to keep it in the viewfinder. Bruno described the phenomenon as a "flat disc", not unlike the object that was photographed in Cluj, Romania, four years earlier and of which they had seen a reproduction in one of Weverbergh's books [1]. One of the other boys took a look through the telescope as well.

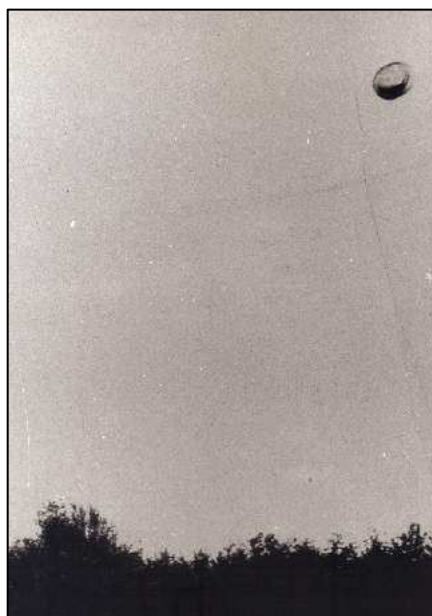


Fig. 100. August 18, 1968, Cluj, Romania. Photo by Emil Barnea (FOTOCAT archives). This photograph is presently considered a hoax created by tossing a camping plate in the sky.

While observing the disc, a part of it changed rapidly from orange-red to yellow and metal blue, then back to orange-red, and again to yellow and metal blue. Through the telescope, the blue color always remained visible. At 6:10 p.m., a neighbor, Mrs. De Ryck, drove by. The youngsters made her stop and she too watched the object for about 1 minute. Several more minutes passed, when Bruno's older brother Cedric came home. After having viewed the object through the telescope, Cedric suggested that it would be best to take pictures. The unknown object was moving so slowly at this point that its displacement was only discernable through the telescope. Following the advice of his brother, young Bruno fitted the connector to the telescope, attached a camera and snapped five pictures: the first one with the exposure time set at 1/225 sec, the second at 1/60 sec, the third and fourth at 1/30 sec and the fifth—it was now 6:22 p.m.—with an exposure of 4.5 sec. The camera was a *Beirette* equipped with an *E. Ludwig Meritar* 2.9/45mm lens (focusing distance set at infinity.) The inserted film was a *Kodak* color slide film of 19 DIN (64 ASA.)

Meanwhile the jet had already disappeared on the Southwest horizon and with his eyes fixed on the “UFO”, Bruno noticed how it started to oscillate heavily and move in an irregular way, as if it had gotten into trouble.” Its elevation was now approximately 80°, almost straight above the witnesses’ house. Then, the report continues, “the UFO shot down over an angle of 70°”. While it did this, black smoke plumes were rising from it. The blue color turned red and the object expanded to a bright ball about 1.5 times its original size. The light then extinguished and 20 to 30 small glittering particles fell down, all clearly visible to the naked eye. The disc itself had completely disappeared. It was now 6:37 p.m. and Cedric was already inside having supper. There were never any flames and no sound was reported.

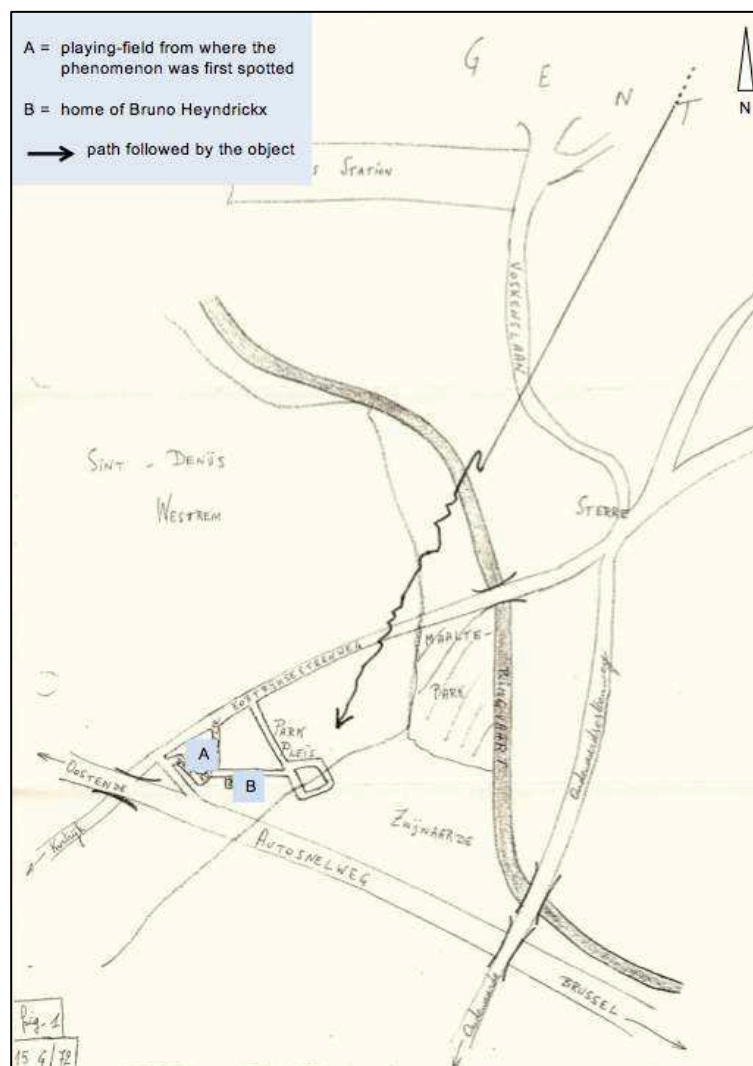


Fig. 101. Map of the sighting location as drawn by Rudy de Groote in 1972, with explanations inserted by the authors. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot

According to Bruno, only the fifth slide, the one taken with the longest exposure time, turned out right. The boy claims it shows the shadow side of the blue disc and two segments of the black smoke trail.



Fig. 102. October 6, 1972, Sint-Denijs-Westrem. Color print of slide #5. According to De Groote's report, the dark, speckled stains that cover the entire photograph were due to the photographer having dropped the slide on wet grass. Photo by Bruno Heyndrickx. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

The image is difficult to interpret, but the younger brother provided his own reading of it, which was used by Rudy de Groote to create the following sketch:

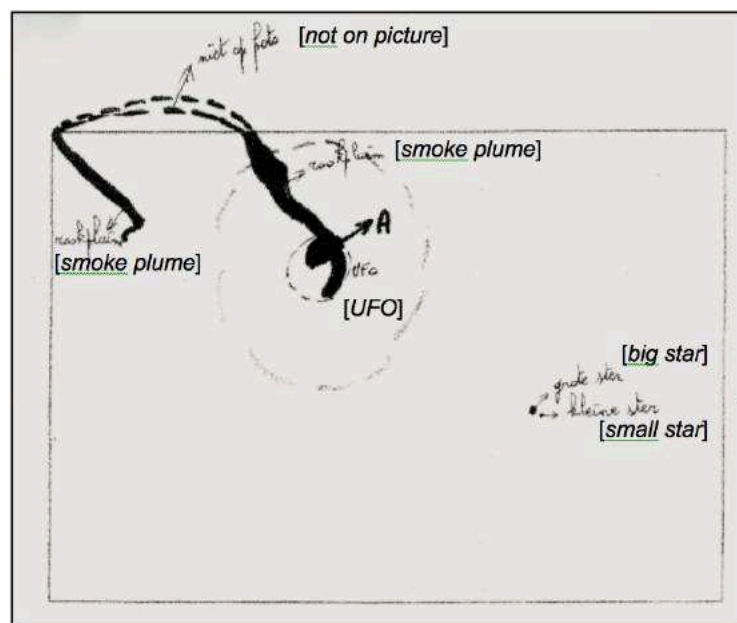


Fig. 103. Explanatory sketch by Rudy de Groote based on information provided by Bruno Hendrickx. English translations added by the authors. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

The 11-year-old photographer explained that the thick black string-like shapes in the upper left corner show the black smoke plumes that emanated from the object during its alleged “disintegration” process. The discontinued line that connects the two dark areas represents the missing part of the trail. The “A” marks the place of the “UFO” whilst the small circle indicates the assumed contours of the oscillating disc, which itself is not visible in the image. On the right side of the picture, two stars are drawn, visible as two whitish specks in the color photo (see close-up further on the next page).

There are several problems with this interpretation. One is the investigator’s storyline, which suggests that the smoke plume became visible only **after** the five pictures were taken. So we may have to look for an alternative origin for the black shapes in picture #5. A closer view at these shapes tells us that this is not at all what a trail of smoke looks like. The appearance is that of a thick fiber made of cotton or some other organic material. Shorter fibers are sticking out on all sides. Note already that there’s no mention in De Groote’s report of anyone having examined the slide itself.

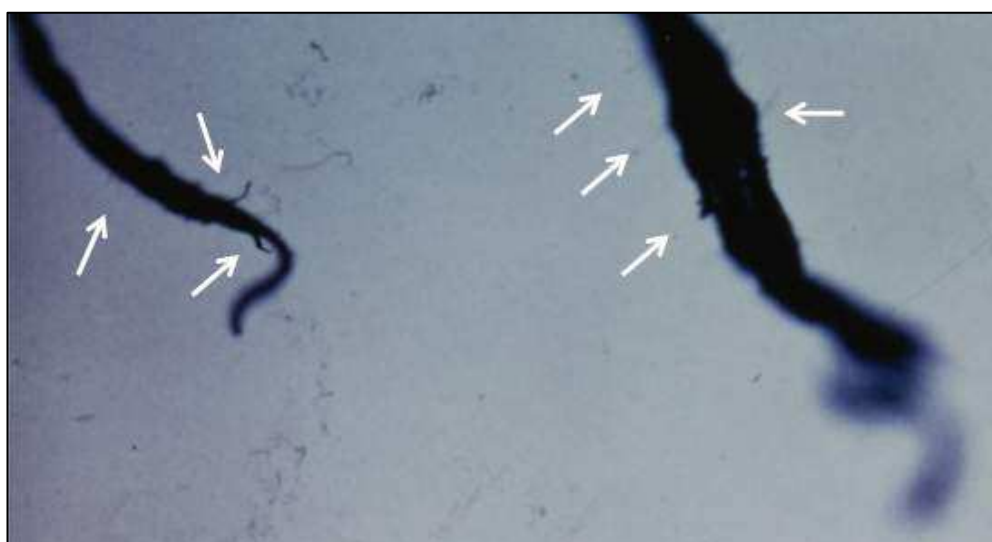


Fig. 104. Blow-up of slide #5 with arrows pointing to fibrous structures sticking out of the “smoke trail”.

Another argument against the black shapes being in any way related to a distant object, is the fact that some parts of the “fiber” are sharply in focus while others or not. If the distance scale were set at infinity, all parts of a distant smoke trail should have been depicted equally sharp. FOTOCAT consultant Andrés Duarte comments:

Such defects are typically due to the presence of a filament deposited on the film when the photo was take. It is not necessary that it is permanently adhered. It suffices that it is present at the time of the exposure so that its shadow remains impressed in the photo. If that happens, what appears in the photo is a shadow, not

an actual image. But in this particular case I think it is not a shadow but an actual image captured with a very small depth of field. It is not usually feasible to achieve photographs with these characteristics with a simple camera, but it is easy if an additional lens is mounted before it.

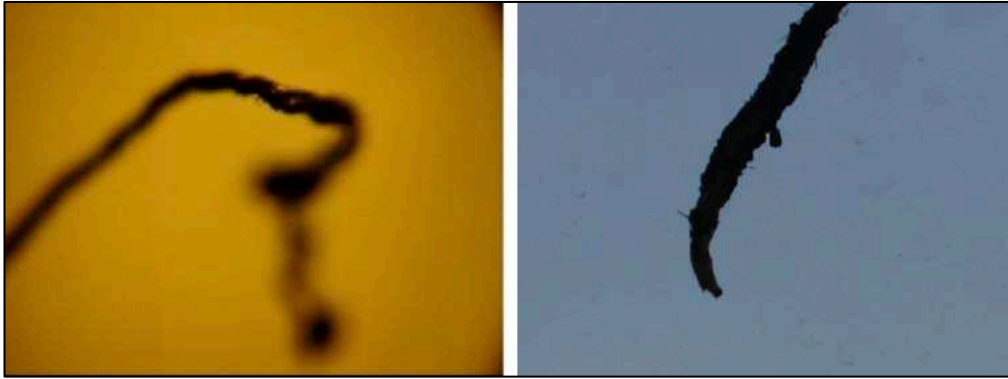


Fig. 105. LEFT: test image obtained with a 20x magnifying glass placed in front of a camera and a 0.5mm thick strand a few millimeters in front of the glass. Photo by Andrés Duarte.
RIGHT: organic fiber picked up from a plant pot and photographed against a daylight sky.
The close resemblance to the dark objects in the purported UFO picture is telling.
Photo by Wim van Utrecht.

A second problem with Bruno's interpretation of what we see in slide #5 is that it proved impossible to identify the two "stars" in the photograph. Sunset was at 6:10 p.m., so at 6:22 the sky was still quite bright and only the brightest stars and planets would have been visible. Yet the only celestial body of note in the northern quadrant was Capella (azimuth: 9°), but much too low on the horizon (altitude 15°), and not accompanied by any "smaller star". Possibly the so-called stars were merely impurities in the film's emulsion layer or a distant cloudlet or contrail (no mention is made of visible stars in the description of the sighting itself.) One might even speculate that they are illuminated parts of the colorful object Bruno was attempting to photograph.



Fig. 106. A blow-up of the "two stars".

The story itself bears a strong resemblance to the Bouffioulx (May 16, 1953) and Saint-Marc (June 5, 1955) incidents discussed elsewhere in the catalog. Here, too, disc-shaped objects were photographed that emitted smoke and luminous particles, which by itself is a rather unique description in UFO reporting history. Accidentally or not, both the Bouffioulx and Saint-Marc photos, both of which we consider to be hoaxes, were published in the first of the two aforementioned books written by Julien Weverbergh and read by Bruno and Cedric shortly before they reported their sighting.

At first sight, a bright light that appears as a “disc-shaped object” through a telescope, displays oscillating movements over an irregular but overall parabolic trajectory and produces smoke on its descent is not unlike the behavior of a parachute flare. In this line of thought the passing of a jet plane and the appearance of the light in the wake of its trail, seems too good to be a coincidence. The obvious problem with this theory is the long sighting duration.

One of the authors (WVU) contacted Cedric Heyndrickx in the summer of 2014. In the mid-70s, both were active members of GESAG/SPW. Cedric, now in his fifties, forwarded our message to his younger brother. Soon thereafter, Bruno responded that the slide was no longer in their possession, but that he still considers the sighting “unexplainable”, admitting at the same time that the other UFO reports he and his brother made in the months following the incident, could probably be qualified as “misinterpretations” of, mostly, astronomical bodies. Both showed themselves disinterested in reporting on their past activities.

What we have is not good: original evidence that is said to have been lost, similar pictures being published in a UFO book that was just out, a very young observer, and no independent witnesses to confirm the stranger aspects of the story. Moreover, the chronology of the events, as written up by De Groote, is difficult to reconcile with what the picture is supposed to show. According to the timeline in his report, the object emitted the smoke plumes only **after** the five pictures were taken. And even if the black smoke was already this clearly visible when the fifth photo was taken (6:22 p.m.), it would imply that the downward trajectory had already begun and would have lasted another 15 minutes (sighting ended at 6:37 p.m.). This is hardly a flight path that one would describe as “shooting down”.

The authors feel that all the elements of this case point to either one of the following scenarios: as soon as the boys got the processed slide film back from the lab, they took it outside to have a look at it in daylight. In their excitement, they dropped the film on the wet grass, causing a piece of fibrous material to attach itself to picture #5. When they picked up the film they noticed the dark elongated shape, which to them had to be the smoke trail that they had seen coming from the unidentified object. The second possibility is that organic material momentarily attached itself to the lens of the telescope and was photographed along with the background sky. The

latter theory would better explain why the young men never realized that the “smoke trail” was actually a piece of dirt that got stuck to the slide.

[1] Julien Weverbergh, *UFO's in Oost en West – Deel 2: UFO's boven het oostblok*, Ankh-Hermes b.v., Deventer, p. 122.

(References: Rudy de Groote, investigative report No. 15 G/72, with a summary published in *Visiteurs Spatiaux/Uit de Ruimte*, No. 32, June 1973, page 9. *Het Volk*, June 6, 1974, pages 1 and 19. Jacques Bonabot, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, June 28 and September 27, 2014. Bruno Heyndrickx, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, August 13, 2014. Jacques Bonabot, meeting with Wim van Utrecht, September 17, 2014. Andrés Duarte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, November 29, 2014.)

Date: Saturday, October 14, 1972 (astronomical deduction)

Location: outer space, Moon, photographed from Assebroek, Bruges (West Flanders)

Time: between 20:30 and 21:00

Duration: not applicable

Special features: telescopic images / unseen by photographer / repeater witness

Assessment: film flaws

The year 1972 marked the beginning of a major change in the life of Werner Bruyneel, a 32-year old food-store manager living with his wife and three kids in Assebroek, a suburb Southeast of the city of Bruges. Fascinated with astronomy and the idea of life elsewhere in the universe, Bruyneel attended a GESAG/SPW meeting in Bruges in May 1972. Back home, he wondered why, despite their fascination for UFOs, none of the group members seemed to have thought of systematically scrutinizing the sky for the weird objects that constituted the subject of their research. In the months that followed, he decided to do just that. His vigilance resulted in a first sighting of a nocturnal light on October 3, 1972. [1] The GESAG team, however, identified the phenomenon as an airplane, but the incident did not demotivate Bruyneel.

At around 8:30 p.m. on “October 16” (other sources mention “October 15”), there was a first quarter Moon shining brightly in the Southwestern sky, a perfect occasion for Bruyneel to take a couple of shots of the Earth’s satellite through his telescope, a *Lancia* 60x700mm reflector with 12.5mm focal length eyepiece. The camera used was a single-lens reflex loaded with AGFA color slide film of 18 DIN (50 ASA). As usual, the pictures were taken in groups of three with intervals of about 1 minute. Exposure time for each shot was approximately two seconds. When the slides came back from the lab, Bruyneel projected them onto the screen and, in his quest for UFO evidence, searched the images thoroughly for anything unusual. It was only at this point that he noticed, underneath the Moon’s south pole, a peculiar, vertically oriented, vivid green rod-shaped speck in three of the shots.



Fig. 107. Werner Bruyneel posing with his two telescopes, one in the small courtyard of his house, and one in the garret. The photos were taken by an unnamed professional photographer of the popular weekly *Panorama*. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

Although nothing out of the ordinary was spotted when the pictures were taken, Bruyneel was convinced the camera had captured “something that didn’t belong in the sky.” The approximate positions of the anomalies are shown in the following drawing that we extracted from an unfinished book manuscript the witness/photographer wrote about his observations in 1978:

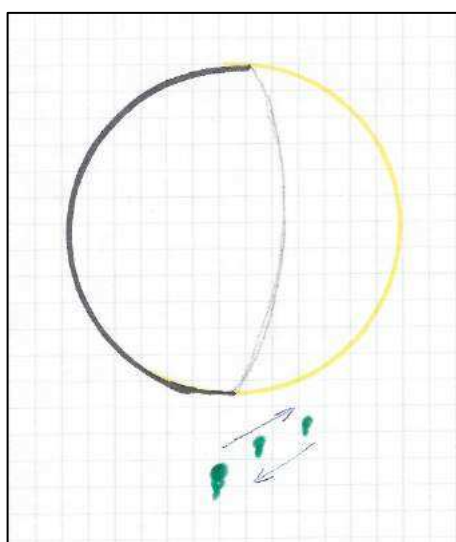


Fig. 108. Bruyneel’s sketch of the Moon with the location of the anomalous speck that showed up in three of his Moon shots. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

In 2010, Bruyneel offered what remains of his slide collection, his personal correspondence, news clippings and notes about the many sightings that were to follow, to Frederick Delaere of the Belgisch UFO-meldpunt (Belgian

UFO Reporting Center). Delaere in turn forwarded the documents to one of the authors (WVU). The 50 slides that could be safeguarded in this way are difficult to assess. It turned out that they are a mixture of originals and duplicates, and of full frame and cropped images. Moreover, identical images were attributed to different dates and none of the joined inventory lists has a numbering that matches the numbers on the plastic slide mounts. In addition, the anomalies on the slides are often smaller than a tip of a needle, making it difficult to tell which descriptions and which of the cropped enlargements relate to which slide. The fact that the enlarged images were often deformed beyond recognition by the technique that was used to make them (i.e. by photographing directly into the slide projector) complicated matters even further.

Only two of the three slides taken on October 14, 1972 could be retrieved from Bruyneel's archives, one with number 11 printed on the film, the other with number 13 (but with numbers "1" for slide #13 and "2" for slide #11 handwritten on the plastic mounts). On the first picture, the rod-shaped anomaly is barely detectable and measures approximately 4x1mm on a projected image that is 800mm wide (portrait mode). In slide #13 it is more pronounced. How the anomalies appear in the two shots is shown on the next page.

Although the printed serial numbers suggest that picture #11 was the first in this series of three, and picture #13 the third, this cannot be stated with any certainty because it is not known if the slides in our possession are originals or duplicates.

What is certain, though, is that there is something wrong with the date: while Bruyneel's (undated) notes mention either "15 October 1972" or "16 October 1972", a comparison with the aspect of the Moon on consecutive days in mid-October 1972 suggests that neither date is right. Below are four *Stellarium* images of the Moon from October 13 until October 16. When comparing the illuminated part of the lunar disc on these images, we find that Bruyneel's photographs were taken on October 14, 1972.



Fig. 109. Comparing Moon phases from October 13 till October 16 with the aspect of the Moon in slide #13.

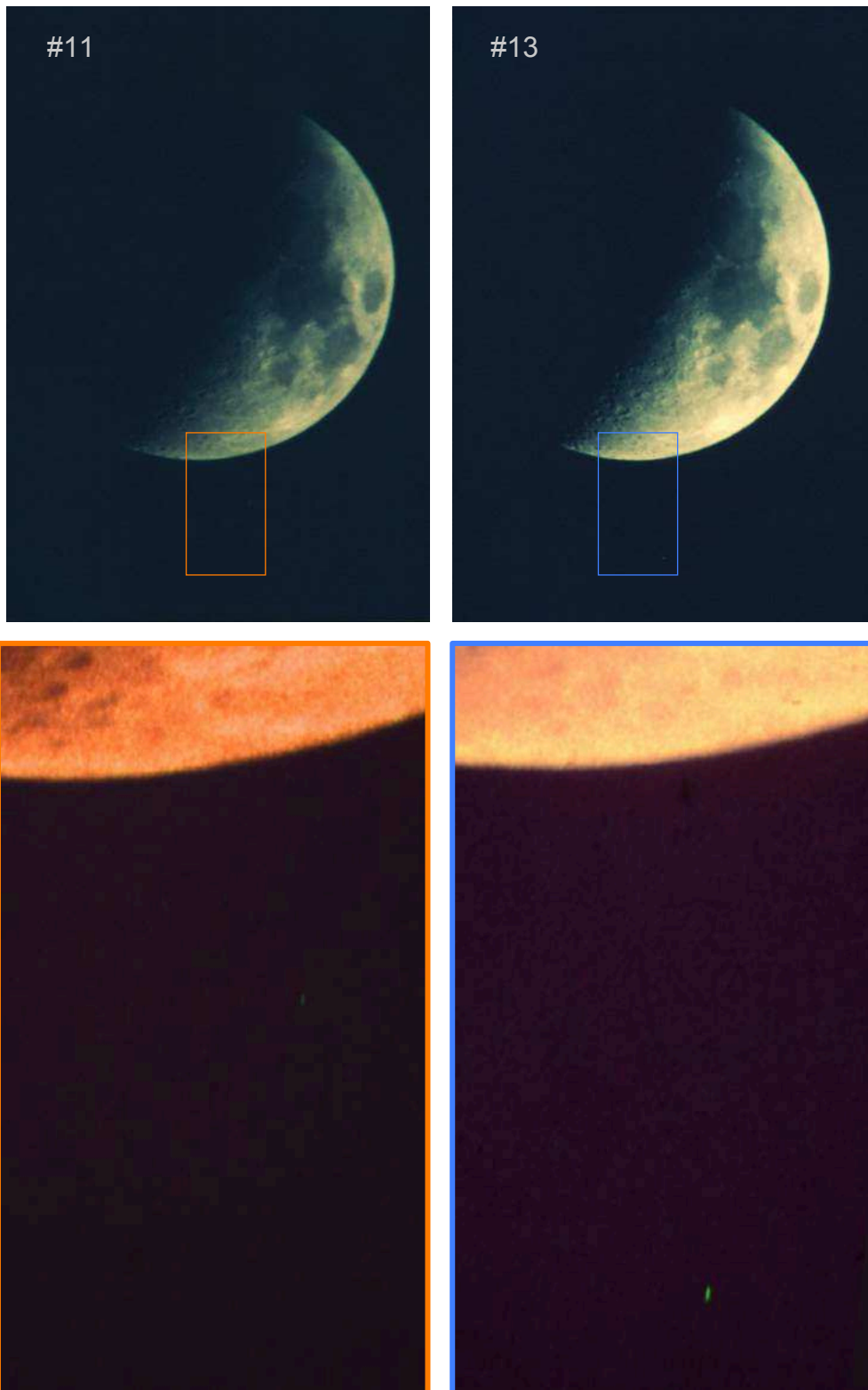


Fig. 110. October 14, 1972, Assebroek. Full-frame images of the two recuperated slides with their respective enlargements.
Photos by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

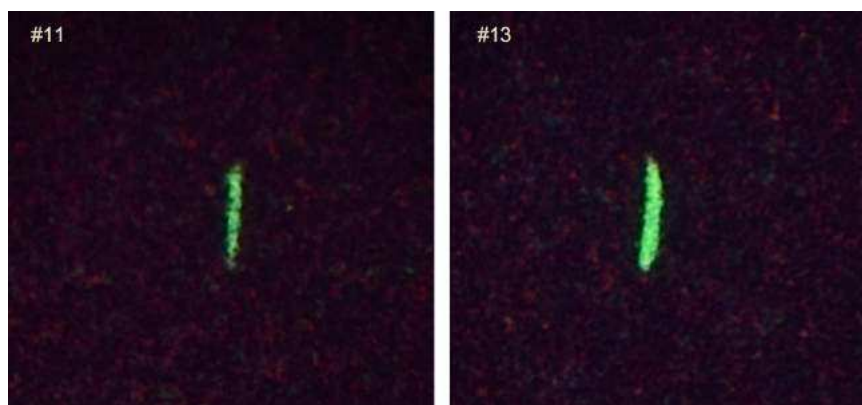


Fig. 111. The green rods as they appear under the microscope.
Photos by Wim van Utrecht.

For the sake of completeness we add that, at 8:30 p.m. on October 14, the lunar disc was 42.7% illuminated. Viewed from Bruges, it was at an azimuth of 212° (South-Southwest) and 8.5° over the horizon.

On November 20, 1972, Bruyneel sent one of his slides to the Antwerp division of AGFA-GEVAERT NV, the manufacturer of the film. Nine days later, the following reply was received:

It is our opinion that the film and its development cannot be held accountable. Other than that, it is not possible for us to determine the cause or the nature of the flaw from this single slide. Even with a projected image of 2m wide, the speck has a size of only 2x7mm. It can be either an object photographed with the rest of the scene or a reflection from the equipment.

In January 1973, Bruyneel contacted the Flemish Association of Astronomers (Vereniging voor Sterrenkunde - VVS) and the Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy (Belgisch Instituut voor Ruimte-Aeronomie – BIRA), both located on the grounds of the Belgian Royal Observatory and the Royal Meteorological Institute in Uccle, Brussels. A meeting was arranged in the building of the aeronomical institute on January 16. In the presence of four scientists, Bruyneel projected his slides and explained what he thought was unusual about them. No clear conclusion was reached, but the scientists agreed that “dust” or “some sort of reflection” would be the most likely explanation. Correspondence with both aforementioned institutions, and in particular with E. Aerts from BIRA and J. Denoyelle from VVS, continued until 1974 but by then the exchange had already turned sour, especially after a Bruges newspaper (*Brugsch Handelsblad*) had published Bruyneel’s statement that neither AGFA, VVS nor BIRA had been able to provide a satisfying answer (see Fig. 123 on page 138). Following this article, Mr. Denoyelle took it upon him to attempt to settle the matter and submitted a lengthy reply to the paper. His comments were published in the May 19, 1973 issue. We quote only the part that concerns the anomalous specks:

As far as the slides of Mr. Bruyneel are concerned: I too analyzed the originals since I was invited by the Institute for Space Aeronomy to take part in the investigation . . . Regarding the white, red and green luminous dots, there is a high chance that these are damages to the emulsion: the chances of flaws should be very small when dealing with a serious firm, and something they will not readily admit! The colors can be explained because not all the damages have to be equally deep so that not all the layers of the color film are affected. If you know that a black and white reversal film already undergoes more than 10 treatments, how many will that be with a color slide film? The damages are so small that they would normally be overlooked in exposures of landscapes or other touristic shots! In this case they will, of course, stand out more because of the dark background.

Blue, white and red spots are very common film flaws. They can be found in almost every transparency that has sufficient dark areas to facilitate spotting them. The green rod-shaped specks posed more of a riddle, until we found one lodged in between two sprocket holes of a slide that Bruyneel took the next day. Its location outside the photographic image implies that at least this rod-shaped feature was not an actual photographed object.

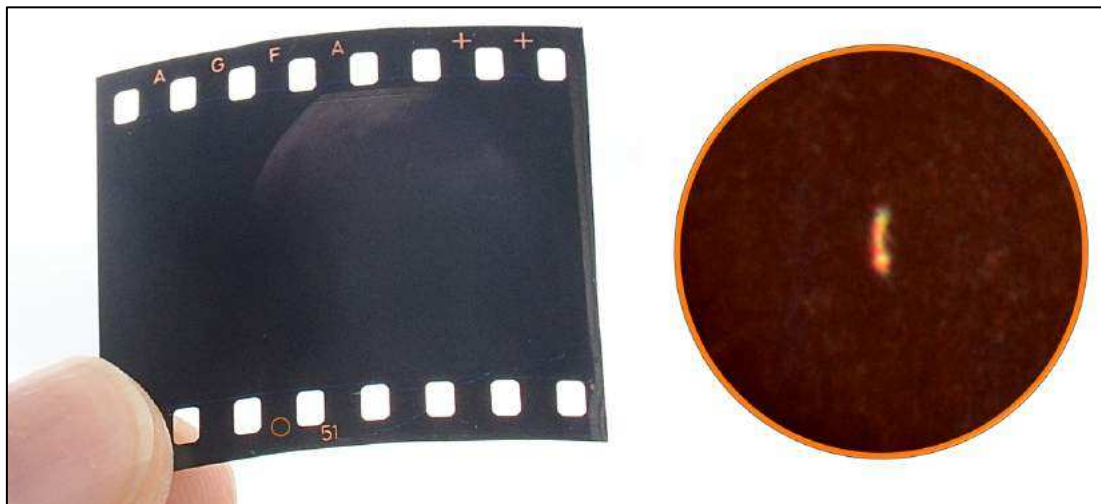


Fig. 112. LEFT: Bruyneel's slide with serial number 51 printed on the bottom of the film. The orange circle near the "51" marks the location of a speck with the same rod shape as the green features in the images under study. RIGHT: the reddish/yellowish/greenish rod as seen under the microscope, flipped and rotated 90° as to obtain the correct orientation for normal viewing. Photos by Wim van Utrecht.

It is difficult to say what may have caused the peculiar shape of these flaws. The anomalies are different in color and/or aspect from the scratch marks that are present elsewhere on the filmstrip. In the transparencies that we possess, the specks appear to be embedded in the film itself. The fact that the tiny rods run roughly parallel to the length of the filmstrip (see also the

images in our next entry), and are always positioned at more or less the same distance from the sprocket holes, could be an indication that contaminants on one of the machine rolls affected one of the still unprotected photosensitive layers during the manufacturing process. A type of defect sometimes referred to as *roll repeats*.

We asked Chilean photo expert and FOTOCAT consultant Andrés Duarte to have a look at several of the images in Bruyneel's collection that display these green features. His conclusion runs parallel to ours:

I think they are defects in the emulsion. I do not think they can be photographed objects or reflections because everything in a photographic imprint should be affected by blur (or should at least display some blur; certain features cannot be less blurred than a certain limit that is determined by diffraction and by the film's MTF [2]), and this due to a combination of different causes (like diffraction, dye diffusion, lens aberration, etc.). Furthermore, they should also have a granular appearance, but these features exhibit very few of these characteristics and have very sharp edges.

Regarding the green color, Duarte agrees with Denoyelle and clarifies:

The green color is explained by the fact that the damage is only present in the magenta layer [3]. I guess it is a manufacturing defect, because it is difficult to imagine how only the magenta layer could have been damaged after manufacturing.

Considering the above, it is not so surprising that identical rod-shaped features reappeared in Moon shots taken by Bruyneel on the following night, presumably with the same film still in the camera. This second series of telescopic images is discussed in our next entry.

[1] Werner Bruyneel claimed many more UFO sightings. For those that were documented photographically, see our entries for October 15 and November 17, 1972; February 27 (two entries), May 19, June 15, July 12, October 1 and November 4, 1973 and June 1 and 4, 1974.

[2] The MTF or Modulation Transfer Function is a measure to determine how faithfully a lens reproduces detail from the object to the image produced (for a more detailed explanation see <http://photo.net/learn/optics/mtf/>)

[3] Slide film, or reversal film, is part of a subtractive process that starts with layers of cyan, magenta, and yellow. When the film is exposed, the dye is subtracted to reveal red, green, and blue colors.

(References: Werner Bruyneel, slide collection, personal notebook, additional descriptions and sketches, letters to and from various UFO researchers and astronomical institutions, and notably a letter addressed to Dr. J. Allen Hynek on February 6, 1973. *Brugsch Handelsblad*, March 17 and May 19, 1973. Fred Joossen, *Panorama* No. 40, October 2, 1973, pages 48-52. Hans van Kampen, *UFO's boven de Lage Landen*, De Kern, Bussum, 1978, pages 118-

119 and photo section. Andrés Duarte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, May 31, 2016. Others, as noted.)

Date: Sunday, October 15, 1972 (astronomical deduction)

Location: outer space; Moon, photographed from Assebroek, Bruges (West-Flanders)

Time: between 20:30 and 21:00

Duration: not applicable

Special features: telescopic images / unseen by photographer / repeater witness

Assessment: film flaws

The evening after he took the pictures discussed in our previous entry, and still unaware that there were “unusual” green specks on them, Werner Bruyneel made another series of Moon shots using the same equipment and setting. This time, it turned out that nine of the transparencies showed something “out of the ordinary.” In his unfinished book manuscript from 1978, Bruyneel explains:

These nine shots show green lights again in proximity of the Moon. Several of them possess a structure and are visible in front of and around the Moon. On three slides, the dots are white and move from right to left over the Moon. Two slides show a dark, structured mass moving in front of the Moon.

Five of the aforementioned nine slides could be retrieved from Bruyneel’s archives. The serial numbers printed on these transparencies are #29, #35, #45, #47 and #51, though this is not always the order Bruyneel gave them in his notes and letters. The fact that the transparencies are framed in three different types of slide mounts suggests that they are a mixture of originals and duplicates. The date attributed to this second series of Moon shots is given as “October 16” in one source, “October 17” in another, but like with the October 14 shots, here too, the aspect of the Moon shows that both dates are wrong. The pictures undeniably stem from October 15. Somehow, Bruyneel neglected a date he handwrote himself on the plastic frame in which transparency number 35 was mounted, and which correctly reads: “15/10/72” (following the typical Belgian format DD/MM/YY).



Fig. 113. FAR LEFT: image of the Moon as generated by the *Stellarium* program for October 15, 1973. LEFT: the Moon the way it appears on Bruyneel’s slide #35.

Out of the five slides that were recovered, three contain light-colored features and two (#35 and #45) show dark shapes (#45 with an additional green speck on it). Like with the October 14 series, nothing out of the ordinary was observed when the pictures were taken. Below is a diagram in which Bruyneel denoted all the anomalies he detected in the 9 pictures taken on October 15, 1972:

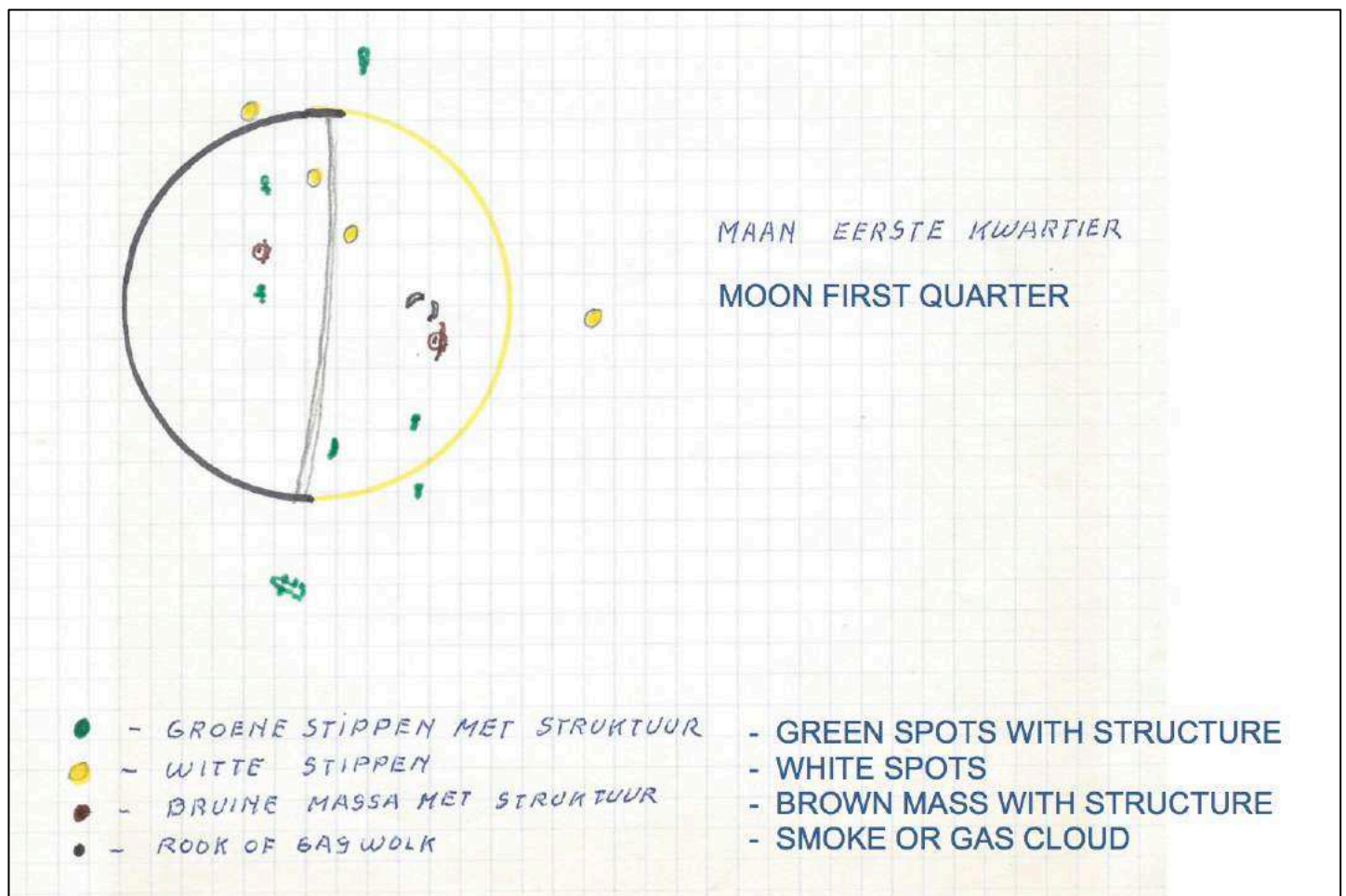


Fig. 114. Diagram from one of Bruyneel's notebooks. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.
Inserted typed texts are translations by the authors.

Almost all images show white/bluish/grey dots. These features are not discussed here: they are microscopically small, lack strangeness and we can think of no reason why they would be anything else but everyday film flaws or dust particles.

Slide #29 contains two specks that Bruyneel described as "structured objects." It concerns the top and bottom green spots in Bruyneel's diagram.



Fig. 115. October 15, 1972, Assebroek. Slide #29. Photo by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere. The images on the right are microscopic enlargements made by Wim van Utrecht in 2016.

The vivid green feature on top is markedly similar to the vertically oriented rod-shaped specks in the October 14 pictures. We explained in our previous entry why we consider these to be blemishes in the magenta layer of the photographic emulsion generated during the manufacturing process.

The feature below the Moon's south pole is somewhat different. It is multicolored, white-pink in the extremes and greenish in the center. Oddly, an extreme blow-up made by Bruyneel in 1972 and published in a Dutch UFO book in 1980 depicts this speck in a very different way:



Fig. 116. Bruyneel's enlargement (cropped) of the bottom feature in slide #29. Image borrowed from *Spooklicht* (De Kern, Baarn, 1980). The inset shows a brightened version of our microscopic picture of the anomaly.

Bruyneel refers to this bright shape as “the submarine”. The presence of a third rod-shaped feature in the illuminated part of the Moon in slide #47 (see further down the text) made him wonder if these specks could have been caused by sunlight reflecting off a huge alien craft that followed an orbital path over the south and north pole of the Moon. A rather hasty presumption, we think, and rather questionable too considering that the top and bottom green features appear in one and the same image (thus requiring at least two gigantic spaceships that were never detected by any professional observatory). Bruyneel's personal interpretation of this “craft” can be seen below left in another diagram:

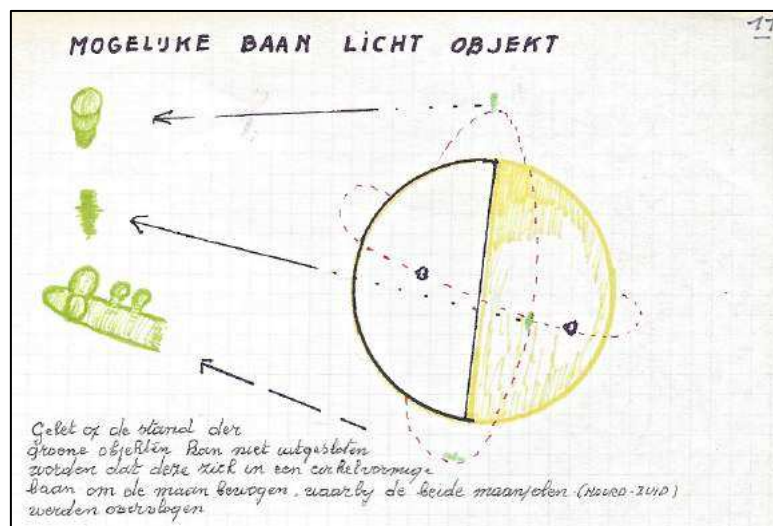


Fig. 117. Bruyneel's interpretation of the possible path followed by the green “luminous objects”. The diagram also includes a hypothetical path for the dark “objects” in slides #35 and #45. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

Note already that Bruyneel draws (and describes) the rod-shaped object over the Moon's north pole as three balls of decreasing size on top of one another. Yet, no such shape is evident from our microscopic image, which shows only a slightly bend, rod-shaped light similar to the green specks on the October 14 pictures. Bruyneel insists, though, that his enlargements were made in the best possible way:

I projected the slides onto a 1.20x1.20m screen and searched for strange lights or objects. I then placed a mirror reflex camera in front of the screen and took the lens away so that the part of the projected image was shown directly on the mirror without any lens deformation. I glided the photo camera a little bit forward or backward until I got a sharp image in the viewer at the back of the camera and pressed the release button in bulb mode and counted 101, 102 and stop. It is impossible to obtain a better enlargement!

The fact that the “submarine” on Bruyneel's enlargement looks so different from the feature on the slide we recovered made us wonder if we had not selected the wrong slide. To verify this, we made the following montage, which compares the position of the anomaly with regard to the lunar south pole in Bruyneel's enlargement (left) with that of the anomaly in a digital enlargement made directly from slide #29.

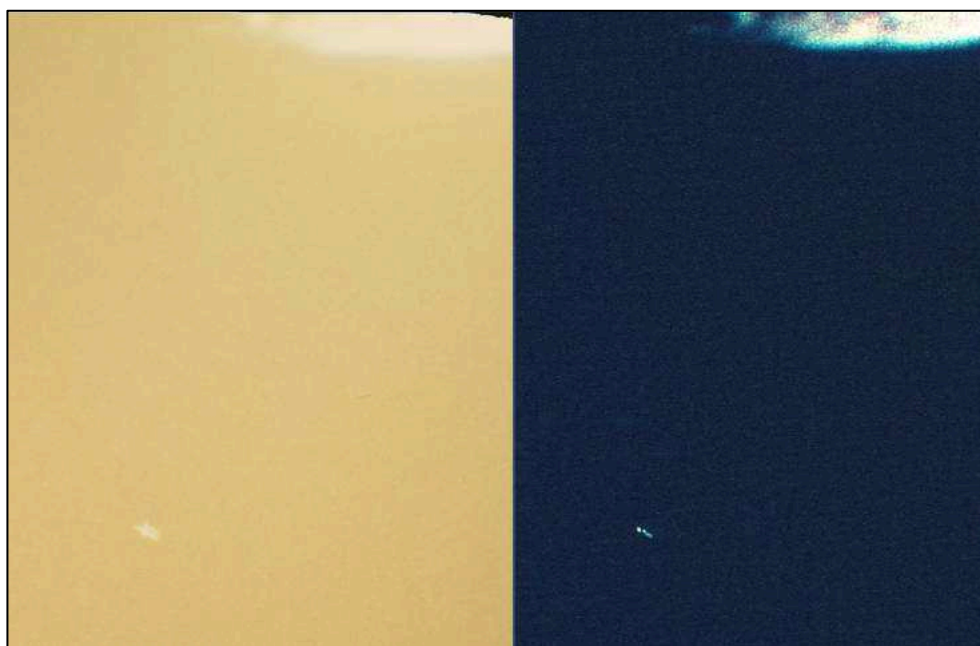


Fig. 118. LEFT: Bruyneel's photographic enlargement of slide #29.
RIGHT: a digital enlargement of the slide.

The match is good. Orientation and size are also similar. In fact, the image to the left turns out to be a blurred reproduction of the original. Interestingly, the same distortion (multiple images and aurora-like spikes) also appears when

the speck is viewed through a magnifying loupe while holding the transparency in front of a bright sky with the image slightly out of focus. The effect appears irrespective of whether the transparency is placed in its glass mount or not. The soft light green color of Bruyneel's enlargement also shows an unrealistic overexposed effect, presumably obtained by photographing directly into the bright projector lamp.

Having determined that it was the way in which Bruyneel crafted his enlargement that produced the complex shape, the question remains what this speck may have been. Its shape is dissimilar from the vertically oriented, slightly bent, rod-like features already discussed. It is more crooked and irregular, and not positioned vertically. Taking into account that nothing was observed visually, anyone who is not a UFO fanatic would logically assume that it is a mere scratch caused by a sharp object, a blemish that affected more than just the magenta layer of the emulsion.

A second picture taken on October 15 (slide #47) shows another light-colored speck, this time in front of the Moon. Here too, shape, size and color compare well the green rods attributed to manufacturing defects in the previous entry.

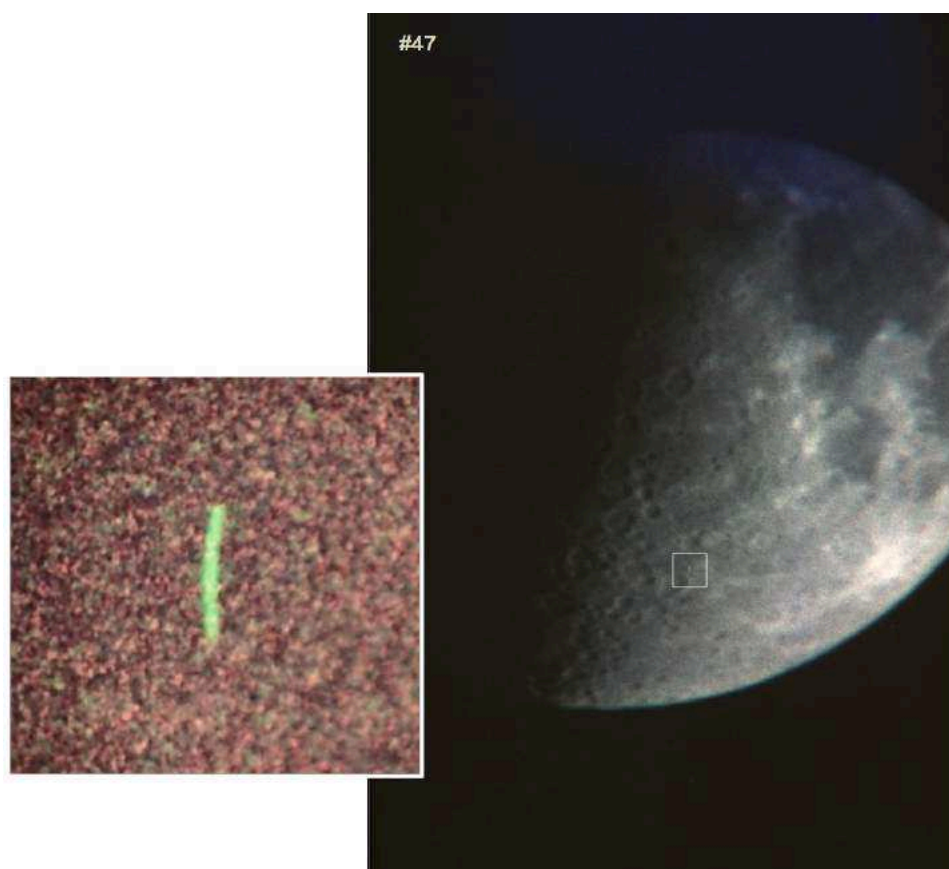


Fig. 119. October 15, 1972, Assebroek. Slide #47. Photo by Werner Bruyneel.
Microscopic photo by Wim van Utrecht.

Apart from a series of long scratches of a marked blue color, slide #51 (see page 126) shows nothing unusual. In fact, it is not certain what “anomaly” Bruyneel had in mind when he added this transparency to his “UFO collection”. Possibly, because it has a couple of microscopically small white spots on it.

The remaining two slides of the October 15 series (#35 and #45) are of a different nature: besides another green “rod”, slide #45 also shows a dark object, roughly the shape of a diamond, in front of the sunlit part of the Moon. Slide #35 shows a similar shape barely visible in the shadow part of the Moon as well as two more dark “objects” in the illuminated part, one in the shape of a “C”, the other in the shape of an ellipse. According to Bruyneel’s notes, slide #45 was taken first and slide #35 immediately thereafter. If true, that would mean that the slides in our possession are copies and not cut from the original film strip. This is what slide #45 shows:



Fig. 120. October 15, 1972, Assebroek. Slide #45. Photo by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere. Microscopic photo (bottom left) by Wim van Utrecht.

Bruyneel describes the dark spot as “a saucer shape that is depicted in every UFO publication”. Below is a close up of this feature, this time imaged through the microscope. On the right is Bruyneel’s personal interpretation of the shape.

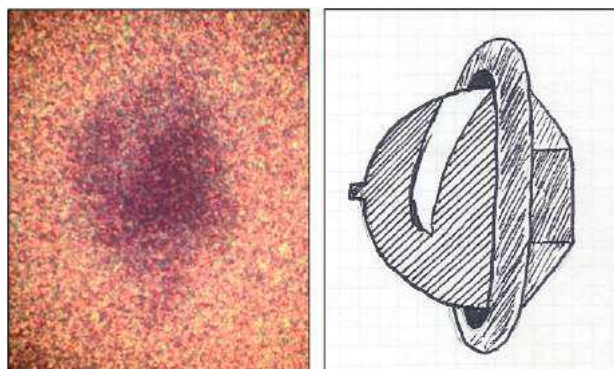


Fig. 121. LEFT: microscopic image of the dark feature in slide #45. RIGHT: Bruyneel’s interpretation. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere. Microscopic photo by Wim van Utrecht.

Readers will agree that it takes a good deal of imagination to detect a “flying saucer” in this blurred image. Just for the sake of completeness, we mention here that one of the scientists who attended the meeting at the Belgian Institute of Aeronomy (see our discussion of the October 14 photographs) estimated that, if this really were an object near the surface of the Moon, its diameter would have been close to 90km.

Slide #35 contains more dark shapes: two on the sunlit side of the lunar disc and one on the shadow side.

With regard to the two brown features, Bruyneel writes:

Even though there is no clear shape present in this shot, we might be dealing here with the exhaust that preceded the displacement of the object.

By “object” Bruyneel is referring to the dark shape visible in slide #45. The alleged path of this “object” is drawn in the diagram published at the beginning of this entry and runs perpendicular to the trajectory attributed to the green specks. It is important to note here that slides #29 and #35 were made with a smaller magnification (56x) than slides #45, #47 and #51 (93x), meaning that the eyepiece of the telescope was changed from 12.5mm to 7.5mm focal length in between these shots. In these circumstances it seems highly unlikely that slide #35 was made “immediately after” slide #45. In fact, the change in magnification seems to confirm that the correct order of the shots is that of the serial numbers printed on the slides in our possession. Once again, the impression arises that Bruyneel tried to connect dots where no connections exist.



Fig. 122. October 15, 1972, Assebroek. Slide #35.

RIGHT: Full-frame image. TOP LEFT: cropped enlargement of the two brownish features in the sunlit part of the Moon. BOTTOM LEFT: brightened cropped image revealing a third black dot in the Moon's dark side.

Photo by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

The nature of the dark shapes remains somewhat puzzling, though. One thing that may hold a clue as to what they show is that, despite the fact that these features are of considerable size, they were not observed with the naked eye or through the telescope's viewfinder. This in itself makes it highly unlikely that they were actual objects hovering near the Moon's surface. But could they have been smaller objects that accidentally passed the telescope's field of view? Perhaps the trees in front of Bruyneel's attic attracted small birds, or perhaps the autumn wind carried some withered leaves across the telescope's line of sight. As FOTOCAT consultant Andrés Duarte pointed out in a mail to the authors, the biggest obstacle for this theory is the long exposure time of the shots. Even if a bird or a leaf passed very slowly in front of the Moon, such objects will appear to move fast when

viewed through the very small window a telescope offers on the sky. With an exposure time of “2 seconds” this would result in considerable motion blur. Only an object moving exactly in the telescope’s line of sight (like a distant stratosphere balloon drifting away from the observer) would produce a reasonably sharp image, but then again, such an object would not have remained unnoticed.

Could the dark features have been foreign debris that settled in the optical path of the eyepiece, camera or telescope? Andrés Duarte points out why this, too, is highly unlikely:

In general, dust particles on lenses cannot form sharp images. A particle on the objective lens of a telescope cannot even form an image. It is not trivial to get a good image of a particle in the eyepiece when the camera is focused on the image formed by the telescope. The eyepiece and the image are at different distances from the camera. One way to get such a particle and a telescopic image almost simultaneously in focus is to use a very small aperture in order to obtain a large depth of field, but in astrophotography very small apertures are not used.

Microscopic examination confirms that the “anomalies” are part of the emulsion layer and that the picture grain is left intact. This would rule out a stain or a dust particle embedded in the film. What remains possible, though, is a particle that only momentarily got stuck to the film. Duarte explains:

I think the spots are shadows left by dust particles deposited on the film, which then became detached, leaving only the imprint of their shadows.

Considering the absence of any visual observation, and abiding by the rule that when confronted with several possible explanations the simplest one is most likely to be correct, the authors accept this explanation as the most reasonable one.

In the meantime Bruyneel’s pictures had found their way to the press. Below is the first newspaper article dedicated to his experiences. It is completely beyond our comprehension why this local newspaper chose to publish slide #35 and replaced one of the two dark features in the illuminated part of the lunar disc with a reversed and enlarged image of the dark shape in slide #45. Was the editorial staff of the opinion that the photo was not spectacular enough and could use a bit of makeover? The caption does not tell us why the photograph was deliberately manipulated. It simply reads: “One of the photos by Mr. Bruyneel. We drew a little ring around the object that raised so many questions in his mind”.

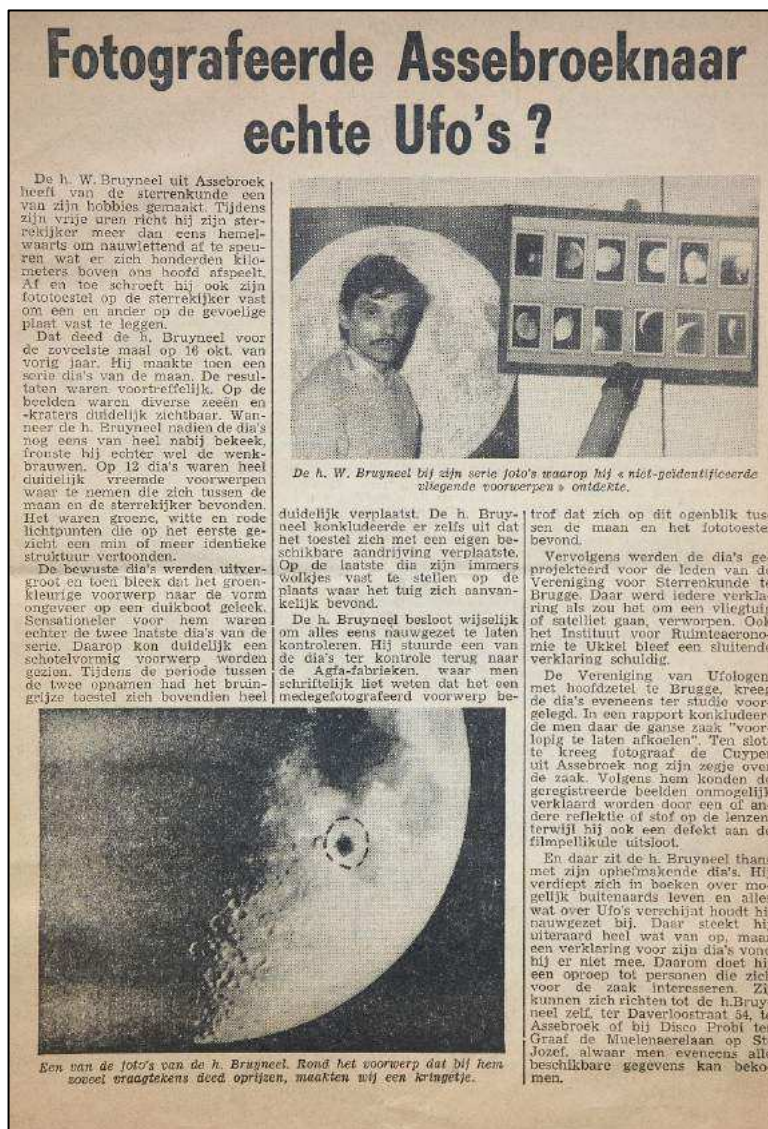


Fig. 123. News clipping with manipulated photo published in the March 17, 1973 edition of *Brugsch Handelsblad*. Courtesy of Frits van der Veldt

It did not take long before other newspapers and magazines picked up Bruyneel's claims and published his pictures. In fact, much of the UFO news in 1973 was dominated by his sightings and by those of his "followers," leading to a series of journalistic hoaxes towards the end of the year.

(References: Werner Bruyneel, personal notes, Werner Bruyneel, *Panorama* (The Netherlands), No. 36, August 1-7, 1973, page 36. Fred Joossen, *Ons Volk/Panorama*, No. 40, October 2, 1973, pages 48-52. Hans van Kampen, *Vliegende Schotels, Waan of Wetenschap?*, H. Meulenhoff, Baarn, 1973, pages 118-119 and photo section. Hans van Kampen, *UFO's boven de Lage Landen*, De Kern, Bussum, 1978, pages 163-169 and photo section. Hans van Kampen, *Spooklicht, Ufo's, wezens & mensen*, De Kern, Baarn, 1980, photo section. Andrés Duarte, personal communication to the authors, June 16, 2016. Others, as noted.)

Date: Thursday, October 19, 1972
Location: Wondelgem (East Flanders)
Time: 23:45
Duration: ~1 minute
Special Features: repeater witness / negatives allegedly lost
Assessment: Moon (mirror ghosting)

Erwin Vangampelaere was 22 when he took a series of pictures that would mark the beginning of his career in the field of UFOs and the paranormal. His personal account of what happened that day was published in the March 1973 issue of the GESAG-SPW journal *Visiteurs Spatiaux/Uit de Ruimte* (further referred to as "VS"). We quote:

*On October 19, 1972, at about 11:45 p.m., while I was studying for an exam, a sharp flash of light lit up the living room. I thought there was something wrong with the lighting because light bulbs do go on and off about 50 times per second (called periods.) When there was a second flash, I looked outside and saw **an enormous ball of bright light below the Moon** [emphasis by the authors]. Because the Moon always illuminates my living room, everything could be clearly observed. I was just planning to make a photo block of my neighbor's child, so it was really a coincidence that my camera stood ready to shoot pictures.*

I had tried to photograph the second flash through my window. Unfortunately, it was too late because I still had to arrange the settings of my camera. I then ran downstairs and positioned my tripod and camera so that I could photograph the Moon. Each phenomenon has been photographed with an exposure time of about 3 seconds. The object itself lit up 10 times, three times I was unable to capture it on film. After picture No. 7, the object flashed out and didn't appear anymore. I then waited for about half an hour for a new observation, but to no avail.

Picture No. 3 shows a strange line that I observed as the object appeared. It was like an arrow with no head or tail that disappeared extremely fast in a direction opposite to the displacement of the object.

In the years that followed, the photographs were published in various newspapers and the incident was discussed on radio and television. Vangampelaere sold his pictures at cost price to whoever wanted to purchase them. The authors have seen four different sets of prints, notably in the files of Dutch researcher Frits van der Veldt (three prints), Belgian ufologist Marc Broux (four prints), SOBEPS' chief of investigations Jean-Luc

Vertongen (seven prints) and GESAG's director Jacques Bonabot (another seven prints.) Below is a scanned version of the latter series.



Fig. 124/125. October 19, 1972, Wondelgem. Pictures #1 and #2.



Fig. 126. Picture #3. Besides the "Moon" and the "UFO", this photo also shows a quasi-horizontal luminous trail near the bottom picture frame.

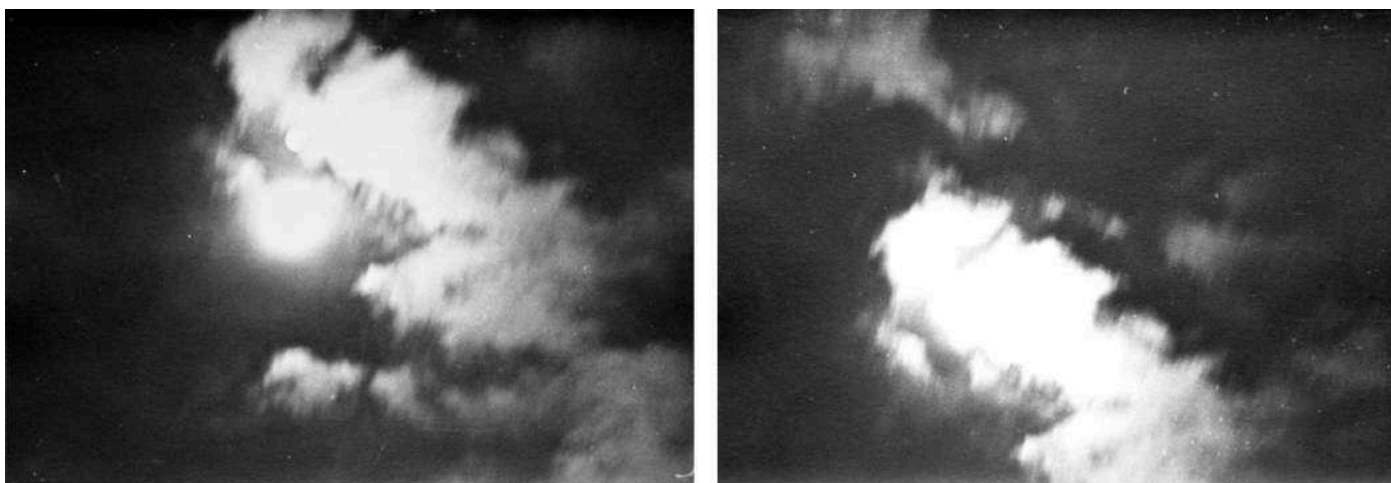


Fig. 127/128. Pictures #4 and #5

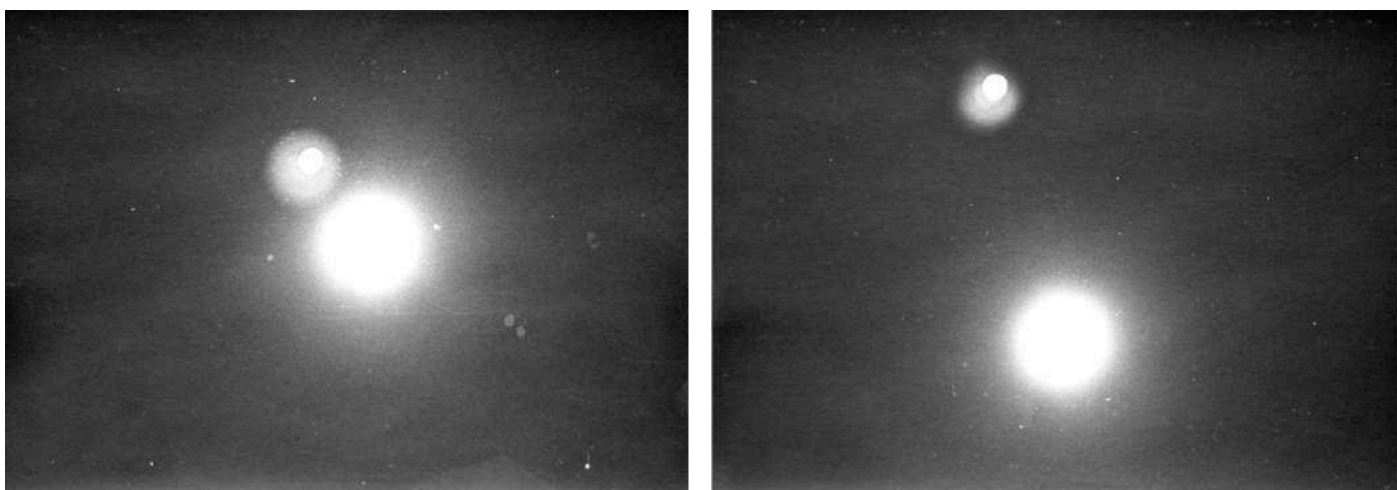


Fig. 129/130. Pictures #6 and #7

All seven pictures taken by Erwin Vangampelaere. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

According to the article in VS, the photos were taken with a *Konica EE* automatic reflex T camera loaded with *AGFA 21 DIN/100 ASA* film. The lens used was a *Konica AR 52mm* (f/1.8; Ø 55m); focal distance was set to infinite. The negatives reportedly got lost when they were sent to UFO author Julien Weverbergh and never returned. A peculiar detail: in personal correspondence with Marc Broux, Vangampelaere mentioned that there were eight pictures. “Eight photos” is also what GESAG member Rudy de Groote wrote at the end of the VS article (despite a comment on the same page that reads: “after picture No. 7, the object flashed out and didn't appear anymore”.) Actually, not only the number of pictures is uncertain, there is also confusion about the order of the shots: the numbers on the back not being the same for each set of photos we examined.

The article further mentions that the displacement of the unidentified light source is clearly visible in the consecutive pictures, that its apparent size was close to 10cm at 60 cm from the eyes, and that the ball of light extinguished rapidly in one place to reappear in a different one.

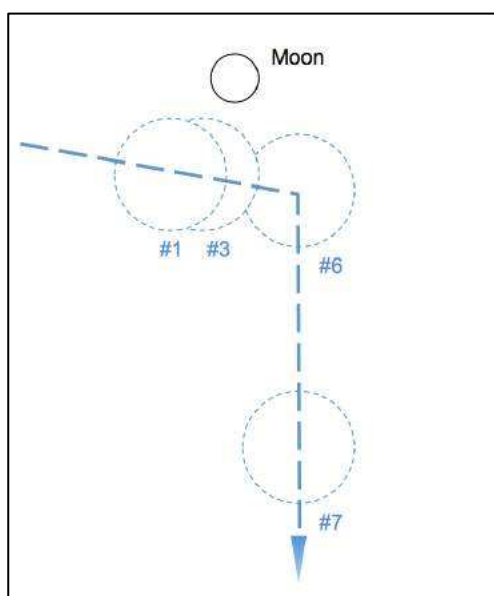


Fig. 131. Diagram based on a sketch in VS showing the supposed displacement of the unidentified light with respect to the Moon.

On October 19, 1972, at 11:54 p.m. the Moon was 90.1% illuminated. It was at azimuth 210° (South-Southwest) and 34° above the horizon. At arm's length (circa 60cm), the Moon measures only about 0.5cm. If, as the photographer claimed, the larger light measured "10cm at 60cm from the eyes", it would have been as big as 20 moons put together. This is not what the pictures show.

For years, Vangampelaere's photos were considered to be among the best UFO pictures the Dutch-speaking part of the country had ever seen. Yet, the pictures show nothing more than a very common photographic effect. In fact, what we are looking at are images of an overexposed Moon (the brighter light) with its weaker mirror image on top, always with the geometrical center of the picture as the point of symmetry. In other words, just the opposite of what the photographer claimed. Typically, such ghost images occur when a filter is placed in front of the camera (many sky and landscape photographers standardly use a so-called *Skylight* or UV filter to protect the lens of their camera). Unfortunately, uncropped, full-frame prints of the Wondelgem photos are not available, making it impossible to demonstrate how the ghost Moons are positioned with regard to the actual Moon. Still, there are plenty of other examples in our files showing the same effect. Below are a couple of nearly identical Moon shots:



Fig. 132. Photograph taken by Ingrid Thalberg at Trollhättan, Sweden, on October 7, 1995. The bright light near the center of the picture is the Moon. Its weaker mirrored image is on the left. Image borrowed from *UFO Aktuellt* No. 2/2001.



Fig. 133. Another Swedish example of *Moon ghosting*, this one captured by Lennart Magnusson at Hedemora, in early 1999. The Moon is on top, the mirrored image is on the opposite side of the image. Image borrowed from *UFO Aktuellt* No. 2/2001.

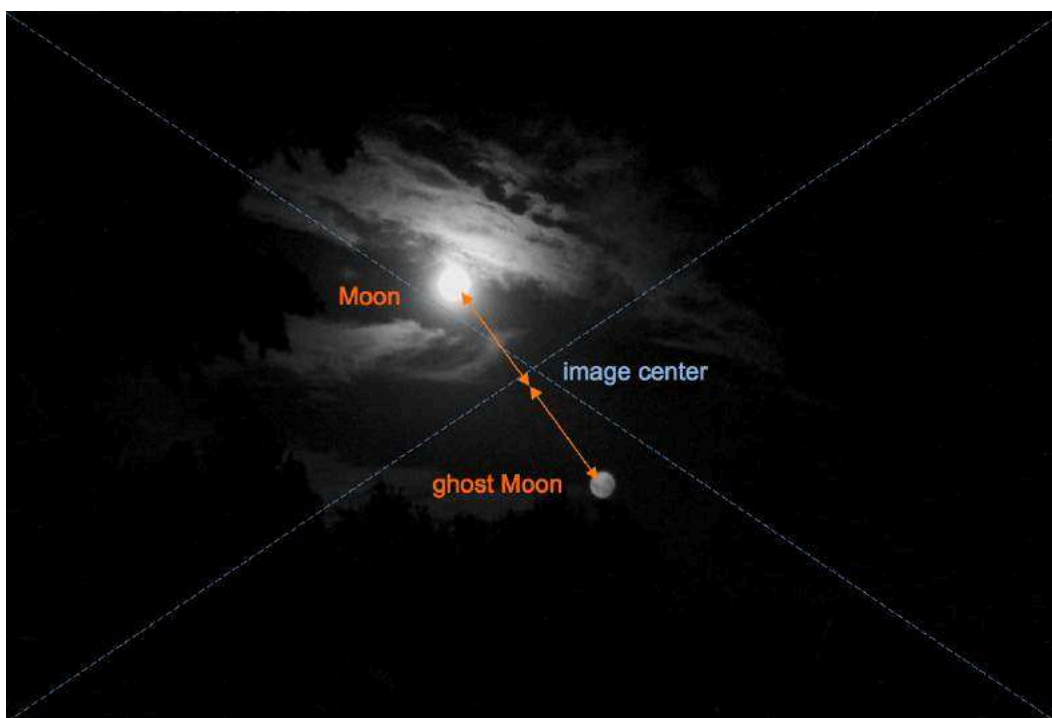


Fig. 134. Same picture as in Fig. 133 with indications showing where to expect ghost images in a picture of a bright light source.

Magnusson's photo being an original and therefore uncropped, it serves well to illustrate the optical principles behind mirror ghosting. To that purpose, we added blue diagonal lines that mark the center of the image, and two equally long double-headed lines, in orange, that connect the Moon with its ghost image. Note that the point where the arrows touch is slightly off with the image center. This is not atypical and presumably due to the fact that internal lenses and filter are not always perfectly aligned. [1]

By way of exercise in comparative ufology, we briefly cover a few more examples of mirror ghosting in Moon pictures, this time drawn from the Spanish UFO files. On January 9, 1982, at 6:30 p.m., photographs of a total lunar eclipse were taken at Cádiz city. Nothing unusual was sighted, but when the pictures came back from the photo shop, there was a clearly distinguishable anomalous object on one of them, halfway between the Moon and the sea below. The image (Fig. 135) was sent to the Grupo Español de Investigación del Fenómeno OVNI (GEIFO) for appraisal.

Less than three hours later, an amateur photographer located in the town of Serinya (Gerona), some 1,000km Northeast of Cádiz, Joseph Rubirola was also taking pictures of the eclipse. To his surprise, Rubirola too discovered a large white disc on the developed pictures (Fig. 136). The disc dwarfed the Moon and showed two vertical appendices, one pointing upward, the other downward. In reality, here too, it is the brighter light that is the Moon with the

ghost image showing a less bright mirrored version of the partly obscured Moon.



Fig. 135. January 9, 1982, Cádiz, Spain (cropped). Photographer unknown. Courtesy of José Ruesga Montiel.

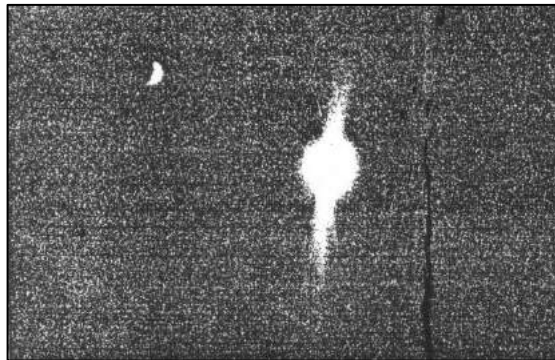


Fig. 136. January 9, 1982, Serinya, Spain (cropped). Photo by Josep Rubirola. Courtesy of *Punt Diari*.

Among the many existing occurrences of this type of reflection, one particular case from Barcelona deserves special mention. It concerns a series of pictures taken on January 24, 1978. The singular feature here is that scientists who studied the images initially concluded that the pictures show a physical object that emitted “some sort of energy”! Photographer on duty was Juan Tubau. Using his *Asahi Pentax* camera (MX model), equipped with a

50mm lens of f/1.74 and loaded with *ORWO Chrome* UT18 slide film of 50 ASA, he was set on photographing the illuminated city with the full Moon shining overhead. The first two pictures were taken with an exposure time of 20-seconds, the next two some 30 minutes later with an exposure time of 1 second. Although nothing out of the ordinary had appeared in the sky, the latter two slides showed “a second Moon”. The staff of a local astronomical society suggested the photographer to take the slides to the Barcelona-based Centro de Estudios Interplanetarios (CEI), a UFO organization founded in 1958 by Antonio Ribera.



Fig. 137. January 24, 1978, Barcelona, Spain. Photos by Juan Tubau. Courtesy of CEI.
 LEFT: 20-seconds exposure showing no reflection. RIGHT: round luminous object appearing on one of the 1-second exposures.

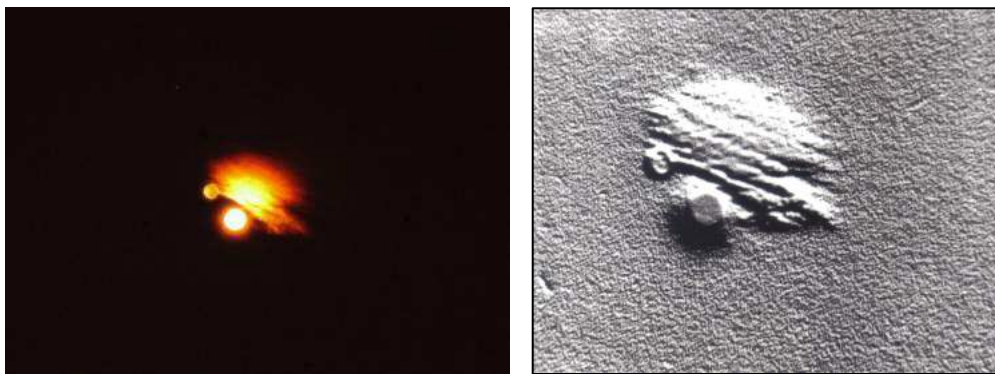


Fig. 138. LEFT: enlargement of the second slide taken with an exposure time of 1 second. The pseudo Moon is now above-left of the Moon. RIGHT: photo analysis output (edge enhancement) by GSW. Courtesy of CEI.

François Louange and J.L. Casero of ESA's European Space Astronomy Center at Villafranca del Castillo, Madrid, analyzed the slides. In their report, published in *Stendek* (June 1980, pages 2-6), they rejected any kind of reflection associated with the camera's optics and supported the hypothesis of a flying object radiating energy. One year later, an alternative study was ordered from Ground Saucer Watch, Inc., a Phoenix-based UFO organization that specialized in computer analysis of UFO photographs. Employing what was then state-of-the-art technology, the GSW team concluded that the unidentified image was just a lens reflection caused by the bright Moon (*Stendek*, June 1981, pages 5-6).



Fig. 139. LEFT: the smaller light in picture #3 erroneously believed to be the “Moon” (enlarged from a darker print in the files of Frits van der Veldt.) RIGHT: the real Moon in the night of October 19, 1972 according to the *Stellarium* software. The image is identical but reversed. The Moon was waxing not waning,

In 2007, François Louange informed one of the authors (VJBO) that he had carefully re-examined the radiometry of the pixels inside the presumed UFO. In doing so, he detected the usual shady shapes that typify the real Moon. This outcome convinced him that the images were indeed nothing but reflections.

Returning to our Belgian case: one wonders why no one thought of this explanation before. An object that was assumed to be much bigger and brighter than the full Moon, flashing on and off in the sky, would not have gone unnoticed by other people residing in this heavily populated community on the northern border of the city of Ghent. Equally upsetting is that, in all those years, nobody seems to have realized that the small object does not show the Moon in its first quarter but shows a mirrored image of what the Moon really looked like on October 19, 1972.

As for the luminous trail on picture #3, there is no reason to believe that this fast-moving, spear-shaped light was anything other than a meteor.



Fig. 140. This one-second exposure of the Moon with clouds and a meteor was captured near Keller, Washington, U.S.A., on August 29, 2012. Photo by “RockyR49”.
Image borrowed from <http://espanol.wunderground.com/wximage/RockyR49/43>.

Mr. Vangampelaere claimed that after his 1972 sighting, he began experiencing paranormal phenomena and witnessed UFOs on many more occasions (“about 150 sightings,” he wrote to Marc Broux in 1979.) One of these incidents is said to have occurred on August 1, 1974 and concerns another series of Moon pictures, this time with a bright hexagonal light underneath (see separate entry in this catalog). From the nature of the 1972 photographs (which, as we have demonstrated, show the Moon and reflections of the Moon, **but no unidentified object**) it is clear that Vangampelaere was not telling the entire truth about what had happened.

About a year after he took his pictures, Vangampelaere got in touch with Werner Bruyneel, a repeater witness who was starting to gain some notoriety with his own collection of “UFO shots.” In the course of the following years, the two worked on a manuscript of a book that would describe not only their UFO sightings, but also Vangampelaere’s extreme fascination with the Bible and his personal experiences with precognitive dreams. What the latter had not foreseen, however, is that their writings about the imminent end of society and ultimate salvation of a chosen few by the “UFO guardians”, would never see the light of day.

[1] For additional technical info on mirror ghosting, and filter flares in particular, see: <http://toothwalker.org/optics/flare.html>

(References: Jacques Bonabot, Rudy de Groote & Erwin Vangampelaere, *Visiteurs Spatiaux/Uit de Ruimte*, No. 31, March 1973, pages 8 & 13-14. Erwin Vangampelaere, personal correspondence with Jean-Luc Vertongen in 1974, with Frits van der Veldt, also in 1974, and with Marc Broux in 1979 and 1983. Werner Bruyneel, letters to Frits van der Veldt,

1974. Jos Vranckx, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, February 28-29, 1976. Unnamed newsclipping, circa mid 1970s. Wim van Utrecht, correspondence with Marc Broux, 1984. Dr. A. Quinet, Royal Meteorological Institute, Brussels, 1984. Marc Biesmans, summary of astronomical data, 1984.)

Date: Thursday, November 16, 1972 (approximate date)

Location: Nivezé, Spa (Liège)

Time: ~17:00

Duration: unknown

Special Features: unseen by photographer

Assessment: Moon

In an article published in the SOBEPS journal *Inforespace*, UFO investigators Franck Boitte and Jean-Luc Vertongen covered several UFO sightings that were said to have occurred between October 17 and October 27, 1972. A report on the events—all of which centered on the hamlet of Nivezé in the municipality of Spa—had been submitted to SOBEPS by their new *enquêteur*, Claude Denis. Already on the night of the 27th, one of the article's authors went to the site to investigate. The following day, several more SOBEPS members visited the area to assist in interviewing the witnesses of over twenty different sightings. The observations that are described in the *Inforespace* article were mostly from orphans and abandoned children residing at a now-defunct orphanage in the aforementioned hamlet. The article further mentions that “photos, too, were added to what was already a well packed file.”

Actually, there were two photographs, both taken by the same person. Boitte and Vertongen stated that several elements had prompted SOBEPS not to publish them. More specifically, three reasons were given for this decision: (1) the pictures were taken during the first week of November, i.e. when the mini wave of sightings had already died down, (2) one photo requires a magnification of 1000 times to view any potential UFO, and (3) according to the photographer himself, nothing abnormal had been seen in the sky when the second photo was taken (it was shot merely to finish the film roll).

Upon our request, Franck Boitte kindly provided us with one of the pictures. He added the following notes:

A 10x15 paper print of a B&W picture was given to me by Claude Denis, a professional photographer living in Spa and a SOBEPS investigator. He kept the negative and told us the pic was taken by Mr. Bruno Steinruch, who was an educator at the orphans' home, a little over 20 and a serious, responsible guy, an early orphan himself, who visibly appreciated his work. Not a “UFO buff” at all. When weeks later we inquired about the picture, Denis had got cold feet regarding his collaboration with SOBEPS and he did not want to inform us anymore.

At the back of the picture, Mr. Denis had typewritten some data, including these comments:

The film has not been tempered with after it was shot; the witness did not see the bright spot when he took the picture. The weather was overcast. If it had been visible, the sun would have been in the back of the witness. Witness seems sincere, fake seems impossible and I do not believe that to be the case. The phenomenon is unknown to me. There is only a blob in the sky, behind the buildings, the forests and the airport; it seems hard to believe it is a spotlight or a bright cloud.



Fig. 141. November 16, 1972, Spa. Photo by Bruno Steinruch.

Franck Boitte feels that the bright patch in the picture may have been caused by the Moon shining through clouds. We checked, and the only astronomical body of note that was visible in the early evening sky between November 15 and 17 was, indeed, the Moon. At 5:00 p.m. local, it was between Southeast and East-Southeast and at an elevation just over 20° (sunset was at 16:54 on November 16). From the photographer's notes, it can be inferred that the picture was taken in the direction of the nearby Airport of Spa/La Sauvenière, which happens to be in that same direction. We also found that the buildings and trees in the picture are on a slope, meaning that the camera would have been pointing upward with the true horizon sinking below the bottom frame of

the picture. If we are looking at an uncropped photo taken with a standard 50mm lens, an elevation of circa 20° for the bright patch does not appear unrealistic. Therefore, we think it is safe to say that moonlight diffused by local clouds reveals itself as a perfect candidate to explain this image. Not also the similarities between the luminous shape in Mr. Steinruch's photo and that in the Faymonville photos discussed on pages 99-113 of the present catalog.

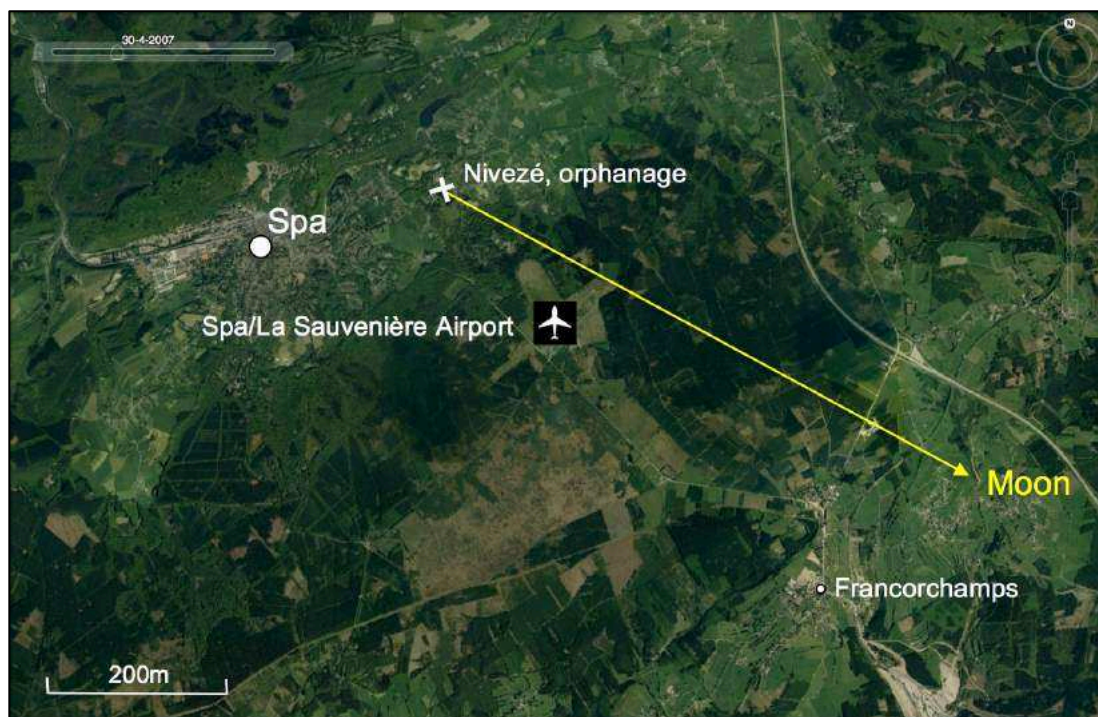


Fig. 142. The yellow arrow on top of the Spa/La Sauvenière Airport shows the azimuth of the Moon as viewed from Nivezé, on November 16, 1972 at 5:00 p.m.

(References: Franck Boitte & Jean-Luc Vertongen, *Inforespace*, No.11, 1973, pages 12-19. Franck Boitte, personal communications to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, July 2012. Manuel Borraz, personal communications to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, December 2013.)

Date: Friday, November 17, 1972
Location: Assebroek, Bruges (West-Flanders)
Time: ~22:30
Duration: ~2.5 hours
Special features: repeater witness
Assessment: reflection of city light or gas flare

Following the sighting of a nocturnal light on October 3, 1972 and the discovery of a variety of anomalous features in a series of Moon shots taken

on October 14 and 15 (see respective entries on pages 121-138), Werner Bruyneel's hunger for a new visual UFO sighting was satiated on October 24. That evening, from his garret, he saw a circular orange glow over some nearby rooftops. The Bruges GESAG, however, identified the phenomenon as "the reflection of lights visible on the roofs surrounding the house." On November 17, a similar sight caught Bruyneel's attention. The following is from a letter the witness sent to GESAG Director Jacques Bonabot on November 18, 1972.

Today Friday, after a full day of rain, the sky cleared up totally around 9 p.m. with the exception of several small cloudlets. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Moon's surface is visible above my house in a Southern direction and star groups are also clearly visible all around.

At 9:50 p.m., I started to take a couple of slides of the lunar surface, 6 or 7 in total, through a telescope. When I took the camera away and wanted to put everything aside, my attention was caught by a red pulsing light low in the West. It was approximately 10:30 p.m. Because of the peculiar flare-ups in brightness (every minute) I aimed my telescope at it and saw an orange to red glow near a TV antenna some 5 to 6m above the houses, which I estimate to be 1000m away. With the naked eye, it looked like a big red star of 1st magnitude, but in the reflector it was like a streak of light, dark on the inside, which later on appeared to be an oval glow with a big shadow inside. The orange always turned red and got darker before regaining its brightness again, without changing place. I immediately put the camera back on the telescope and took a slide in bulb mode (exposure: approximately 60 sec). After 5 minutes, I took another one, and 10 minutes later number three. I then called upon my wife and together we kept watching until 11:25 p.m. We stopped because of the cold. At 11:45 p.m. I went to have another look before going to bed and it was still in the same spot (pulsing).

At 1 o'clock in the morning, so on November 18, I could not sleep and went back to have another look. Now the sky was grey and it even started to rain. The red pulsing light was still in the same place. I took a slide, simply with the camera, just to know its exact position, took the film out and will ship it for development right away. If there is anything visible on the slides, I will know so by the end of next week and will forward them to you.

If nothing is visible on the film, or if I find out that it was something that reflected on the antenna, I will remain silent because I do not want to harass you with something I have no proof of. I will definitely let you know before the end of November.

This is not a joke! Perhaps there are other people who saw this.

No images or further references to this incident were found in the GESAG archives or in Bruyneel's personal files. In consequence, and following Bruyneel's own statement in this regard, it can be assumed that the luminous phenomenon did not show up on the slides or that the images revealed a very simple cause. Possibly, as Bruyneel suggested himself, the light was a mere reflection of city lights on the TV antenna. Other candidate explanations for an orange-red pulsing glow that spring to mind are: a just-installed rotating aircraft warning light on a high structure, or a distant gas flame burning on top of a flare stack (there is a chemical plant 18km West of Assebroek.)

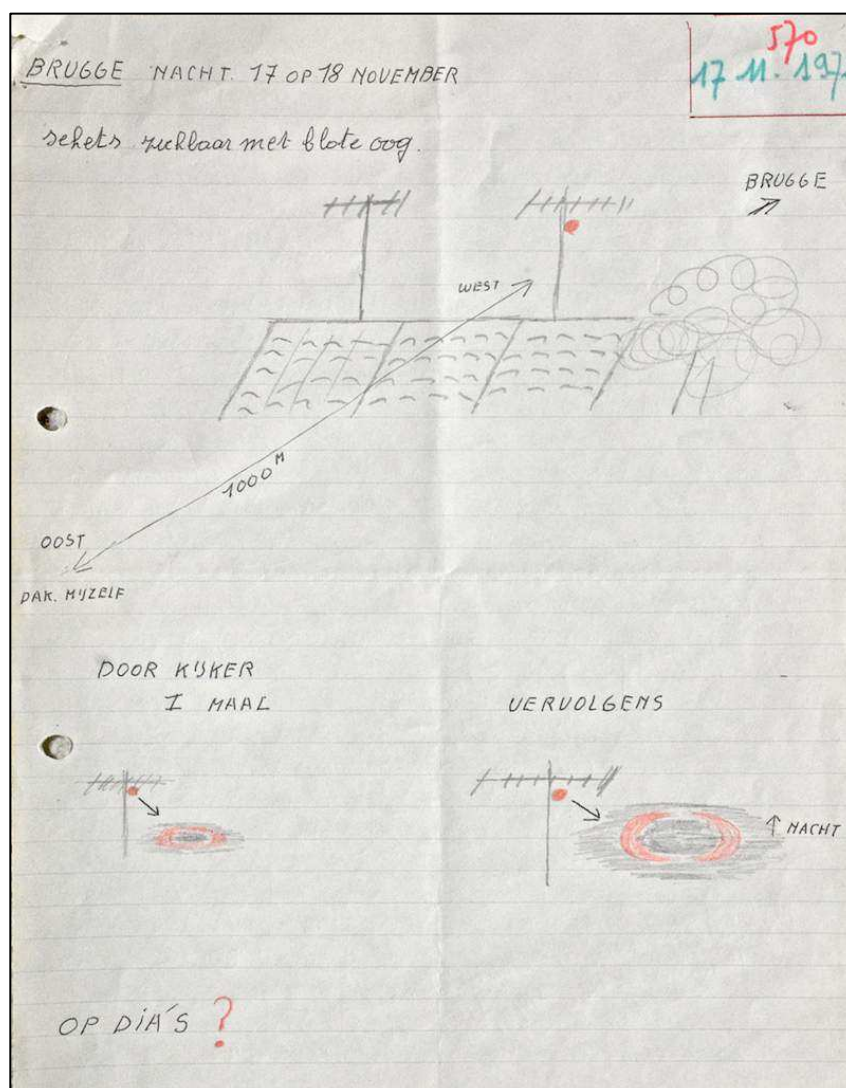


Fig. 143. Sketches of the phenomenon made by Werner Bruyneel shortly after the sighting.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

(References: *Heelal*, No. 183, December 1972, page 2. *Visiteurs Spatiaux* (GESAG) No. 32, June 1973, page 9. Jacques Bonabot, meeting with Wim van Utrecht, June 27, 2015 and personal communication, July 1, 2015.)

Date: Sunday, December 3, 1972
Location: outer space, photographed from Mariakerke, Ghent (East Flanders)
Time: 18:32
Duration: 15 minutes
Special Features: repeater witness
Assessment: space balloon *PAGEOS*

The main witness to this event is Medard Martens, a 28-years-old radio and television technician who in 1972 was on the verge of becoming one of the most active members of the *Vereniging voor Sterrenkunde* (Flemish Association for Astronomy). Although far from being a UFO fanatic, Mr. Martens had read some mainstream books on the subject prior to the events described below. On November 10, 1972, he had already spotted a fast moving dark mass in the sky. The phenomenon was about the size of the full moon and was only visible when it reflected the streetlights, which gave it a dull, round-looking appearance. It was first seen near the zenith from where it moved towards the West-Southwest horizon in about 5 seconds. A little more than three weeks later, Martens would succeed in taking pictures of a totally different phenomenon. We quote from a report drafted by SPW Director Rudy de Groote on January 11, 1973:

Description of event

It was about 6 p.m. when Medard Martens went outside to take a look at the weather. There was a strong SW wind, but no clouds or mist. Suddenly, his attention was drawn towards [what looked like] a double star between the constellations Andromeda and Cassiopeia. On a closer look, there was one star that appeared to be moving from SE to N. Upon seeing this, the witness went back inside to get his photo equipment. It took about 5 minutes before he had everything ready for shooting. The dot was of a white color and moved at a steady pace; the speed was definitely lower than that of an airliner or satellite. No sound was heard.

After having traveled like this for something like 15 minutes, the dot stopped. About 3 minutes later it started to move again, but instead of continuing N, it now went in an ESE direction. From that moment on, the luminosity diminished so quickly that it was no longer possible to photograph it, which explains why the picture that was taken during this phase does not show anything anymore. In fact, the luminosity diminished so quickly that, circa 1 minute after the stop, the dot was no longer visible.

Just after Mr. Martens took the second picture, a second dot flashed with great speed from W to E. The witness was unable to photograph this light because it disappeared too quickly.

The distance between the trail on pictures #2 and #3 is bigger than the distance between the trail on pictures #1 and #2. This is because, in between pictures #2 and #3, the witness pointed his camera towards the second light. Not being able to photograph this light because of its great speed, he then pointed his camera back at the first light.

Time between pic #1 and pic #2: ~15 seconds

Time between pic #2 and pic #3: ~50 second

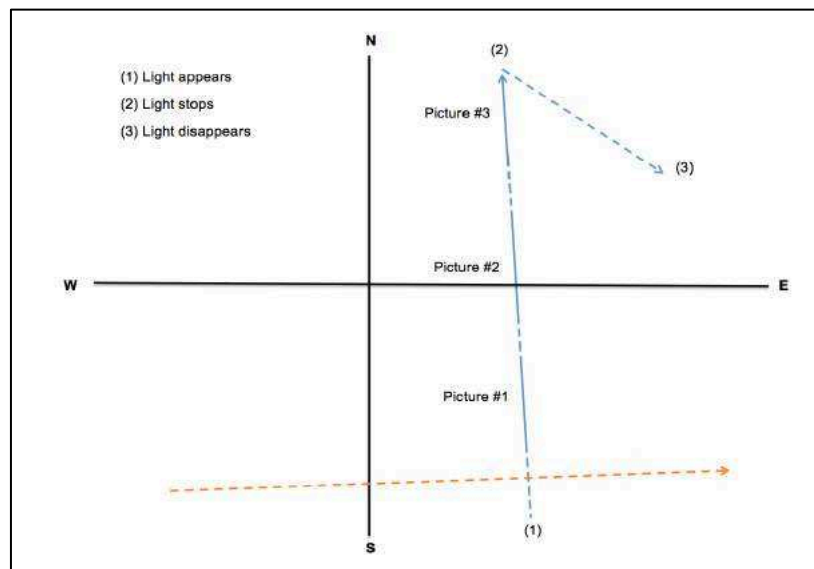


Fig. 144. Simplified diagram of the situation based on sketches executed by Rudy De Groote. The blue line represents the slowly moving light; the orange line the fast moving light.

During his interview with De Groote, Martens further specified that, while the first light had a magnitude comparable to that of an ordinary star, the fast-moving light was as bright as Venus. It was visible for about 6 seconds and he was the only one who spotted it. His wife had also seen the slow-moving light, but only for a brief moment. She did not pay much attention to it.

Technical specifications were given as follows:

- Camera: Yashica
- Film: Kodak Tri-X, sensitivity: 400 ASA
- Type of lens: Yashinon 1/2.8 $f = 4.5\text{cm}$
- Lens set to infinity
- Exposure time of each picture: ~4 minutes



Fig. 145. December 3, 1972, Mariakerke. Picture #1.



Fig. 146. December 3, 1972, Mariakerke. Picture #2.

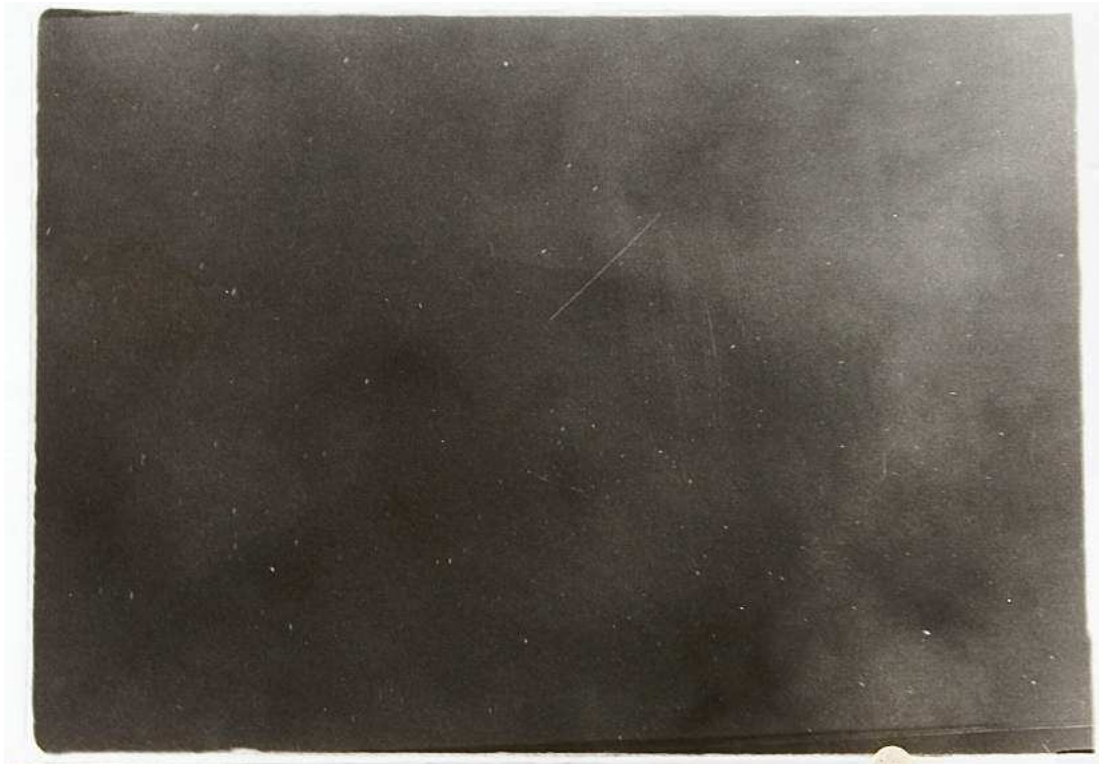


Fig. 147. December 3, 1972, Mariakerke. Picture #3. All photos by Medard Martens.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.



Fig. 148. Juxtaposition of the three shots. Montage by Medard Martens.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

In a note dated February 14, 1973, Rudy de Groote argued that the light witnessed by Mr. Martens had probably been a high-altitude balloon illuminated by the last rays of the Sun. De Groote writes:

The sudden halt would then have been caused by the balloon entering into another air layer where there is another air current. Result: the balloon remains motionless at the place where the two air currents meet until it is caught in the second airflow. The luminous dot will then continue in another direction. This also explains the time of disappearance. The sighting lasted until about five minutes before half past six, the moment at which the Sun had completely set and could not illuminate the object anymore.

Early April 2015 we contacted Mr. Martens to ask him about his current views on the photographs. The witness, now working as a volunteer at the Observatory Armand Pien in the city of Ghent, replied:

This was at the very beginning of my observations. In the meantime, I have seen so many things that I think De Groote's report matches fairly well with what I saw, namely that it was a weather balloon that got caught in a different air flow, changed direction because of this and drifted ever further away from the Sun.

Case closed? Not really, because there is a major problem with this theory: on December 3, sunset was at 4:39 p.m., not at "half past six." At 6:00 p.m., the Sun was already 12° below the horizon. With the Sun in that position, an airborne object seen from Mariakerke should have been at an altitude of more than 170km to be outside the Earth's shadow and still capture the rays of the Sun. At 6:30 p.m. the Sun had sunk to an elevation of ~17°, requiring an altitude of at least 320km for an object to have reflected sunlight to the observer [1]. High-altitude balloons, however, typically cruise the atmosphere at altitudes of 'only' 18 to 38km.

In consequence, the only manmade craft that could have produced the trail would be a satellite. Yet this explanation too faces serious problems, like the 3-minute stop, the change in direction and the slow movement (satellites normally take less than 13 minutes to arc their way from one horizon to the other.)

The reported slow movement is the only of these three characteristics that can be objectively verified. This can be done by measuring the displacement of the stars on the pictures between the moment the shutter button was pressed to make the first shot and the moment the shutter closed and ended the third exposure. The illustration below focuses on CS *Camelopardalis*, a star that shows up in all three images. On the left is the sum of the three trails produced by the star, superimposed on a *Stellarium* sky map. We find that, during the total exposure time, the position of the star changed about one

degree. The figure on the right shows the star's displacement between 6:05 and 6:18 p.m. on the night the photos were taken. This trail is almost twice as long, meaning that the elapsed time was not 13 minutes, but closer to 8 minutes, which is better in line with the average travelling speed of a satellite, but still much too slow.



Fig. 149. Diagram comparing the star trail of *CS Camelopardalis* as imaged by the witness/photographer (LEFT) with the star's actual displacement between 6:05 and 6:18 p.m. as generated by the *Stellarium* program (RIGHT)

Still in the dark as to what this light could have been, we decided to consult satellite expert Ted Molczan. After reviewing the evidence, Molczan reported: "The trail in the three photos was indeed caused by a balloon, but one far above the weather. It was *PAGEOS* (1966-056A / 2253)."

PAGEOS stands for Passive Geodetic Earth Orbiting Satellite. This "space balloon" was a 30m-diameter inflatable sphere made of 0.5mm thick aluminized plastic. It was put in a near-polar orbit in 1966 and served as a reflective tracking and photographic target. The "balloon" broke up into small pieces nine years later. Due to its high orbit, each revolution took about three hours, and it took nearly one hour to cross the entire sky. Due to its huge size and highly reflective surface, it reached a brightness of magnitude 2, which is comparable to that of a normal star.

Molczan further explains:

Using the TLE [Two Line Elements, a standard mathematical model to describe a satellite's orbit] closest to the date of the

photos (epoch 72339.46051048), I find that the start of the trail in photo #1 occurred near 17:32 UTC, and the end of the trail in photo #3 occurred near 17:40 UTC.

Careful matching of the ephemeris positions to the trails yields the following approximate shutter times (UTC):

#	Open	Close
1	17:32:29	17:34:30
2	17:35:12	17:37:25
3	17:38:51	17:40:26



Fig. 150. PAGEOS imaged in 1965 during a test inflation in a blimp hangar at Weeksville, North Carolina. Photo borrowed from www.palmerstation.com/history/6575/pageos.html

Ted Molczan's findings bring down the total time it took for the balloon to produce the trail on the photos to 8 minutes (7'57" to be precise), which is exactly what our rough measurements of the star trails predicted. Furthermore, it was found that the first photograph was not taken around 6:05 p.m., but at 6:32 p.m., and that the balloon was soaring at an altitude of 4,833km at that moment.

With the photographed trail being positively identified, it became clear that the second phase of the sighting (namely, the light that was seen to travel in another direction) had to relate to another object.

Molczan queried Space Track (www.space-track.org) for sets of TLEs that enabled him to perform brute force searches for objects that may account for this light. The reply was quick:

I found one visible object that passed within my search criteria...It was the rocket body of Cosmos 151 (67027B / 2721). It passed less than 3 degrees from azimuth 17° and altitude 38°, about 2 minutes after shutter-close of photo #3. Its estimated brightness (magnitude 4.2 +/-1.5) could have been sufficiently similar to that of PAGEOS, to have been mistaken for it on that criterion. It entered eclipse almost exactly 1 minute after the point of intersection with the PAGEOS track, perhaps consistent with Rudy de Groote's report, that "...the luminosity diminished so quickly that, circa 1 minute after the stop, the dot was no longer visible.

The simplified diagram below shows a *Stellarium* sky map for Mariakerke, December 3, 1972, at 6:32 p.m. Superimposed are crops of the three photographs placed in their right position against the background stars. We added the trajectories of PAGEOS and Cosmos 151, as well as some relevant time indications.

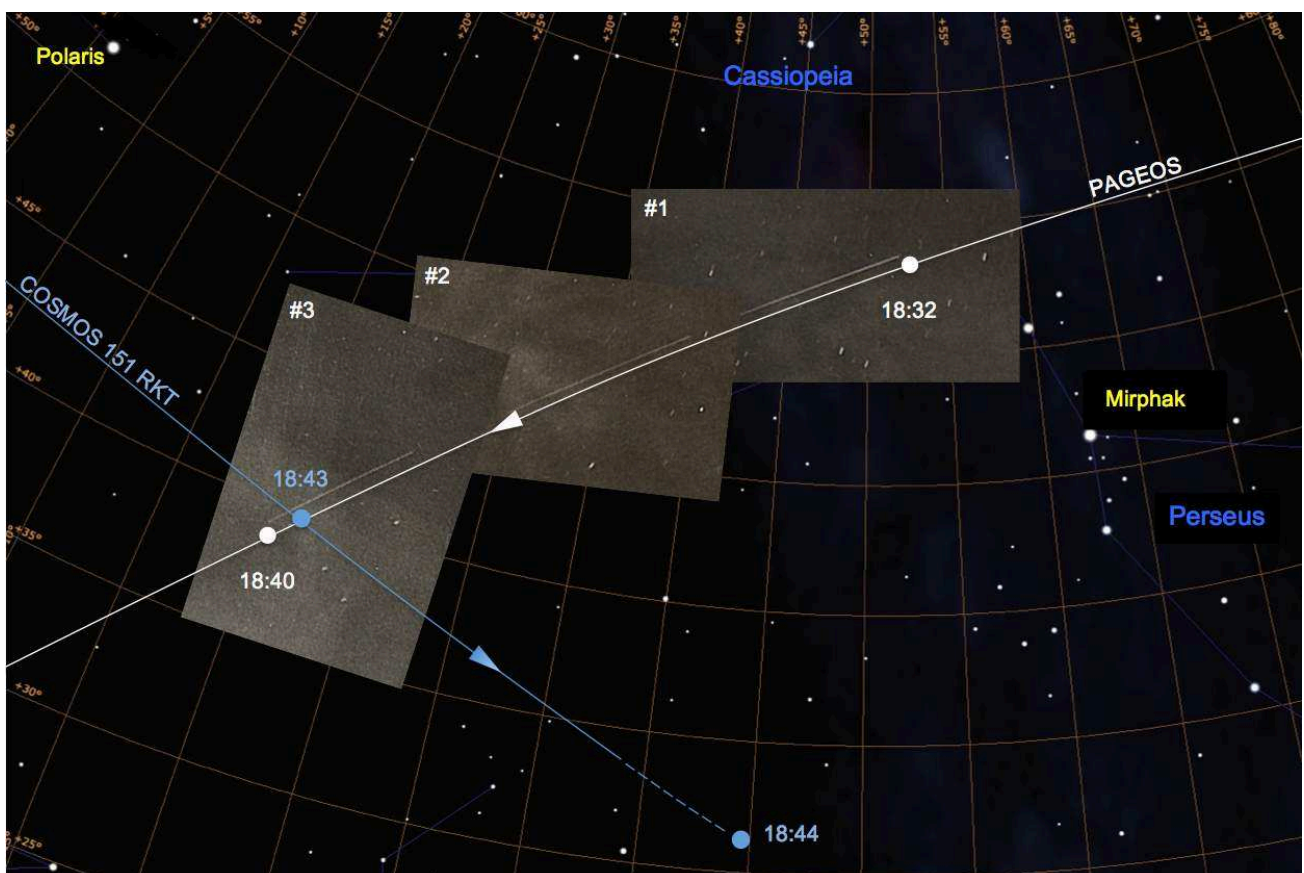


Fig. 151. Summarizing diagram.

The diagram is clear: the path followed by the slowly moving light matches that of PAGEOS (shown here as a white arrowed line). The blue line marks the trajectory of the Cosmos rocket. Its intersection with the flight path of PAGEOS turns out to be very close to where the slow-moving light was said to have stopped three minutes earlier.

We can now be certain that this stop never happened. Keeping focus on a slow-moving point source that has the brightness of an average star for three full minutes is difficult, and it is conceivable that the witness, while in the process of photographing, shortly mistook a star for the unexplained light. As Molczan recalls from personal observations: *PAGEOS tended to blend into the star background* (due to its) *extremely slow angular velocity* (and the fact that a couple of years after its launch) *it began to exhibit a slow, regular variation in brightness* (presumably, because the balloon was no longer a 'perfect' sphere at that moment.) With the balloon reflecting less light from time to time, it may easily have been lost from view. Therefore, when a light appeared in the same area of the sky where PAGEOS was last seen, Mr. Martens would logically have assumed that this was the same light that had started to move again but was now heading in a different direction.

There is no reason to believe that the brighter light that flashed by when the second picture was taken was anything else than a meteor. Probably, the duration of this phase was overestimated as well (6 seconds visibility can hardly be described as "in a flash").

[1] These calculations were carried out independently by Henk Kalfsbeek and Manuel Borraz Aymerich. Both assumed the following approximations:

- Perfectly spherical Earth having a radius of 6371km.
 - Cylindrical instead of conical Earth shadow (as if the Sun's light travels in parallel rays).
- Atmospheric refraction and altitude of the sighting location (Mariakerke is 10 m above sea level) were not taken into account.

(References: *Visiteurs Spatiaux*, June 1973, page 9. Medard Martens, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, April 7, 2015. Henk Kalfsbeek, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, May 11, 2015. Manuel Borraz Aymerich, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, May 20, 2015. Ted Molczan, personal correspondence with the authors, July 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Tuesday, February 27, 1973

Location: Assebroek, Bruges (West Flanders)

Phase One

Time: 19:25

Duration: 10 minutes

Special features: repeater witness

Assessment: aircraft (jet fighters)

On February 27, 1973, Werner Bruyneel, author of many pictures included in this chapter, experienced what he would describe five years later as “a high day on which I beheld a real UFO for the first time” (sic), “a phenomenon, which, apart from its exceptional BEAUTY that made the event unforgettable, exerted such an attraction that it made me a believer forever.” The event Bruyneel refers to occurred in two phases: a first sighting of a luminous phenomenon at 7:25 p.m., and another over 3 hours later. We quote from a handwritten text that is part of the witness’ personal UFO archives.

Spotted through the [bedroom] window, which faces East: an orange-yellow luminous ball that emerged from behind a roof positioned opposite my window. The size of the ball was $\frac{1}{4}$ that of the Moon, yellow with a redder color towards the center. It moved very slowly upward toward the South, without getting bigger or smaller, what suggested a displacement parallel to myself. It also looked as if it came from the ground.

I ran towards the next room where my photo camera was [a Pentaflex SL camera loaded with color reversal film]. I opened the window, tried to get this craft correctly in the camera’s viewfinder and pressed. One slide was taken. Now it seemed to be getting smaller, as if it was moving in a southerly direction. I made another slide. Time between spotting the object and first slide: 2 minutes (+ exposure time of 2 seconds.) Time between 1st and 2nd slide: +/- 30 seconds (+ another 2 seconds for the exposure.) I kept watching for what I think was 1 minute as it moved in a southerly direction. Total duration: about 5 minutes.

I then went to the garret, opened the roof window and could still see it. However, it was now moving in a western direction and appeared to be somewhat higher and smaller. I took my telescope [a Lancia 700mmx60mm reflector with 12.5mm eyepiece], which is always ready for observation. I placed it in front of the window and searched the ball through the viewfinder. Once I had it aimed right, I adjusted the focus and saw an oval-shaped dark mass containing four oval-yellow lights and a dull red light inside the dark mass. The lights were arranged in the shape of a cross with the red light as the center point. The lot stood out a little against the twilight in the West. (Total duration between the taking of the last shot and observing the object through the reflector: +/- 5 minutes.) I put the telescope aside and kept watching as it went higher and higher in the West and became invisible, getting redder and duller in color. Upon returning downstairs, the weatherman was reading the forecast. This is always at 7:40-7:54 p.m.

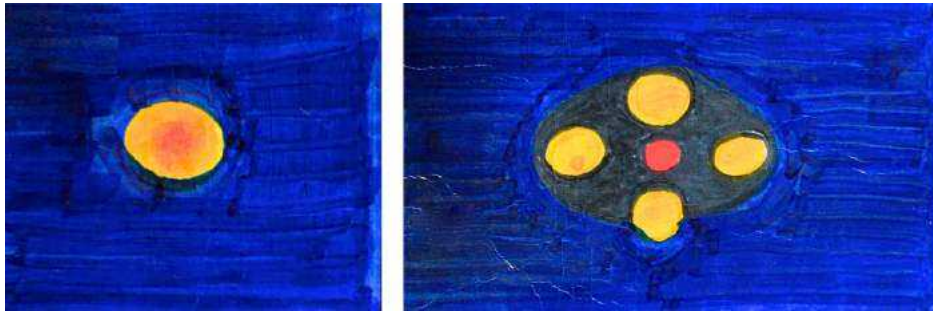


Fig. 152. Color sketches in felt pen executed by Werner Bruyneel. LEFT: the “ball” as seen with the naked eye. RIGHT: as it appeared through the telescope.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

In later writings, Bruyneel pointed out that only one of the two photos showed a clear image of the object. This photo, which could be retrieved from the witness’ slide collection and is now in possession of one of authors (WVU), has two serial numbers printed on the film: “1” and “2”. We will further refer to this photograph as “slide #1/2”.



Fig. 153. February 27, 1973, Assebroek. Full-frame version of slide #1/2. The unknown object is visible near the top right corner.
Photo by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere

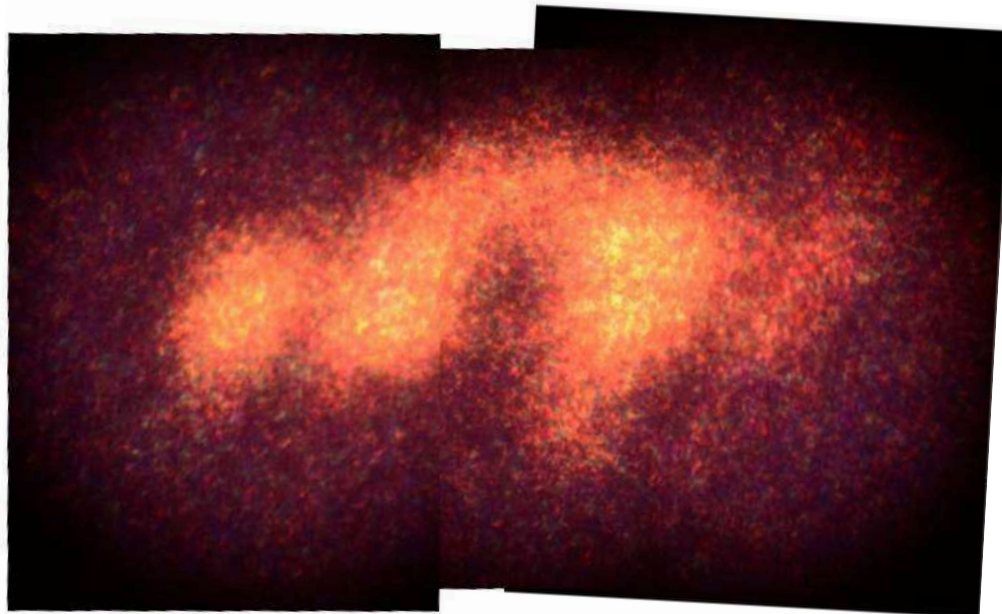


Fig. 154. Extreme bow-up of the luminous blob in slide #1/2.
Composite image from three microscope pictures by Wim van Utrecht.

Phase Two

Time: 22:45

Duration: 20 minutes

Special features: repeater witness

Assessment: aircraft (jet fighters)

We continue quoting from Werner Bruyneel's notes drafted shortly after the events:

At around 10:30 p.m., after a TV program had ended, I went to bed. As I closed the curtains, I noticed high up in the sky in a western direction, close to Saturn [at 10:40 p.m. the planet's azimuth was 254°, elevation 39°], another orange (actually more reddish) small light moving very slowly to the East. It seemed to get brighter and looked as if it was descending, so I immediately excluded an airplane . . . I returned to the garret, opened the window, put the telescope in position, searched for the light in the viewfinder and adjusted the focal distance a little. Once again, I saw a red center light surrounded by four orange-yellow lights that gradually got bigger. This time, because of the darkness, the dark oval mass was not so clearly visible, but I could see it nonetheless because of the distinctive properties of the telescope's objective. I

followed it until it almost completely occupied my objective lens (telescope magnification: 56x). I put the telescope aside and grabbed the camera. The time that had elapsed was something like 10 minutes. Meanwhile, my wife had joined me in the garret.

I took one shot that didn't show anything. A second one when it was still descending; a third when it approached the houses and remained motionless, a fourth when it stopped a second time, and a fifth one when it may already have been moving away (exposure time: always +/- 2 seconds.)

I put my camera away and together we watched how it disappeared high up in an eastern direction. All without sound. My wife went to bed. As I remained watching, it kept turning redder and duller during these last minutes, disappearing over a chimney as if it was climbing. Had it flown horizontally, it should have descended behind the chimney. However, it seemed to move ever further away in a vertical direction above this chimney. I estimate that the total duration was again 20 minutes (end-time was at 11:05 p.m.) [Note that for Phase One, the total duration as derived from Bruyneel's narrative amounts to only 10 minutes, not 20.]

The four slides that turned out right are in the possession of one of the authors (WVU). They are originals and have the following serial numbers printed on the film: #7/8, #9/10, #11/12 and #13/14.

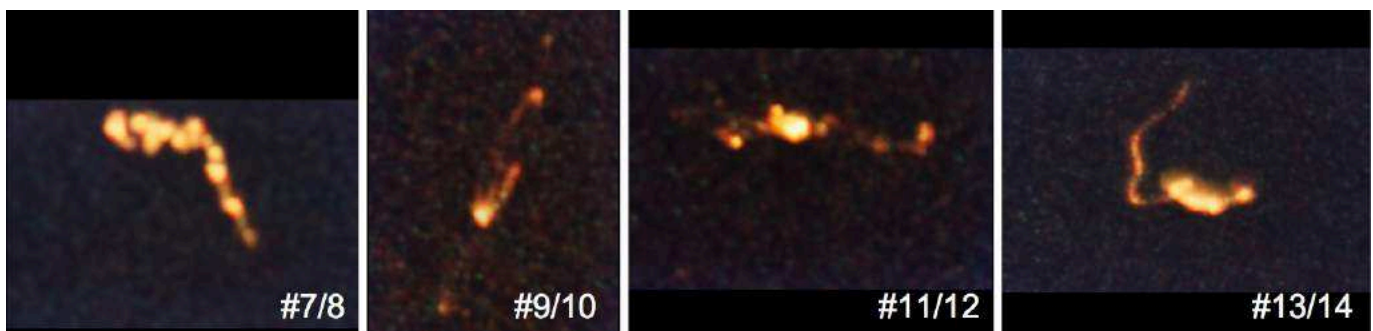


Fig. 155. February 27, 1973, Assebroek. Enlarged and cropped images of the four slides. Photos by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.



Fig. 156. Brightened, full-frame version of slide #7/8. The bluish concentric rings are Newton's rings [1]. Photo by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

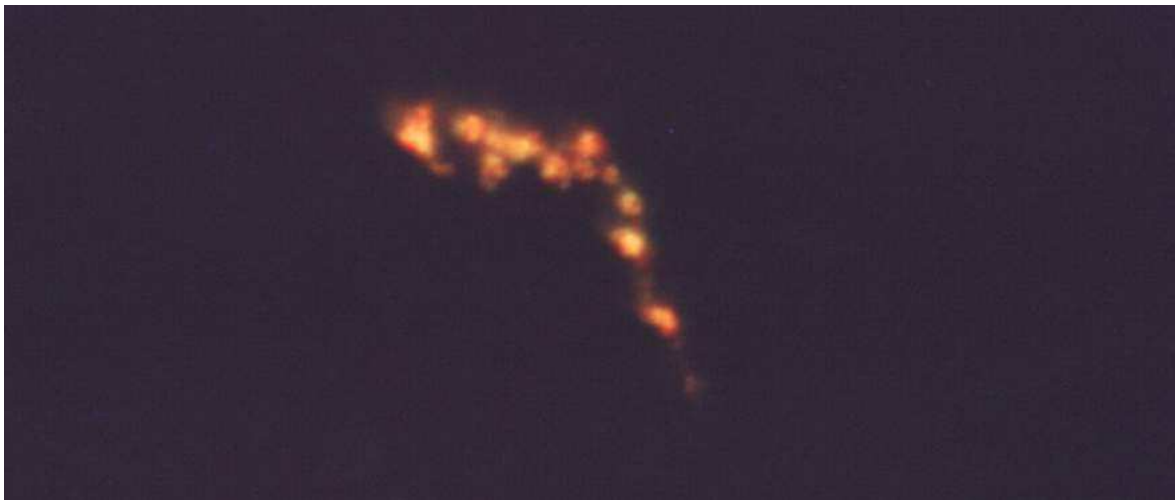


Fig. 157. Digital enlargement from slide #7/8.

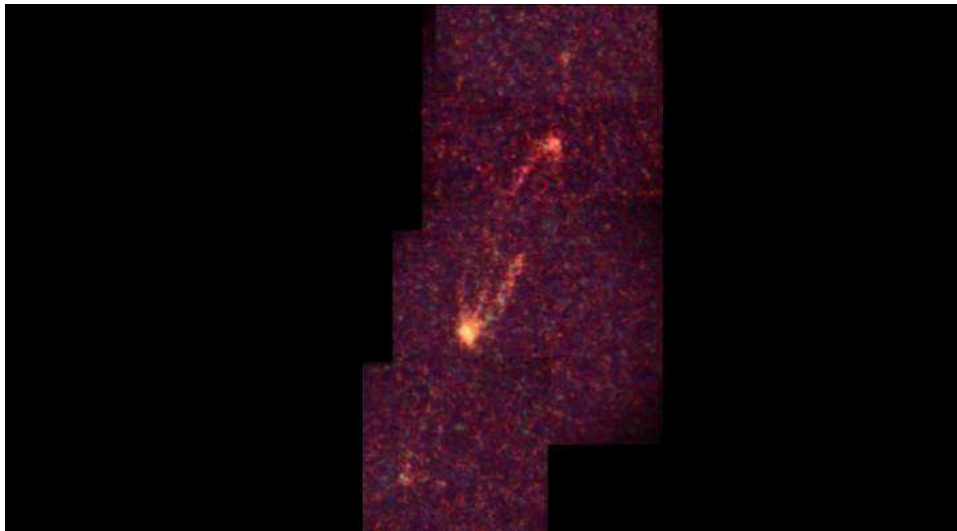


Fig. 158. Composite image from four microscope pictures showing the luminous phenomenon in slide #9/10.

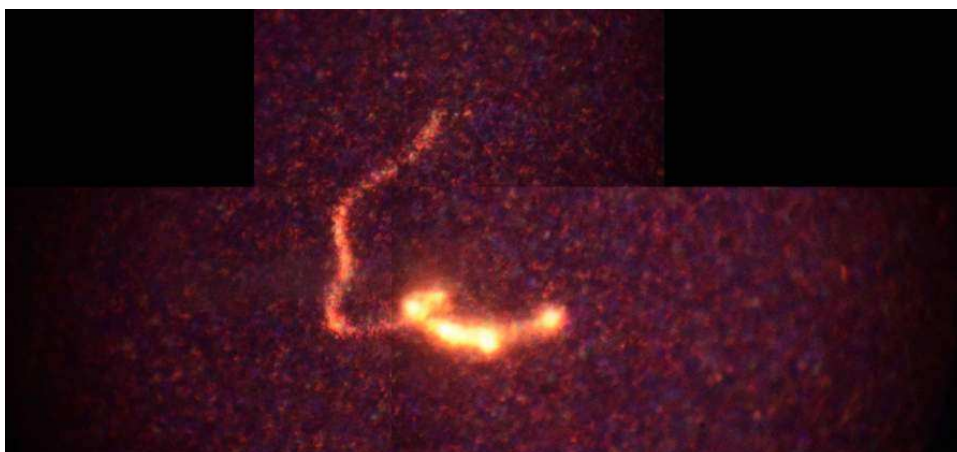


Fig. 159. Composite image from three microscope pictures of slide #11/12.

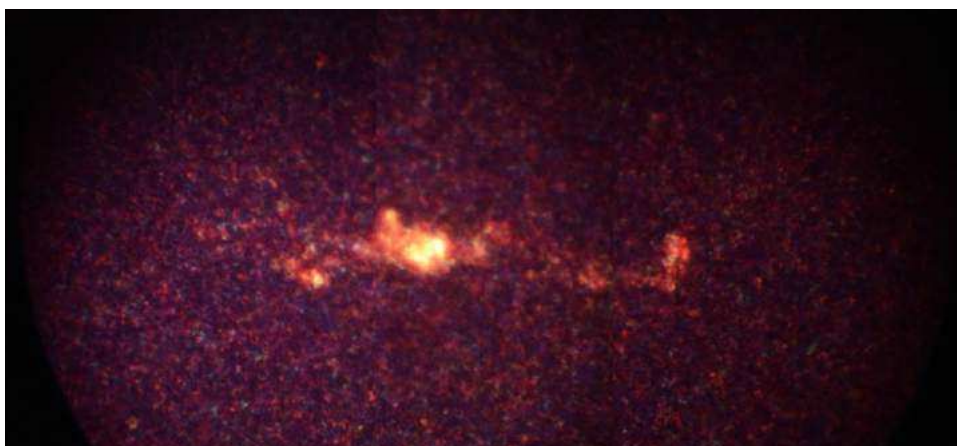


Fig. 160. Composite image from three microscope pictures of slide #13/14.

The following diagram, sent by Bruyneel to GESAG Director Jacques Bonabot in the course of 1973, confirms the order of the shots as presented above:

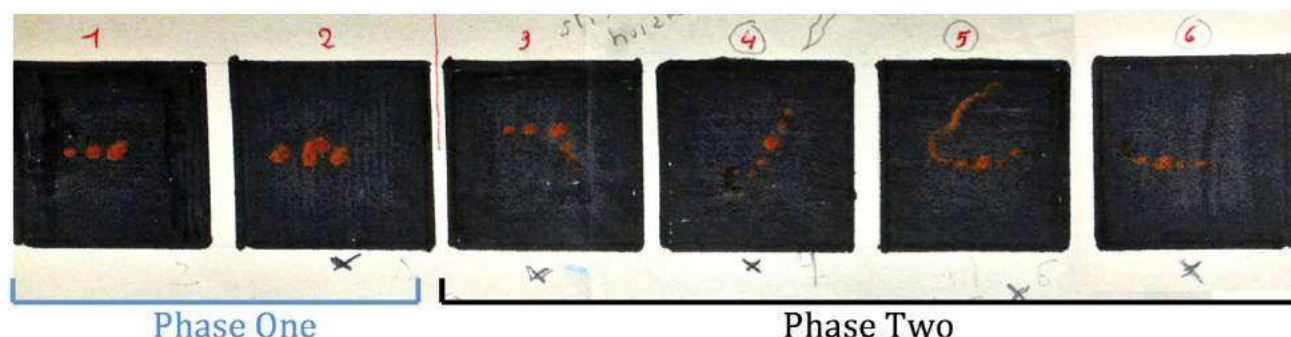


Fig. 161. Order of the shots for the first and second sighting as drawn by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

Later narratives, however, suggest another sequence in which the shots were taken. We quote from one of Bruyneel's many undated explanatory notes (slightly adapted here for readability and replacing the photographer's own numbering with the serial numbers on the slides):

Now [i.e. after having observed the yellow-orange light through the telescope] I made the first two shots, which failed. [Note that the photographer now mentions two failed shots instead of just one. This would be compatible with the serial numbers on the slide film. The failed slides would then have carried the missing numbers #3/4 and #5/6.]

In the meantime, the phenomenon had further descended and the shot I took then did turn out right. So on [slide #9/10] there are clearly distinguishable lights that are arranged in the form of a disc. The next photo, [slide #11/12], taken after a pause of a few seconds, shows the object when it was almost motionless over the houses, and still in a slanted position. On [slide #13/14] the object turned horizontal, parallel with the houses. This was also its lowest point during the entire observation. The final shot of this beautiful scene, before it moved upward again, is [slide #7/8]. This is when it placed itself in an oblique position ready to depart, but it still wasn't moving at that time and was almost at the same place as where it was when I made that other clear picture three hours earlier.

In another notebook he kept, Bruyneel drew the four slides in yet another way, adding more confusion:

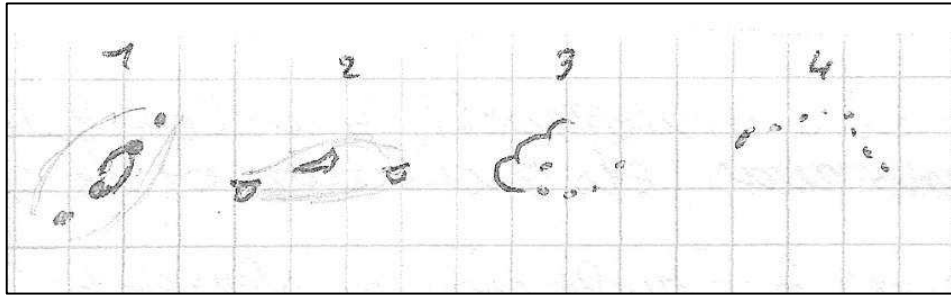


Fig. 162. Order of the shots for the second sighting according to another sketch made by Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

The authors interpret the continuous changing of the order of the slides as a sign of Bruyneel privileging imagination over facts. Had he opened the glass slide mounts, he could easily have verified the correct order of the shots by the imprinted serial numbers.

A situational sketch made by Bruyneel shows the presumed trajectories of the objects for Phase One and Phase Two:

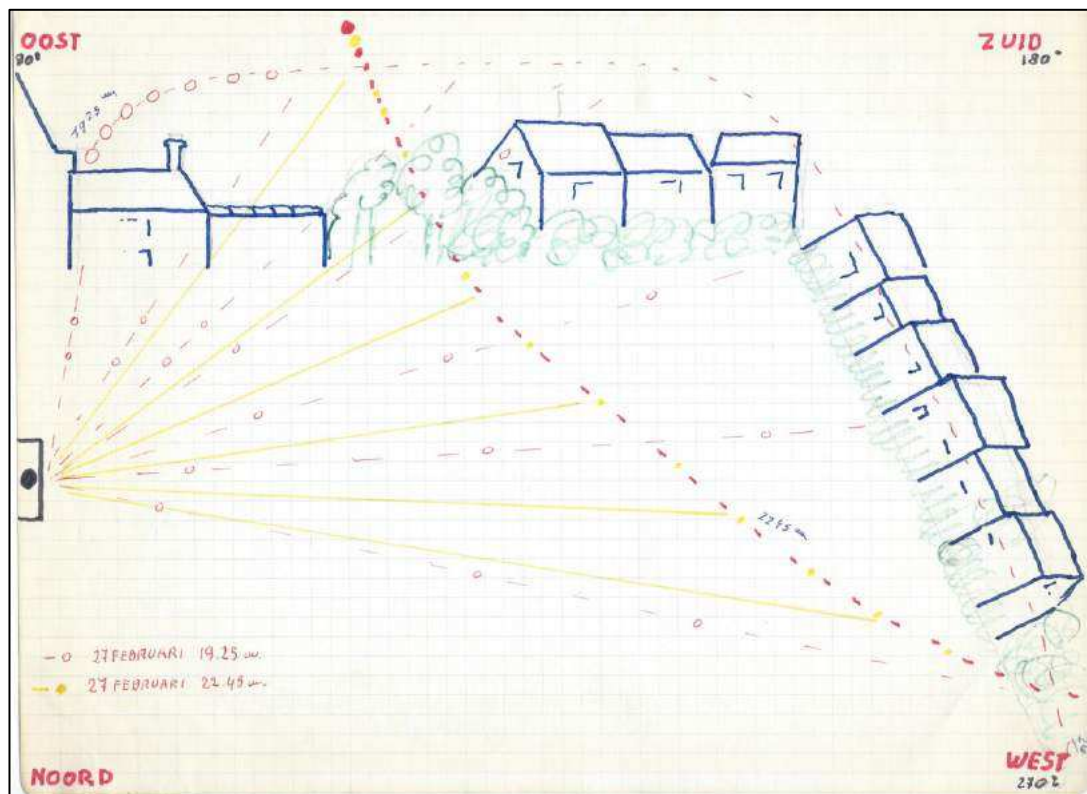


Fig. 163. The dashed line with the open circles indicates the object's trajectory for the first sighting. The dashed line with yellow circles shows the trajectory for the second phase. The witness' house is represented as a black dot inside a rectangle on the left edge of the sketch. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

A more detailed sketch depicting the paths followed by the objects was drafted by Jacques Bonabot during a visit to Bruyneel's place shortly after February 27:

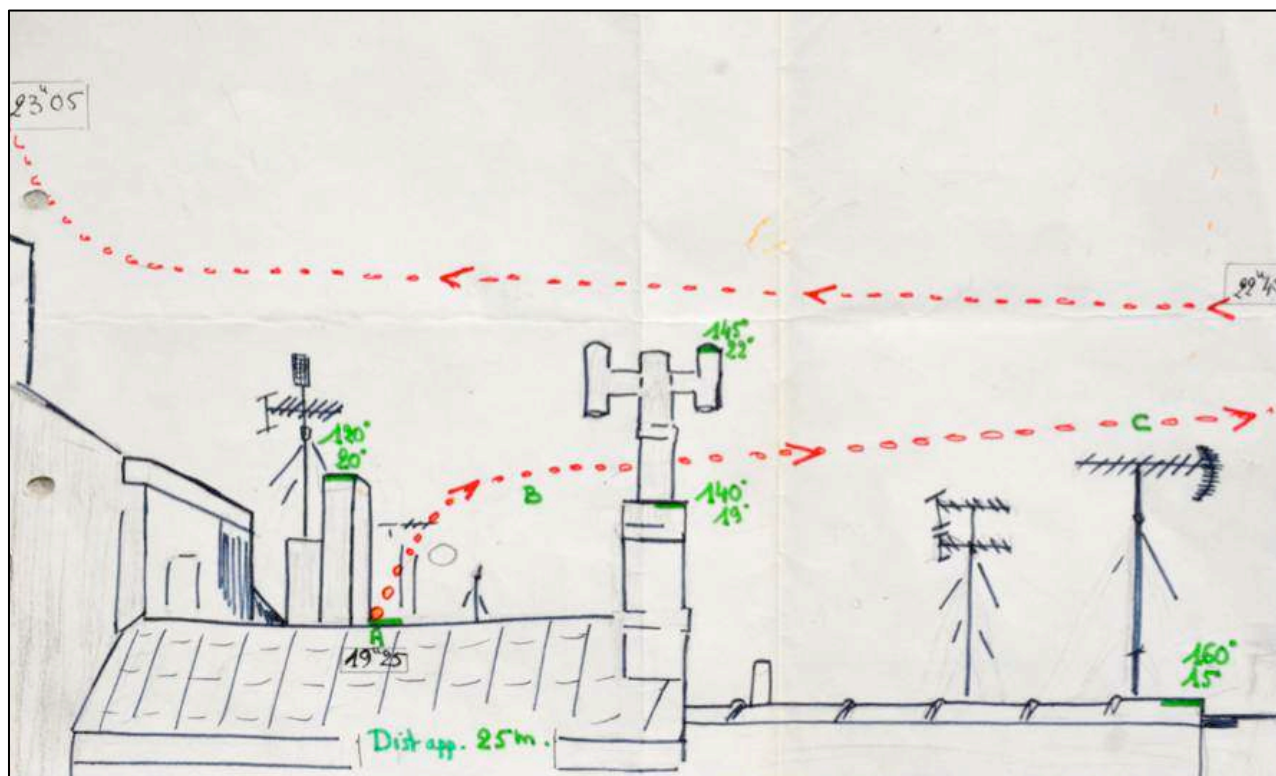


Fig. 164. The lower trajectory represents the motion of the lights during Phase One; the upper trajectory their motion during Phase Two. The figures in green denote approximate azimuths and elevations.

Brightened versions of two of the slides taken during the second sighting reveal parts of the buildings in front of Bruyneel's garret (see, for instance, the full-frame version of slide #7/8 published above as Fig. 156). By superimposing these two slides on a panoramic montage made from two daylight pictures found in Bruyneel's slide collection, we were able to obtain a more accurate estimate of the object's position. The outcome is presented on the next page as Fig. 165.

Although the spot from where these daylight shots were taken differs slightly from that of the "UFO" slides, it is clear that the elevations were grossly overestimated in Bonabot's sketch.

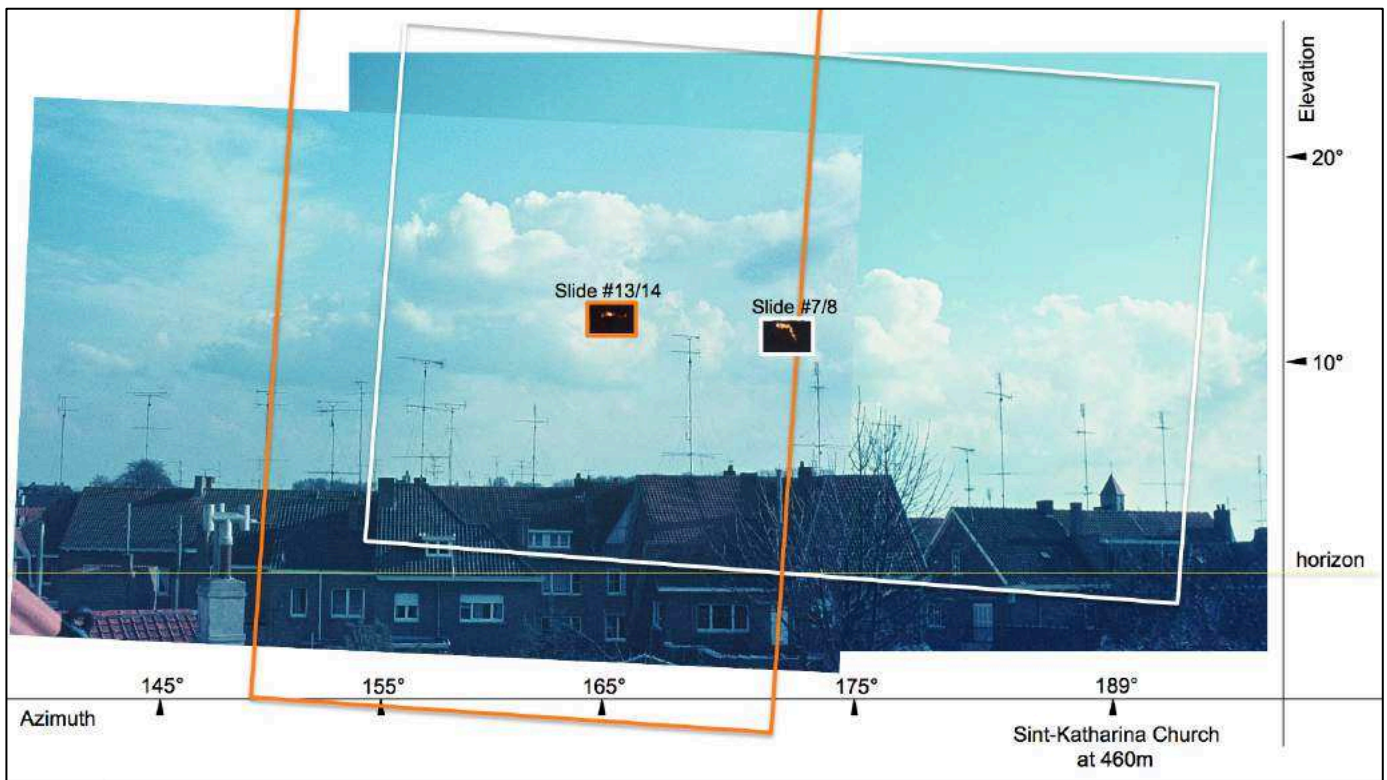


Fig. 165. Slides #7/8 and #13/14 superimposed on panoramic montage of the viewing area with azimuth and elevation lines.

In an attempt to match the shape of the “UFO” in slide #11/12 with that of one of the dark objects he photographed in front of the Moon on October 15, 1972—and which the authors assessed as the “shadow” of a dust particle—, Bruyneel provides another extreme example of his unstoppable imagination. Below are these two images displayed alongside Bruyneel’s sketches of what he believes they represent.

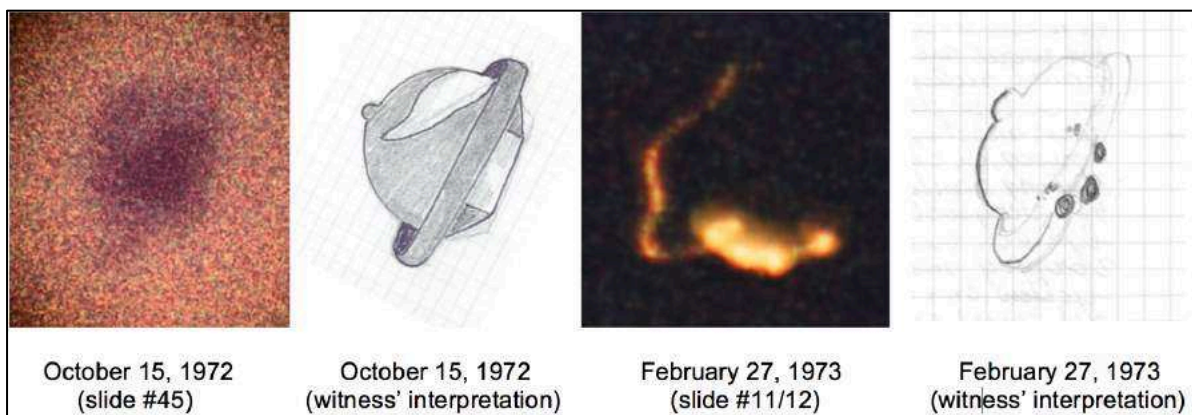


Fig. 166. Slides #45 and #11/12 placed next to the Bruyneel’s sketched interpretations.

Not only is the resemblance simply not there, Bruyneel also forgot that, if the luminous trail in slide #11/12 represents the same object that he assumed was orbiting the Moon on October 15, it would have been close to 100km in size. Placing the phenomenon only “2,245m” away (a measurement that appears in his own situational sketch published above) and no higher than “300m” over the houses in front of him, it is difficult to understand why no one else in the densely populated city of Bruges reported seeing this gigantic “spaceship”.

Fortunately, the GESAG/SPW team kept its cool and tried to find a rational explanation for what essentially are little more than luminous trails left by a moving light or lights. A breakthrough in the investigation came on December 11, 1973, when group member Rudy de Groote sent the following letter to Jacques Bonabot:

This morning I had a conversation with a radar operator from Semmerzake [a military Air Traffic Control Center 42km Southeast of Assebroek]. In their logbooks they noted the following for February 27, 1973: “There have been night flights all evening. Every 10 minutes an F-104 of the Dutch Air Force flew over the area of Bruges. The aircraft had taken off from Volkel, East of ‘s-Hertogenbosch, and entered our airspace flying southward. Our country was then overflowed from East to West (close to the language border). Close to Bruges, all aircraft veered away to the Northeast to disappear in the direction of Moerdijk (the Netherlands). The last craft passed Bruges at 10:44 p.m. In the region of Bruges the craft flew LOW-LEVEL, in other words at an altitude of only 1,000 to 2,000 feet or 300 to 600m!!!” [De Groote is obviously not quoting verbatim from any logbook, but merely paraphrasing the information he was told by the radar controller.] Note that Werner Bruyneel made his color pictures that very same evening at 7:25 p.m. and 22:45 p.m.!!! In the article that recently appeared in Ons Volk/Panorama, Bruyneel stated himself: “When I started to take pictures the light was about 300m above the ground” and “The colors, too, make me think of airplane lights”.

The authors feel that a distant maneuvering airplane could very well have created the luminous trails in the pictures. The absence of sound may have been due to the jet being at a much greater distance than the witness believed. It is not clear if this possible explanation ever came to the attention of Bruyneel. In any case, it did not mark the end of his ufological exploits. During the first half of 1973 several more pictures emerged, starting with a new incident on May 19. Readers will find the details of that incident in the entry for that day further in the catalog.

[1] Newton’s rings are an interference pattern that is created when light hits and reflects between two different surfaces: a convex surface (here the slide film that got crinkled, presumably because it remained too long in the projector) and an adjacent touching flat surface (the glass plate of the slide mount).

(References: Fred Joossen, *Ons Volk/Panorama* No. 40, October 2, 1973, pages 48-52. Jacques Bonabot, *Stendek* No. 14, September 1973, pages 12-14 (+ original manuscript). Werner Bruyneel, letters to Frits van der Veldt, 1974. Hans van Kampen, *UFO's boven de Lage Landen*, De Kern, Bussum, 1978, pages 163-169 and photo section. Hans van Kampen, *Spooklicht, Ufo's, wezens & mensen*, De Kern, Baarn, 1980, photo section. Jacques Bonabot, meeting with Wim van Utrecht on June 27, 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Tuesday, March 20, 1973

Location: Tarcienne (Namur)

Time: 19:15

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes

Special Features: ground level / creature / repeater witness

Assessment: street lamp

The witness to this remarkable episode in the history of Belgian UFO lore was Mrs. Lucie Vandervoort (L.V.), approximately 60 years old in 1973, amateur painter, member of several UFO groups, and interested in astronomy and spiritism. At the time of the sighting, Mrs. L.V. resided in Tarcienne, a rural community 11km South of the city of Charleroi. She claimed, not only to have spotted "spaceships" on numerous occasions, but also to have photographed several such craft. In September 1973 the French UFO journal *Ouranos* printed "one of her best pictures", accompanied by a caption that ended with: "We publish this document with all due reservations; an inquiry is in progress... we will express ourselves more overtly and with more details in a future issue."

Having heard about L.V.'s claims, GESAG Director Jacques Bonabot dispatched group member Alain Bonivert to interview her. Reading through a two-page investigative report drafted by Bonivert in January 1974 and some additional information contained in a letter L.V. sent to Bonabot on the 13th of that month, the following set of events emerged. (We quote extensively from an article published in the June 1974 issue of the GESAG Journal *UFO INFO*; some parts were slightly edited for ease of readability.)

Mrs. L.V. lives on an isolated lot, far away from the village center and the road to Philippeville. As L.V. was closing the shutters on the outside of her house, her attention was drawn to a light approaching silently from the nearby Bois de Comognes, a tiny forest to the Southwest of where she lived. Even though L.V. claimed to have seen unusual lights in the Tarcienne sky since 1972, she characterized the vision as "impressive". L.V. explains: "What I saw was a white light of an intense luminosity, it passed over the roof of a nearby house (some 100m away), then it banked, making a 90° turn, and started to blink before disappearing toward the East. I counted 25 of these craft at a cadence of 10 every 10 minutes, and this until 21h15m."

Compared to the house's roof and the fir trees, the lights flew at a very low altitude, 10 to 15m above the ground. After the objects had performed the banking maneuver, only a blinking light remained visible.

L.V. included the following sketch for this phase of the sighting, showing one of the objects with a fixed light on both sides, but no “blinking light”:

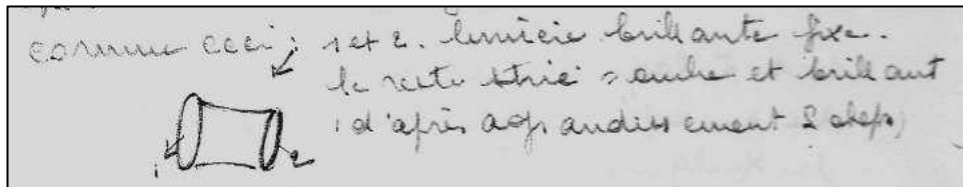


Fig. 167. Witness' sketch of the phenomenon showing an object in the shape of a “barrel” with “fixed, bright lights” left and right and a middle section that looked “dark” and “striated”.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

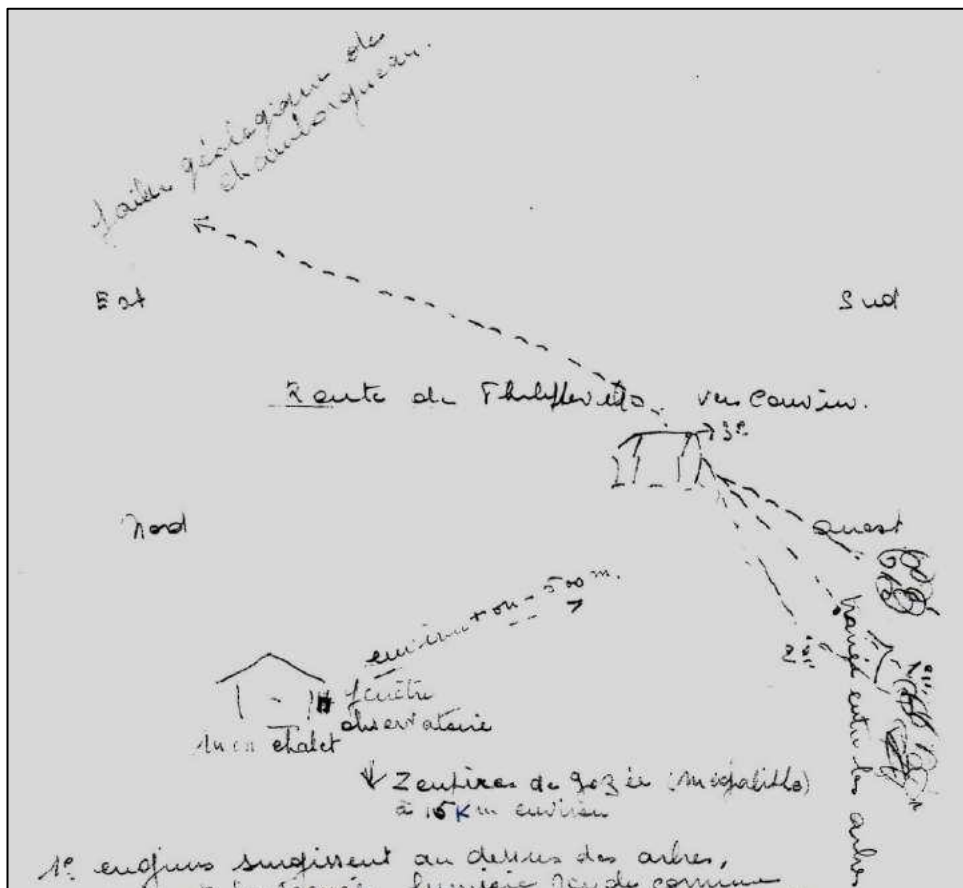


Fig. 168. Map of the sighting area sketched by the witness (North is on the left). The map shows the chalet, the forest from where the objects came (bottom right corner), the trajectory they followed (dashed line) and the house behind which they passed before continuing their way to the East (here placed at “+/- 500m” instead of “some 100m away.”)
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

We transposed the information provided in the above sketch onto an aerial view of the sighting location.



Fig. 169. Google Earth image from 2004. The yellow cross marks the witness' position; the blue arrow the presumed trajectory followed by the unidentified objects.

Now let us continue where we left off:

According to Mrs. L.V., it was the objects' reduced speed that allowed her not only to take photographs, but also to observe the scene through a WW1 trench periscope that had belonged to her late husband. It was thanks to this optical instrument that L.V. saw something even more peculiar: "a man." She clarifies: "He was standing at the front of the object; he had one arm raised seemingly manipulating something, perhaps an instrument panel, the other arm was down. He was thin, dressed in shiny, tight-fitting clothes, did not appear to be very tall and stood out well against the bright, neon-like background.



Fig. 170. A WW1 trench periscope found on www.e-bay.com similar to the one used by Mrs. Vandervoort.

SOBEPS field investigator Franck Boitte, who visited Mrs. L.V. on June 14, 1973, jotted down the following description of this humanoid figure: “a character not unlike those in ancient Greek theater, dressed in a peplum and making friendly gestures at her.” In her letter to Jacques Bonabot, L.V. wrote that the “man” was “about 1.5m tall” and that “the craft” was at a distance of “approximately 500m” when she first noticed the figure (“less than 500m when it came closer.”) She continues: “He looked really thin. He was standing up, his back turned towards the craft and seemed attentive to every maneuver.” In another letter, this one sent to SOBEPS Director Michel Bougard on September 2, 1992, L.V. describes the figure as: “a human form, standing up, on the inside of a window, one arm up and one down . . . in the lower part of the object.”

The camera used was a *Voigtlander Vitoret* loaded with *Ilford* HP4 film, special for night photography (the HP4 film was a 36 exposures black & white film of 400-650 ASA producing standard 24x36mm negatives.) The picture—apparently only one turned out right—was taken with the camera set to bulb mode. Upon request, Mrs. L.V. supplied the original negative film to SOBEPS, who later mailed a duplicate negative to GESAG.

Below is the cropped and upside-down version of the picture as it was printed in the journal *Ouranos*, followed by a digitized positive of the second-generation negative from the GESAG archives.



Fig. 171. March 20, 1973, Tarcienne. Photo by Lucie Vandervoort.

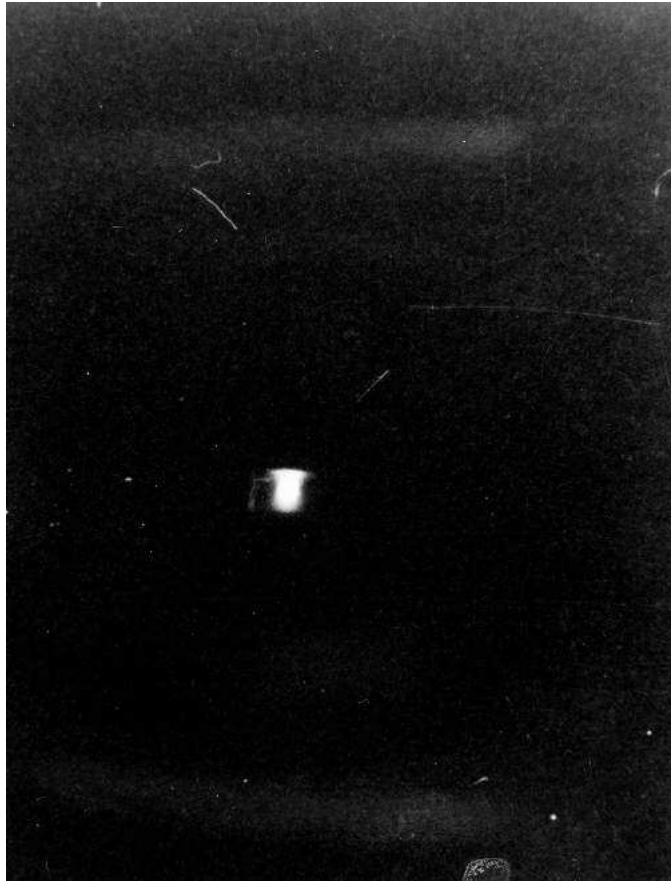


Fig. 172. March 20, 1973, Tarcienne.
Photo by Lucie Vandervoort. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

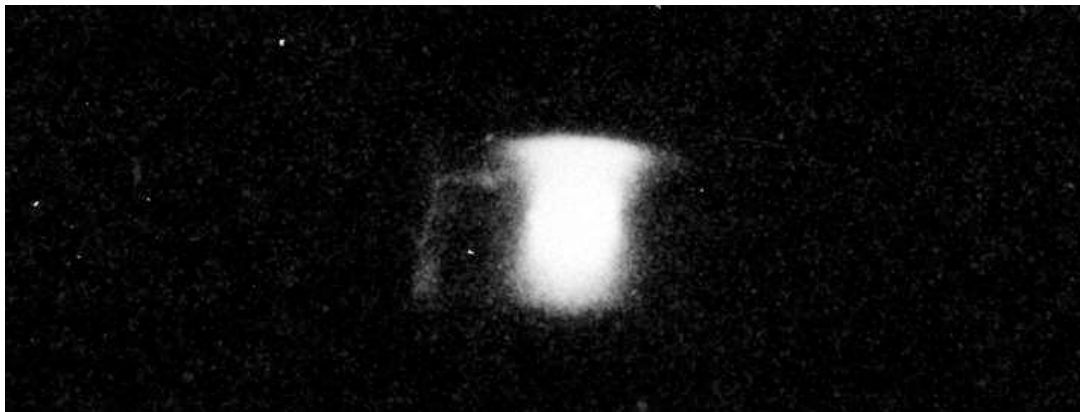


Fig. 173. Close-up of the object.

With regard to her photograph, Mrs. L.V. wrote in her letter to Bonabot: "When examining it attentively with a big magnifying glass, we can see the bottom of the craft spreading out downward and on the left side the network of shiny particles forming a right angle." In her 1992 letter to Bougard, the witness refers to this structure as an "antenna".

The witness' narrative is littered with inconsistencies, especially where it concerns the description of the object's aspect after the banking maneuver and the clothes and gestures of the human figure. Dependent on the source, the time the first object came into view varies from 7:00 to 7:30, with the last object disappearing from view either at 8:15 or at 9:15. At 7:00 p.m. on March 20, 1973, the sky was still quite bright in the West (sunset was at 6:55 p.m. with civil twilight ending at 7:27 p.m.) However, the photo seems to depict a very dark sky, especially when taking into account that a sensitive film was used in combination with what can be presumed to have been a relatively long exposure time (camera set to bulb mode). 7:30 would therefore be a better fit, perhaps even a later time because, in her letter to Bonabot, Mrs. L.V. pointed out that: "the Moon was in the East (2 or 3 days after full Moon)." While the Moon was indeed waning gibbous with 96% of its Earth-facing surface illuminated, the lunar disc only appeared above the horizon at 9:13 p.m.

Other discrepancies were found with regard to the estimated distances (e.g.: the house behind which the objects disappeared was located at "some 100m away" in Bonivert's report but "+ or - 500m" in L.V.'s sketch of the sighting location). A 1.5m tall figure at a distance of 500m would subtend an angle of 0.17° (at a distance of 100m that would be 0.86°). This means that, even at a distance of 500m, the height of the "UFO pilot" would have compared to a vertical line that covers 1/3 of the full Moon and nearly two Moon diameters if the object was at 100m. In those circumstances, it is not clear why the "man" does not show up in the photo.

Using an old WW1 periscope to observe moving luminous objects at night may not have been the best of ideas. During his 1973 visit to Tarcienne, Franck Boitte asked L.V. to demonstrate how she used the instrument and found that she had trouble in keeping the 10-kilo heavy brass instrument stable. Asked to elaborate on this, Boitte stipulated in 2015: "Its optics were completely distorted . . . Mrs. Vandervoort had to kneel before her bedroom window in order to give it some support on the window-sill and even then its extremity was continually wobbling." Presumably L.V. decided to use the periscope because it was equipped with magnifying lenses. What magnification is not known, but a magnified image would have narrowed down the field of view considerably, making it difficult to find a moving target and keep it in view. An old instrument may also have collected dirt on the mirrors, lenses or eyepiece, rendering the image blurred, with the possibility of stains or dust particles creating all sorts of shapes. These circumstances may easily have led the repeater witness to imagine extraordinary details where none were present.

As for the photographic evidence, if the image we borrowed from the GESAG files was not cropped, as we were told, the luminous shape must have been huge (its horizontal angular width would have been 0.94° , which is comparable to nearly two times the diameter of the Moon.)

In his 1974 report, Bonivert mentions that “at the time of the sighting, the pathways were not illuminated, meaning that her observation could not have been influenced by the light of street lamps.” Presumably, Bonivert realized that skeptics who took a look at L.V.’s photograph, would notice the close resemblance between the luminous shape in the picture and a street lamp with vertical motion blur, like in the image below left:



Fig. 174. LEFT: streetlight with vertical motion blur caused by releasing the shutter button during the exposure. RIGHT: the same lamppost by daylight. Photos by Wim van Utrecht.

Theorizing that the luminous feature in L.V.’s picture is indeed a blurred image of a streetlight, the “network of shiny particles forming a right angle” could very well be the illuminated pole to which the lamp is attached. To make this theory work, we would need a rather specific type of support arm, one that is bent at a right angle, made of a highly reflective material and ends abruptly. When we used the *Google Street View* application to pay a virtual visit to the street where L.V. resided in 1973, we found it to be bordered with exactly such types of streetlights. A screen capture is presented on the following page as Fig. 175.

This find does not mean, of course, that the same or similar streetlights were in use in Tarcienne in the 1970s, but the chances are good that they were. The photo above shows today’s street lights bolted to concrete telephone poles by means of a bent support arm. This was a common practice in the early years and we could argue that, since there are no separate lamp posts (new or old) erected on the site in 2015, the same technique would have been in use the previous years as well. Bolts and wires would have made parts of the support arm look dark giving it the aspect of a fragmented streak of light, not unlike a “network of shiny particles.”

Fig. 175. 2015 Google Street View image showing one of the lampposts in the street from where the “UFO photo” was taken. Note the highly reflective, right-angle support arm.



A digitally contrast- and brightness-enhanced version of the photograph (see Fig. 176 on the next page) shows a roughly rectangular patch underneath the object. Could this be a stretch of the road illuminated by our hypothetical streetlight? Bonivert explicitly mentions that the pathways were not illuminated **at the time of the sighting**. But this is not the same as saying that there were no lampposts in L.V.’s street. Perhaps Bonivert simply repeated Mrs. L.V.’s claim that there was no public lighting illuminating the road at the time she took the picture.

Also visible in the enhanced version are two nearly horizontal bright streaks, one close to the top edge of the picture, the other close to the bottom edge with the dark area around the unknown light being marked with a slightly lighter colored ring. This particular configuration of dark and light areas makes us wonder if the photo may not have been taken through the circular eyepiece of the trench periscope. However, with the *Voigtlander Vitoret* being a rangefinder camera, and the viewfinder window therefore being separated from the taking lens, such a feat would have been hard to accomplish. Even more so because the shutter release button is placed at the front of the camera next to the lens. A more likely explanation is that the camera was held close to a windowpane, thus creating an out-of-focus mirror image of the camera in the glass. Unfortunately, it is not specified by either Bonivert or Boitte whether the photo was taken through an open or a closed window, but considering the temperatures that evening (a chilly 7°C at Charleroi, according to www.infoclimat.fr), we can assume an elderly lady would have kept it closed.

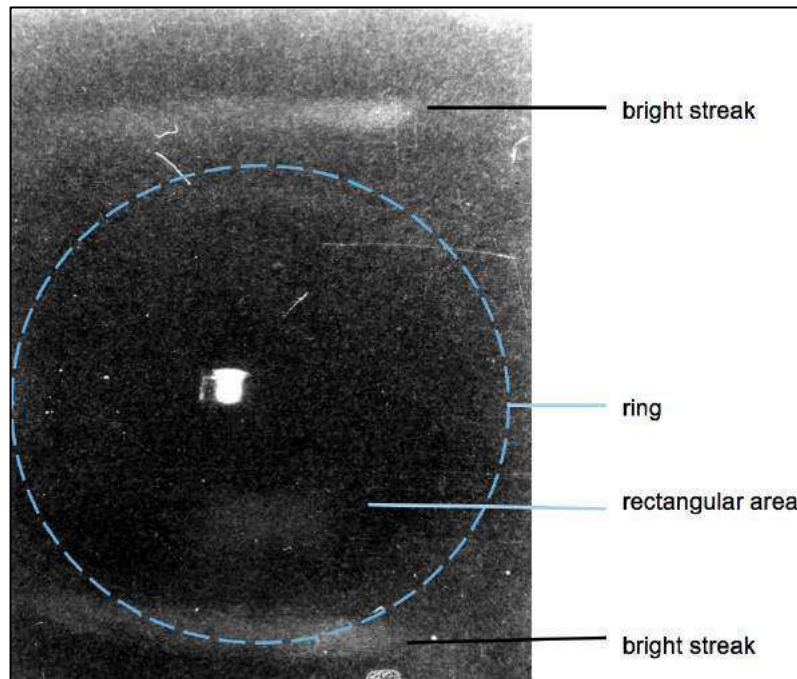


Fig. 176. Contrast- and brightness-enhanced version of the photograph.

Both Boitte and Jacques Bonabot were not overly impressed with the evidence produced by Mrs. L.V. In 2015, in an e-mail to the authors, Boitte wrote: “She used the periscope to watch the skies for hours and every time she noticed ‘something of value’—[presumably] airplanes or satellites—and hurried to her little low-cost camera to photograph it. Her collection consisted of at least a dozen photographs, some of them actually intriguing.” Not only did the witness have an ample share of unusual observations (the earliest one on October 25, 1972, four more in 1973, one in 1975, several sightings throughout 1976 and 1977, another one in March 1978 and two in September 1979), she also displayed an outspoken interest in UFOs. Asked by Bonivert what her opinion on the UFO phenomenon was, she readily replied: “UFOs exist and I was in the presence of a spaceship from another world.”

In a 1974 article about the sighting, Jacques Bonabot concluded: “The high frequency of sightings is undoubtedly the result of wrongly interpreted aircraft passages from the military base of Florennes [13km Southeast of Mrs. L.V.’s residence]. This base is precisely for this type of night fighter aircraft.” The banking maneuver, the blinking light and the absence of other witnesses to a UFO flotilla circling the highly populated city of Charleroi (which is located in between Tarcienne and Gosselies) do indeed make a flight of aircraft the most likely explanation for the visual sighting. Presumably, the airplanes were at a greater distance than the witness thought they were (remember that Mrs. L.V. was observing the scene through a magnifying periscope). This would also explain why no mention was made of any sound. Ex-SOBEPS collaborator Michel Abrassart noted in this regard: “The plateau of Tarcienne

is the point where these airplanes extend their landing gear. As they are decelerating, they make very little noise.”

As for the luminous shape in the picture, we found it to be inconsistent with L.V.’s description of her visual observation. Moreover, horizontally moving lights would have caused the image to show horizontal blur as well. The striking similarities between the “object” in the photo and a streetlight make us logically conclude that this is what the image shows. The weird details, like the reported human-like figure, seem to be a figment of the lady’s imagination. Lack of confidence in the details provided by someone who reports seeing UFOs on a regular basis, would explain why *Ouranos* and SOBEPS declined to pursue the matter further (or, if there was a follow-up, preferred not to publish their negative findings about experiences reported by one of their own members.)

(References: *Ouranos*, No.8, July-September 1973, p 9. Alain Bonivert & Jacques Bonabot, *UFO INFO*, No.35, March 1974, pages 6-9. Franck Boitte, post on the EuroUFO forum, June 27, 2012. Jacques Bonabot, personal communications to V.J. Ballester Olmos, December 2014. Franck Boitte, personal communications to Wim van Utrecht, February 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Saturday, March 24, 1973

Location: Borgerhout (Antwerp)

Time: ~07:30

Duration: ~10 minutes

Assessment: film or developing flaw (photograph); aircraft & rawinsonde balloon (visual sighting)

The morning Sun was low on the horizon when 26-year-old Arthur de Weerd, correspondent of the Dutch-speaking UFO group SPW, was scrutinizing the clear blue sky for strange events and noticed the short sunlit contrail of an airliner. Using his 7x50 binoculars, De Weerd estimated that the trail had “an apparent length of about 8mm.” From his position, the plane was heading “from Southwest to North.” Higher up in the sky, and seemingly further away, there was another sunlit object, moving on a more or less parallel course with the airliner and at about the same pace. When the plane reached an elevation equal to “about the size of a fist at arm’s length” above the roof in front of the witness, this very bright object suddenly stopped. According to De Weerd, its diameter at that moment was close to 2mm (“the head of a match at arm’s length”) and its position “about three fingers above the airplane.” “I tried to see if there was some sort of structure, but this proved impossible because the object was flashing on and off with short intervals,” De Weerd wrote in his report to SPW.

After having remained motionless for about one minute, the unknown object started to move again, but this time at a greater speed, executing an angle of 70° before coming to a halt a second time some 12 to 15° away from where

the first stop had happened. It covered this distance in “barely 2 seconds”. De Weerdts:

When I took another look through the field glasses, I noticed that it had doubled in size. This made me wonder if it had moved towards me. Also, the object was not as static as it had appeared when I observed it with the naked eye. In fact, it made a wobbling motion. One time I saw a brightly lit sphere, then a lenticular shape that was not so brightly lit with the upper part not illuminated and silver grey. It executed this transformation on and off during the 8 minutes it remained in the same place.

As he continued to watch, “a kind of red light” appeared underneath the object. “It was as if the object was swallowed up by this light,” De Weerdts explains. The red/rust-brown light remained visible for a couple more moments, “like a cloudlet that expanded until there was nothing left to see.

During the 8 minutes stop, De Weerdts managed to take a color photograph of the phenomenon, but he acknowledges that he may not have held the camera completely still. The camera used was an AGFA (exact model not specified), equipped with a 105mm AGFA Agnar f/2.8 lens. Exposure time was 1 second. The 60x90mm negative that was lent to us for examination bears the mark “KODAK SAFETY FILM.” It is believed to be the original. Examination with a magnifying loupe revealed no tampering, but the great number of scratches and stains testify to a poorly handled negative. In total, three pictures were made. According to the witness, one of the other negatives looked like it was overexposed, while the third—if we read De Weerdts’s comment correctly—had a piece cut off where the object should have been. The witness asserts that he has no idea why this was done.

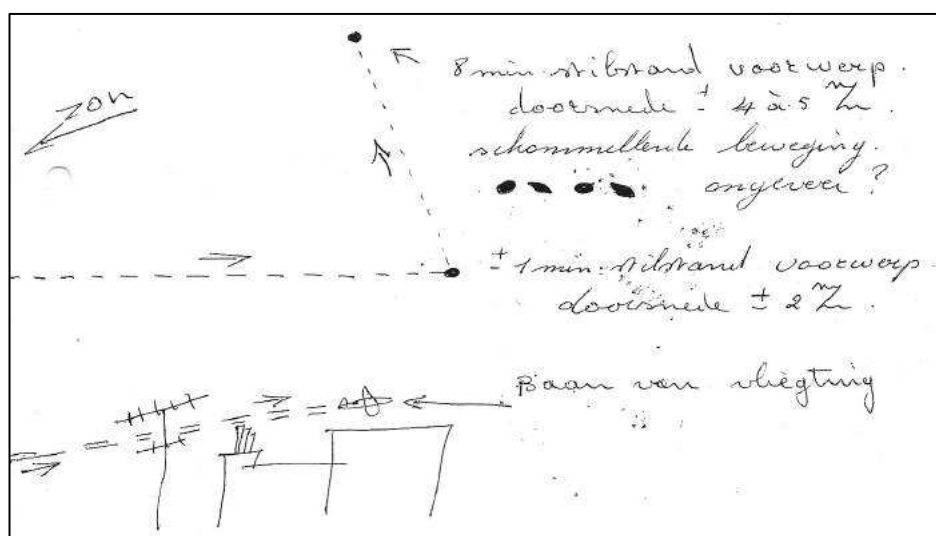


Fig. 177. Witness’ sketch showing the different phases of the sighting. The sketch was part of a letter sent by Arthur de Weerdts to SPW on March 31, 1973.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

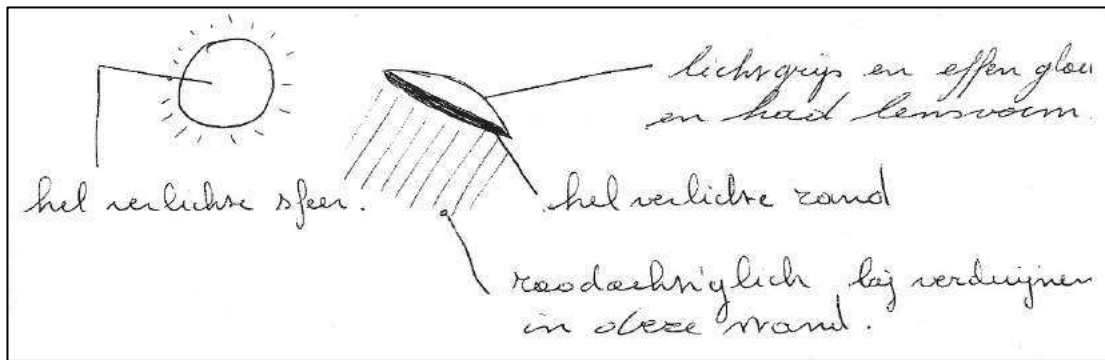


Fig. 178. Second sketch by Arthur de Weerd depicting a closer view of the alternating appearances of the phenomenon: sometimes looking like a “brightly lit sphere” (left), then like an “evenly glowing, light-grey, lens-shaped” and “well-defined” object with a “brightly lit rim” at the bottom (black in the sketch). Parallel lines represent the “reddish luminosity” that was noticed just before the object disappeared. Image scanned from a letter sent to SPW on April 17, 1973. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

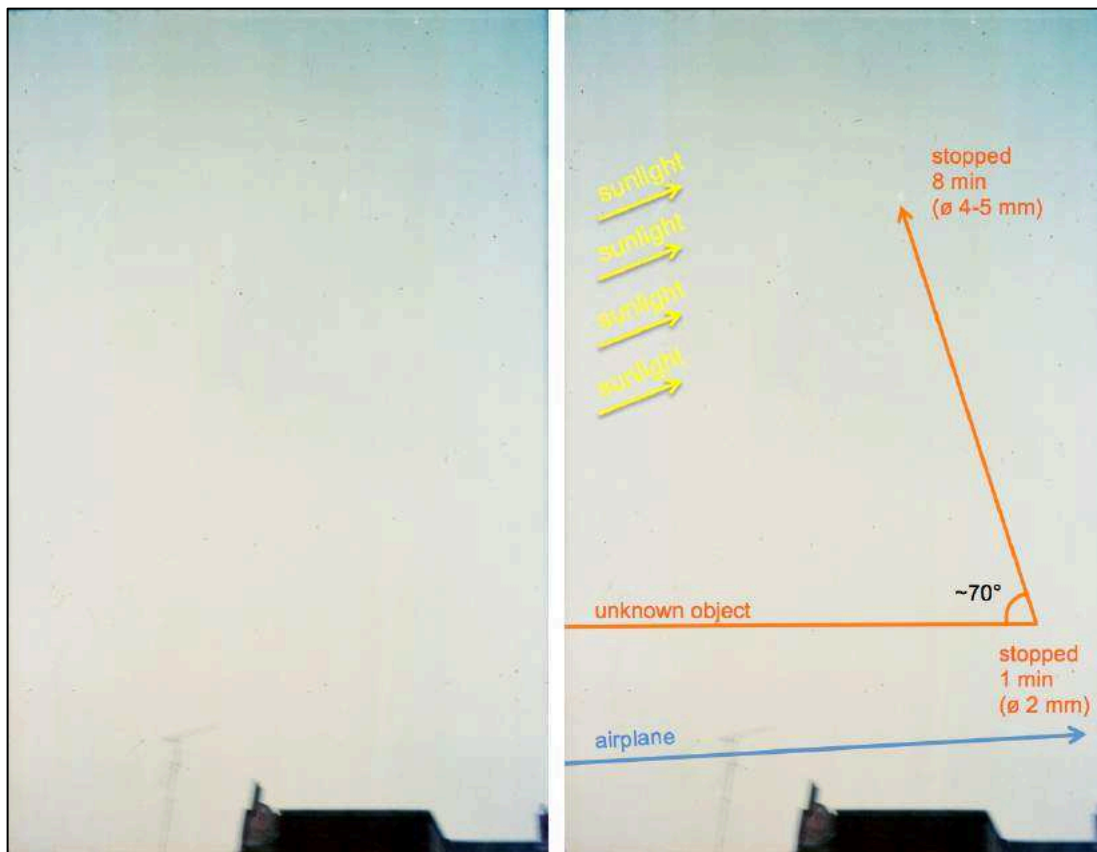


Fig. 179. March 24, 1973, Borgerhout. LEFT: full-frame color print of the photograph. RIGHT: same print with added trajectories of the airplane (blue arrow) and the unknown object (orange arrow). Trajectories are based on the sketches made by the witness. The object itself is barely visible at the tip of the orange arrow. Photo by Arthur De Weerd. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

A digitally sharpened and contrast-enhanced close-up shows the unknown object as a vertically positioned comet-shaped dot (the parallel lines seen to the right of the anomaly are scratches; the same goes for the shorter line that runs through the lower part of the “object”):



Fig. 180. Sharpened and contrast enhanced detail.

A ground plan executed by De Weerdts reveals that the photo was taken with the camera pointed roughly South:

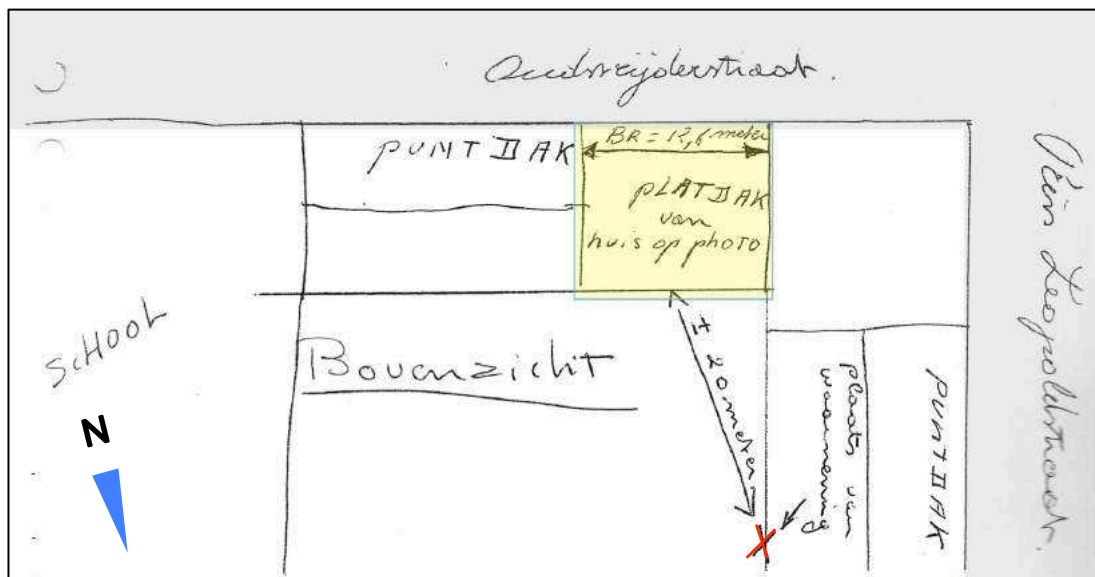


Fig. 181. Top view placing the sighting location near the intersection of the Oudrijdersstraat and the Prins Leopoldstraat. The red X marks the spot from where the picture was taken. The roof highlighted in yellow is the one that appears in the photograph. According to the comments in the sketch it was 12.6m wide and at a distance of about 20m from the witness. The building itself is said to be 11m high.
Sketch by Arthur de Weerdts. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.



Fig. 182. 2015 photo taken at the sighting location from a spot close to where De Weerd stood when he took his picture in 1973. The horizontal picture angle is 66.5° . The (renovated) house in the center is the one appearing in De Weerd's picture.
Photo by Wim van Utrecht.

Data about the position of the Sun for an observer in Borgerhout were gleaned from the US Navy Observatory. They tell us that, at 7:30 a.m., the Sun was in the East (azimuth: 97.2°) at an elevation of 7.6° . This is only partial in agreement with De Weerd's claim that the Sun was "to the left and behind of me." While the Sun was indeed to his left, it was not behind him.

Reading through the witness' statements, there also appears to be a problem with the indicated Southwest-to-North course for the first phase of the sighting. More precisely, it is not clear how the trajectory of an object in the South moving from left to right can be reconciled with a flight path from Southwest to North. Obviously, a left-to-right course would imply that the object was moving roughly from East to West.

The photographic evidence itself is of too low a quality to be of much help in identifying the object. According to De Weerd, by the time the photo was taken, the object's size had increased from one match head at arm's length to two, which would equal an angular size of about 0.8° (by way of comparison: the Moon's diameter covers approximately 0.5° of the sky.)

De Weerd's statement that the object disappeared into thin air shortly after having doubled in size, would rule out a conventional aircraft. On the other hand, the description given by the witness (object getting bigger despite its ascending motion) is similar to the behavior of a weather balloon. In fact, a radiosonde balloon that measures 1.5m in diameter on the ground will expand to circa 6m before it reaches the critical altitude where it bursts. A weather balloon would also explain the way in which the mystery object disappeared. The witness' description of the object being "swallowed up" and

leaving an expanding cloudlet behind, is not unlike what can be seen on the following images of bursting weather balloons:



Fig. 183. Five stills from videos that captured the final stage of different weather balloons. Note the expanding cloud of dust and debris that surrounds what is left of the balloon.

Images were respectively borrowed from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IG3zr0yaJw> (TOP LEFT);
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mG7xFt1FpCc> (TOP RIGHT);
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab7dmuWyc18> (BOTTOM LEFT);
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXvNQQgfb0> (BOTTOM CENTER);
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCWTqM8gMdE> (BOTTOM RIGHT).

Given that the object was sighted in the South, the ideal candidate to explain the final stages of the sighting would be a balloon released from the Royal Meteorological Institute at Uccle, Brussels, which is located 46.4km South-Southwest of Borgerhout. At 6:00 a.m. on March 24, the Uccle ground station recorded good visibility and a gentle breeze near the ground coming from the Southwest. These elements prompted us to explore the idea of a weather balloon further.

A first mail to the Royal Meteorological Institute yielded a negative response: according to the institute, only two radiosonde balloons went up on March 24: at 00:00 UT and at 12:00 UT (1:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. local, respectively). However, a more careful check by Dr. Ronny Blomme of the Belgian Royal Observatory, which facilities are also located at Uccle, revealed that there

was a balloon released from the institute in the morning of March 24. It concerned a so-called *rawinsonde 'pilot' balloon*, a type of sounding balloon that is tracked by a radio direction-finding instrument to observe the speed and direction of upper-air winds. The balloon went up from Uccle at 6:00 UT (7:00 a.m. local) and reached an altitude of at least 29km [1]. Below is a table with the altitude, flight direction and (horizontal) wind speed that we derived from the encrypted data sets. Flight time and ascent rate are not known.

<u>Altitude</u>	<u>Direction of flight / Wind coming from</u>	<u>Wind speed</u>
0m	30° / 210°	9km/h
900m	40° / 220°	22km/h
1,500m	50° / 230°	20km/h
2,100m	30° / 210°	26km/h
3,000m	5° / 185°	24km/h
3,600m	350° / 170°	28km/h
4,200m	335° / 155°	39km/h
4,800m	325° / 145°	37km/h
5,600m	315° / 135°	39km/h
7,200m	280° / 100°	31km/h
9,200m	280° / 100°	13km/h
9,900m	320° / 140°	9km/h
10,400m	20° / 200°	19km/h
11,800m	350° / 170°	24km/h
13,600m	340° / 160°	24km/h
16,200m	360° / 180°	11km/h
19,000m	90° / 270°	15km/h
21,000m	85° / 265°	17km/h
23,700m	125° / 305°	13km/h
24,500m	120° / 300°	13km/h
29,000m	100° / 280°	46km/h

Using these figures, Spanish researcher and telecommunications engineer Manuel Borraz Aymerich plotted three different flight paths for the balloon, each for a different ascent rate but centered on the standard ascent rate for weather balloons set by the World Meteorological Organization, which is 5m/s, or roughly 18km/h.

The calculated flight paths are approximates. They are based on only 21 data sets and assume a constant climbing rate throughout the entire flight. Still, the outcome is close enough to tell us that the final phase of the sighting occurred pretty much in the direction where the balloon's flight path ended.

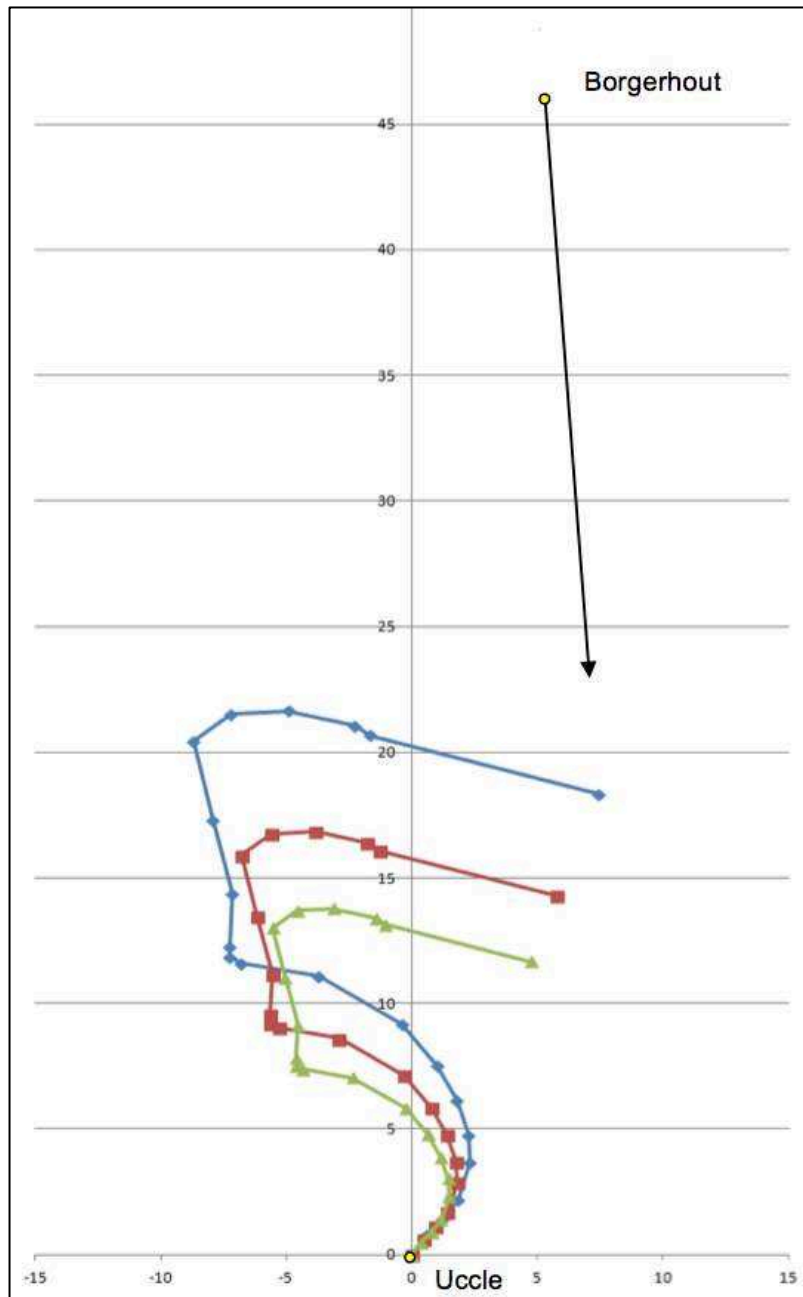


Fig. 184. Diagram showing a map view with central Y-axis pointing to the North and X-axis to the East. The launching site is located at (0.0). Scale is in km. The blue track shows the flight path of the balloon for an assumed ascent rate of 14km/h, the red line for the standard ascent rate of 18km/h and the green line for an ascent rate of 22km/h. The black arrow (added by the authors) indicates the azimuth for the light in the photograph.
Credit: Manuel Borraz Aymerich.

When observed from Borgerhout, the balloon's flight path would have looked like this:

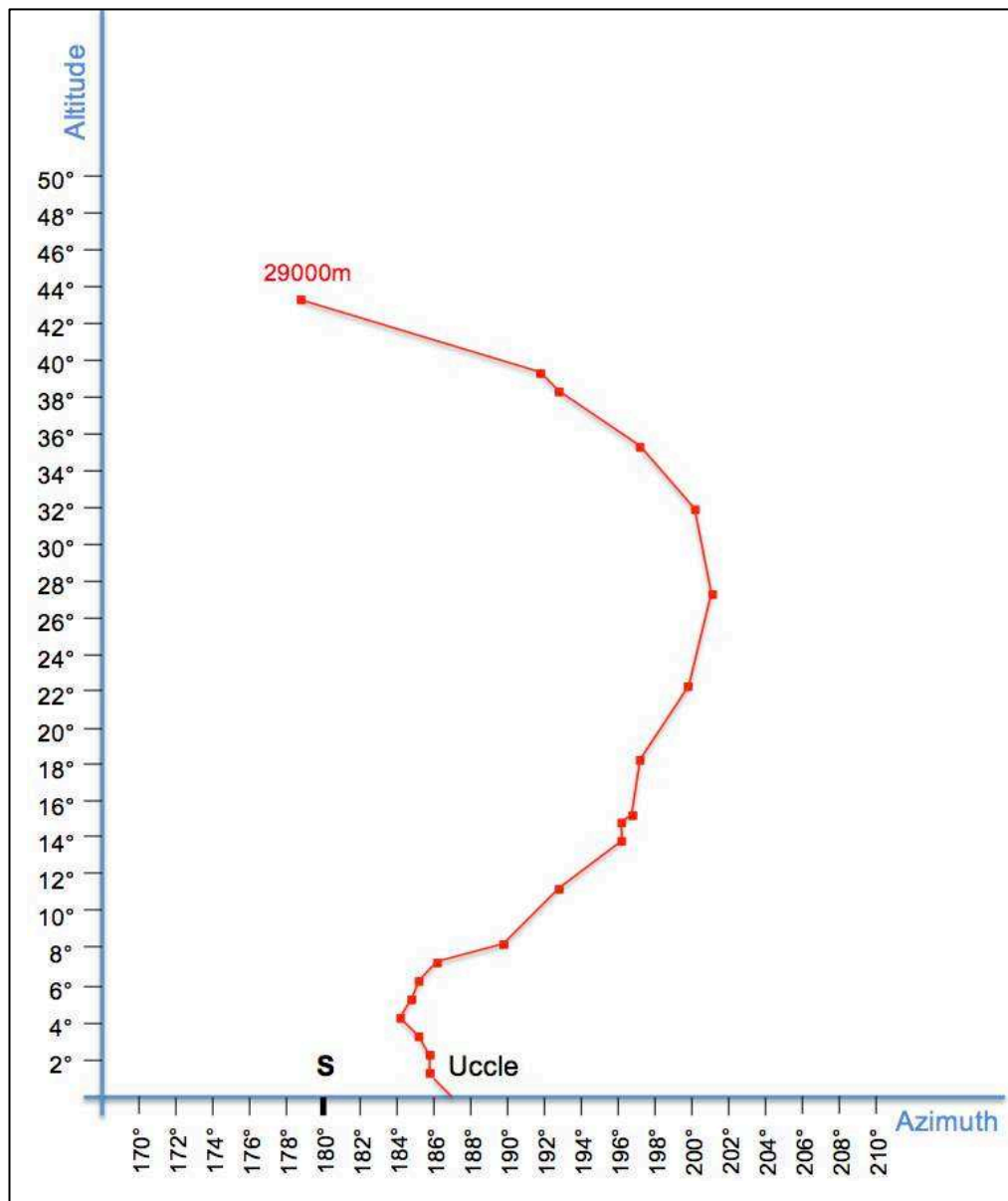


Fig. 185. Flight path of the rawinsonde balloon as viewed from Borgerhout assuming a constant ascent rate of 18km/h.

For an ascent rate of 18km/h, the total flight duration of the Uccle balloon would have been just under 97 minutes. Flight durations for ascent rates of 14km/h and 22km/h would have been, respectively, 124 and 79 minutes. This means that all scenarios that involve this balloon put the time of the sighting after 8 a.m. We are not sure how much weight we should attach to this. De Weerd's very loose indication of the time of the sighting (given as "between 7 and 8 a.m.") exposes his uncertainty, and it may be just one of several reporting errors inherent to this case.

While the rawinsonde balloon offers a reasonable explanation for the final phase, this is not so for the beginning of the sighting. Weather balloons do not follow horizontal trajectories and take a one-minute pause before continuing their ascent in another direction. The diagrams do not corroborate such an extraordinary flight path either. One explanation could be that three different objects were sighted: the airplane, the horizontal moving light and the wobbling disc-shaped object. We know that De Weerdts was in the process of handling not only a pair of binoculars, but a camera as well. On top of that he had to divide his attention between two distant objects: the airplane and the light following a similar path but at a higher elevation. This horizontally moving light could have been another sunlit airliner, one that produced no contrail and for that reason may have appeared unusual to the witness. [2]

In these circumstances (observing two separate objects not only with the naked eye but also through binoculars and through the camera's viewfinder), the witness may have momentarily lost sight of the light. Then, while searching the sky with his binoculars, he may have caught sight of the weather balloon, creating the impression that the light was now much higher up and behaving very differently. According to De Weerdts, the displacement from the first stop to the second occurred in "barely two seconds". If there really was an object flying through the sky "further away" than the sunlit contrail and performing such a maneuver, it should have produced a sonic boom, but this is not mentioned. This simple observation in itself reinforces the idea that the unidentified object involved the sighting of two different objects and that the 70° turn was a false assumption. [3]

Another discrepancy becomes apparent when we considered the technical specifications for the lens and the photo's image size in relation to what the picture shows. If we are to take the witness' estimates literally, the roof on the picture was 20m away from the camera and 12.6m wide (i.e. the distance in between the chimney in the center of the photo to the chimney bordering the right edge of the picture frame). A 12.6m-wide structure at a distance of 20m would give an angle of 35°. Yet, the horizontal viewing angle of a photograph taken in portrait mode with a 105mm lens producing a 60x90mm image is smaller than that. It is only 32°. In consequence, the photograph could not have been made with a 105mm lens. Measurements on Google Earth images of the site, and on photos taken during a visit to the sighting location, suggest that a much more common 45mm lens was used. If this were the case, the horizontal angle covered by the picture would have been close to 67°. The vertical angle would then have been 90°. (See also Fig. 186 on the next page.)

If we accept De Weerdts' estimates, the elevation of the object at the time it was photographed would have been: 29° (for the roof of an 11m-high building 20m from the camera) +10° (for a clenched fist at arm's length) +5° (for three fingers at arm's length) +12° (for the vertical distance between the first and second stop), which would give 56° (maximum elevation because vertical

angles are almost always overestimated.) Yet, with the camera's vertical viewing angle being approximately 90° , we find that the angular distance between the roof and the anomaly in the picture is close to 65° . Adding the 29° for the distance between the ground and the roof gives an elevation of 4° past the zenith. Going by these figures, the obvious conclusion is that the anomaly in the photograph was unrelated to the sighting.

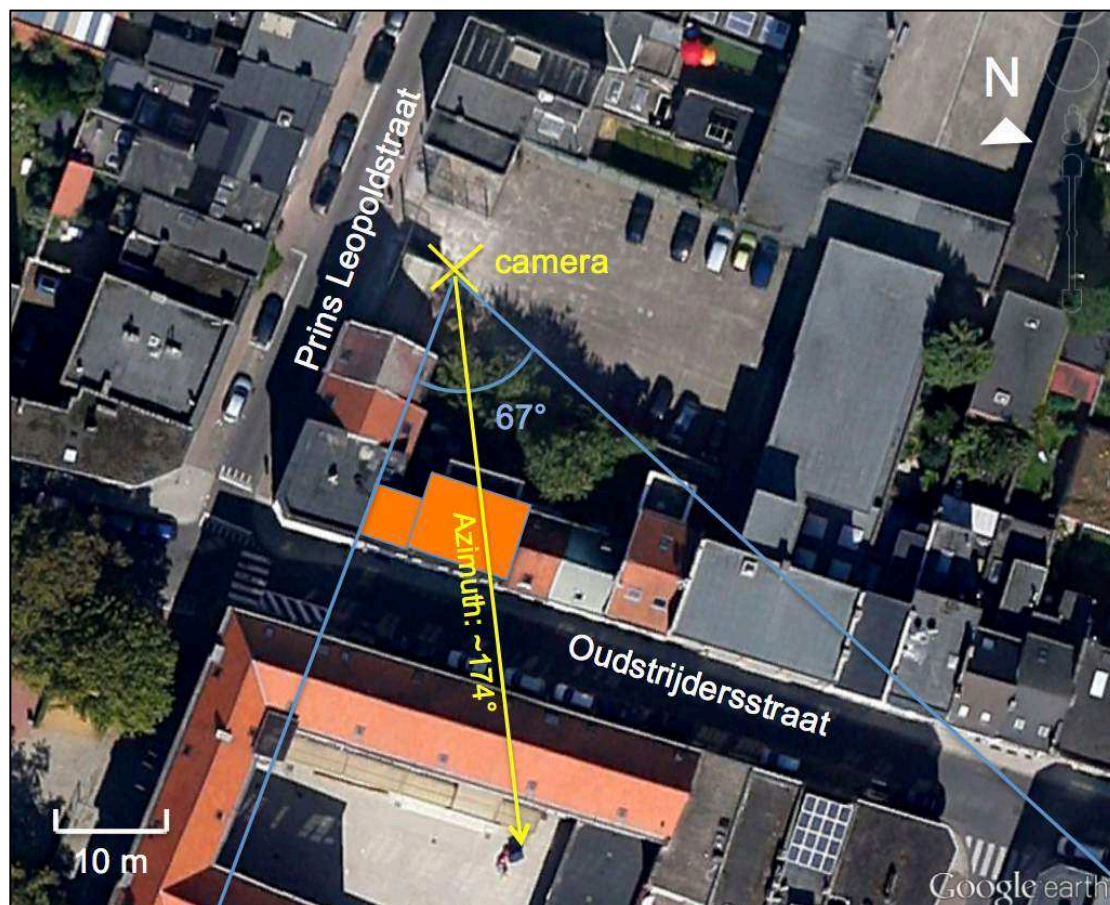


Fig. 186. 2012 Google Earth image with yellow cross showing the position of the camera and yellow arrow indicates the direction for the anomaly in the photograph. The blue lines define the camera's viewing angle. The orange rectangles mark the position of the flat roof that can be seen on the alleged UFO picture. The house where De Weerdts lived in 1973 was taken down when this satellite picture was made.

The found elevation angle (past the zenith when looking South) also rules out the possibility that the big white speck was the rawinsonde balloon. This is also evident from its size. Despite the fact that various factors can influence the way in which a moving, highly reflective body shows up on a photograph [4], it is very unlikely that a weather balloon photographed from a distance of about 30km, would have shown up as one big, sharply delineated mass in a photograph taken with an old-model camera that provided a wide-angle view. On a digitized 2353x3689 pixels version of the negative, the anomaly covers

approximately 10x40 pixels, which corresponds to an angular width of 0.28° and an angular height of 0.98° , i.e. the size of two full Moons placed on top of one another! While this is close to the witness' estimate of the object's size (0.8°), it is hard to accept that no one else reported seeing this extraordinary apparition in a cloudless sky on a Saturday morning. By way of comparison, a 7m-diameter balloon that hovers at a distance of 30km covers only 0.013° of the sky. This angle is smaller than the average visual acuity of the human eye, which is 0.017° , meaning that the shape of the balloon would not have been visible without binoculars. This is much better in line with what transpires from the witness' report, namely that the shape of the object only became apparent when viewed through binoculars.

After having reviewed the evidence, FOTOCAT's photographic consultant Andrés Duarte feels that there is a simple explanation for the whitish spot in the photo. He writes:

[Despite the fact that] there are possible objections and ambiguities that complicate things, I think the alleged image is a developing spot or a defect of the film or the copy because it is not motion blurred like the rest of the photo. The spot is something fuzzy, but it is totally incompatible with the PSF of the rest of the picture. [The PSF or Point Spread Function being the recorded response of an imaging system to a point source or point object.]

For some parts of the antenna that can be seen in the bottom left of the picture, the contrast with the sky is less outspoken than the contrast between the spot and the sky. Yet, the full trace of the movement can be seen, like for example in the area framed in the figure below that shows the antenna (the arrow roughly indicates the extent of the trace.) The whole trace can be seen with the naked eye, perhaps with some difficulty, but it shows up clearly just by increasing the contrast. If the full trace is visible despite the low contrast, then it is obvious that, if the spot was affected by the same PSF, here too, the higher contrast should have rendered the entire trace visible, but it didn't. Actually, the spot has a shorter length than the motion blur that affects the antenna.

One possible explanation for this inconsistency is that the photo is blurred not uniformly so that the light does not appear blurred even if the house is, but it is unlikely and it is an "ad hoc" fallacy. Another possibility is that the object emitted very brief flashes impressing the film only for a small fraction of the movement.

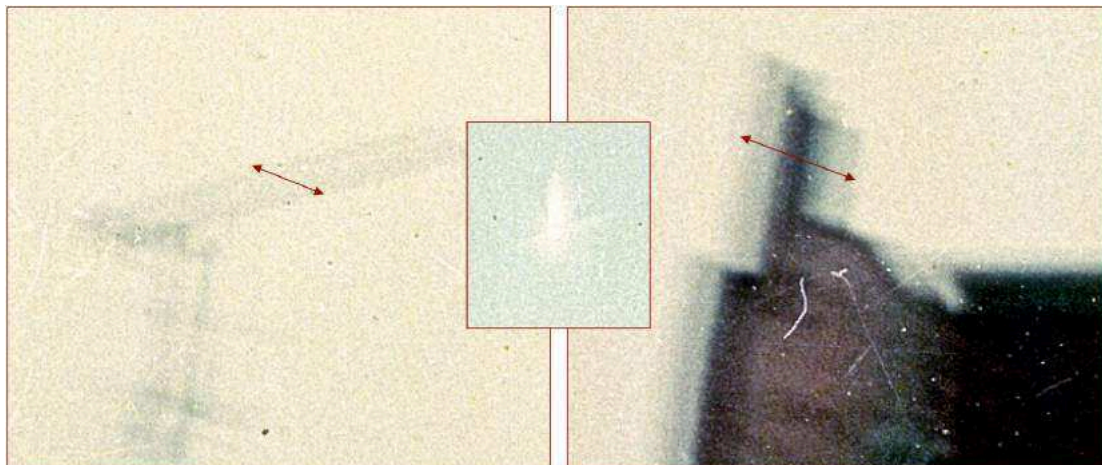


Fig. 187. LEFT: close up of the antenna showing moderate motion blur in low-contrast parts of the image. RIGHT: close up of the contrast-rich chimney near the bottom center of the picture showing the full extent of the motion blur. CENTER: close up of the anomaly, showing no sign of motion blur. (All cropped images shown here with the same scale and identical contrast and sharpness settings.)

In summary: there are strong arguments that a sounding balloon was responsible for the stranger part of the **visual sighting**. There is the actual presence of a rawinsonde balloon that drifted close to where the object was sighted, the ascending and wobbling motion, the doubling in size and the expanding cloudlet during the final stage of the sighting. The light that moved parallel to the contrail, may have been a second sunlit airliner. As to the anomaly in the **picture**, its big size and elevated position, together with the fact that it does not appear to be affected by the same motion blur that is displayed by the objects in the foreground, are sure indicators that the “UFO” depicted in the photograph is merely a developing stain or a film flaw, unrelated to the visual sighting. This situation is far from unique. Other witnesses who took a picture of an unusual sky phenomenon, and were confronted with a failed photograph afterwards, have shown this eagerness to pick out the most prominent film flaw on their image and attribute it to the object they spotted visually. Several such examples can be found in this catalog, namely: Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (July 5, 1972), Moorslede (June 5, 1983) and Wommelgem (December 1992).

[1] 29km being the maximum altitude for which data are included in the institute’s data sets.

[2] It is not uncommon to observe planes with and without contrails in close proximity of one another (whether a contrail forms or not depends on the engines used by the aircraft and the humidity of the air it flies through.) See for example:

<http://contrailscience.com/why-do-some-planes-leave-long-trails-but-others-dont/>

[3] Readers may want to compare the present case details with those of the Mariakerke case (see entry for December 3, 1972).

[4] Factors that can influence the size of a point source on a photograph are:

- The glaring effect that increases the size of an object captured on film;

- The reported wobbling motion of the object, which, in combination with the relatively long exposure time of 1 second, may have caused different, consecutively captured reflections to be depicted as one larger shape.
- The radar reflector that was suspended several meters below the balloon would also have reflected sunlight towards the camera, adding to the amount of light reflected by the balloon itself.
- The camera shake, whereby the shape and extent of the motion signature depends on the contrast between the object and its background, the sensitivity of the film and the coincidence between the reported flashes and the camera shake.

(References: Arthur de Weerdt, letters to GESAG, March 31 and April 17, 1973. Arthur de Weerdt, *UFO INFO*, No.33, September 1973, page 12. Jacques Bonabot and Michel Roy, personal communications to Wim van Utrecht, January 2015. Manuel Borraz Aymerich, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, February 3, 2015. Andrés Duarte, personal communications to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, February and March 2015. Koninklijk Meteorologisch Instituut, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, February 26 and March 5, 2015. Belgocontrol, mail to Wim van Utrecht, March 9, 2015. Antoine Cousyn, personal communications to the authors, March 2015. Dr. Ronny Blomme, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, July-August 2015. Manuel Borraz Aymerich, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, July-August 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Saturday, May 19, 1973

Location: Assebroek, Bruges (West Flanders)

Time: ~22:10

Duration: over 1 minute

Special features: repeater witness

Assessment: film flaws (photographs); satellite (visual sighting)

This entry discusses one of the many photographically documented observations reported by Werner Bruyneel (see our various other entries for “Assebroek” between October 14, 1972 and November 4, 1974). In a loose and undated note the authors recuperated from his personal archives, Bruyneel describes this new incident as follows:

At around 10:30 p.m., a white light the size of a star approached from the North moving Southeast. Size and brightness were very similar to how Skylab looked during its orbits several months later. As the light moved towards the zenith, its size and brightness greatly increased, excluding it being a satellite. An airplane was no option either. A picture was taken, but somehow, a change in shape had occurred when the second picture was taken. Despite the fact that it always remained visible as just one light, there are two lights present in the photograph. So it cannot be excluded that when this first shot was taken, a second light joined the first and both merged into one as can be seen on the second exposure. Next it disappeared behind a roof.

In a notebook, also without date, Bruyneel offers a bit more info:

These shots were intended to show the Russian satellite Salyut [Salyut 2, to be precise] that was circling the Earth around this time and burned up on May 28, 1973.

However, these pictures show something that is definitely too big for a satellite. There's also the fact that you can see two separate white shapes on the first picture and a single luminous shape on the second, as if these lights merged together. Camera shake can be excluded because the roof above the window, which is visible on the photograph, shows no distortions. This light, or something similar, had been flying over the area for several days, always coming from the Northwest and moving towards the East. However, on May 19, it came straight from the North and travelled towards the Southeast (over the archeological site of Assebroek) [1]. I am unable to form a clear opinion on these two photographs. Whether they show the Russian Salyut or something else, they definitely are strange.

The time of event is given as "22:10" in one source, "22:30" in another. The interval between the two shots is said to have been approximately 1 minute, with an exposure time of 2 seconds for each shot. The pictures were presumably taken with Bruyneel's *Pentaflex* single lens reflex camera equipped with a standard 50mm lens. The camera was loaded with 35mm black and white film.

The original negatives and two sets of cropped positive prints are in the possession of one of the authors (WVU). Going by the orientation of the shots, as indicated by Bruyneel on the back of the prints, this is what the photos show:



Fig. 188. May 19, 1973, Assebroek. Photo #1 by Werner Bruyneel.
Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.



Fig. 189. May 19, 1973, Assebroek. Photo #2 by Werner Bruyneel. According to the photographer's notes, this second shot was taken with the camera held in portrait mode.
Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

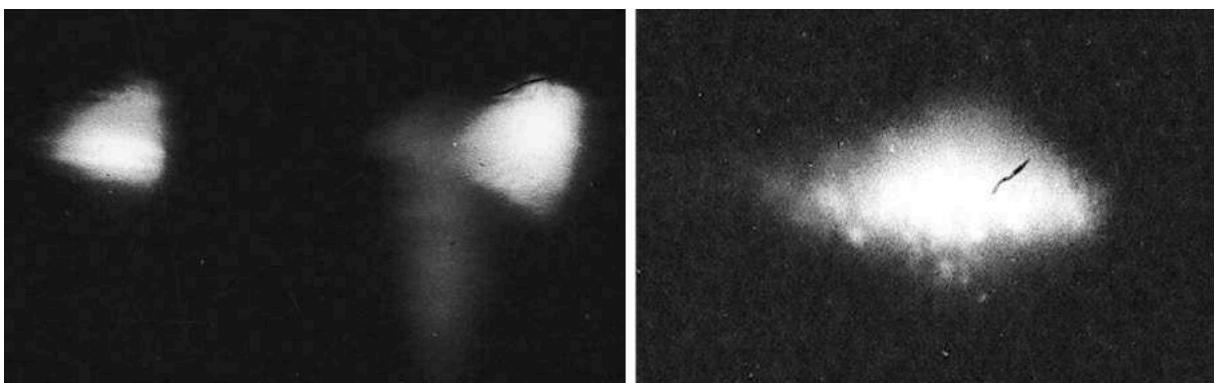


Fig. 190. Close ups of the "two white separate shapes" in the first picture (LEFT) and of the "single shape of light" in the second picture.

The negatives we retrieved had been cut and placed in plastic slide mounts. We removed them from their mounts and placed them side-by-side to see precisely how they formed part of the filmstrip. The result is shown below.

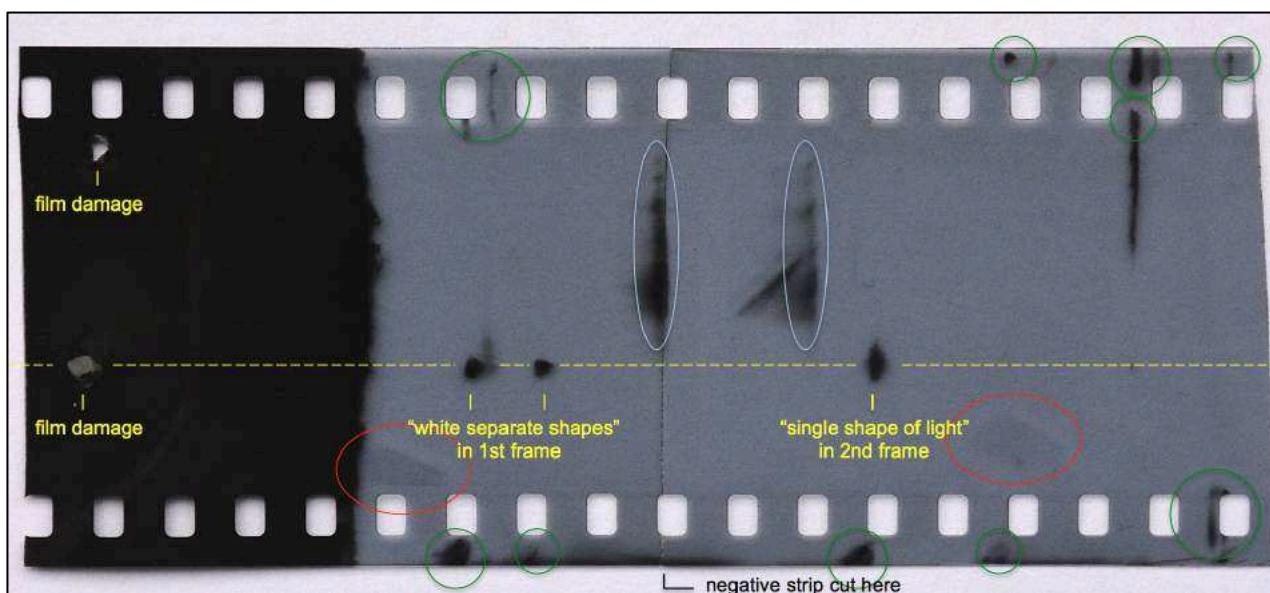


Fig. 191. The filmstrip partly restored. Designations are explained in the text.

Just for the sake of clarity, we are also showing the positive version of the two frames from the negative strip:

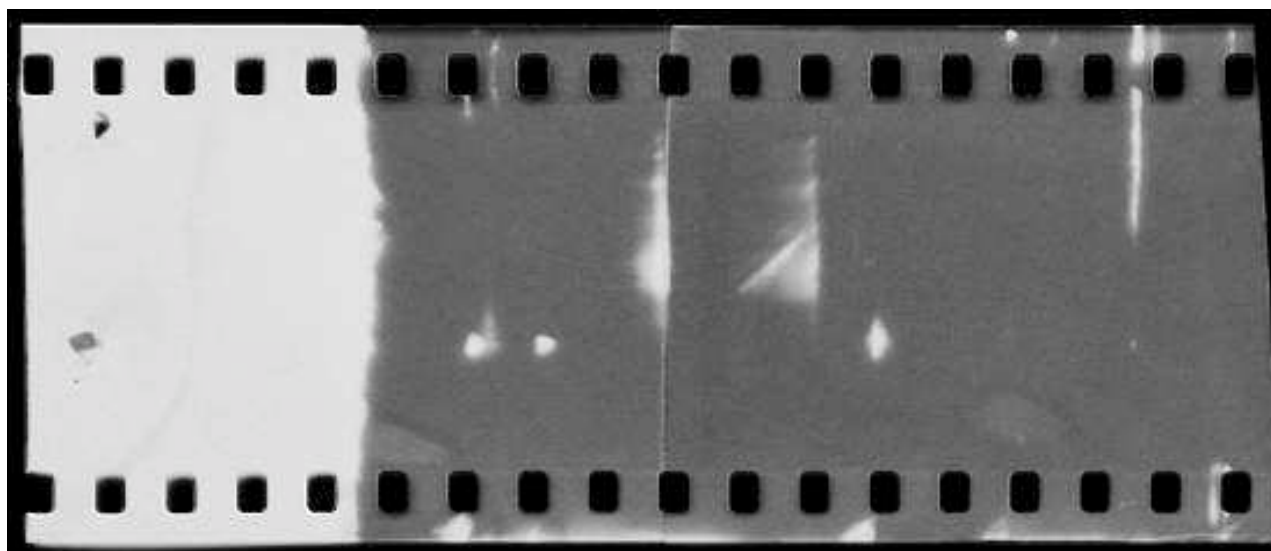


Fig. 192. Positive version of the restored part of the filmstrip.

Upon closer examination of this part of the filmstrip—photographed here with the base (shiny) side facing the camera—, six elements stand out that are particularly relevant:

- The photos represent the first two frames of the film roll. This can be derived from the fact that one half of photo #1 is completely black, and shows the typical fibrous edge where the backing paper ends and marks the beginning of the exposed part of the film. The fact that there are no frame numbers or manufacturer's ID printed in the margins of two consecutive frames is also a sure indication that this is the beginning of the film. This is the part that is the most vulnerable to light leaks and other type of film blemishes.
- A rough trapezoid patch appears in both images. Bruyneel attributed it to "the roof above the window" (obviously meaning the window through which the photo was taken). These two features (marked by red ovals on the negative strip shown in Fig. 191) are oriented in more or less the same way in both shots. They are also located in approximately the same area of each frame. Whether these features represent an actual photographed structure or not is difficult to say. In the first frame of the negative strip, the feature appears to be cut off where the light-sensitive area ends and the edge with the sprocket holes begins. This seems to confirm that they are. If what we are looking at is really a part of the roof, it follows that both pictures were made in the same mode, i.e. without Bruyneel having changed the camera position from landscape to portrait mode in between shots.
- The three unidentified "shapes of light" (visible as dark blobs in the negative strip) are all positioned on a straight line (represented here by a yellow dashed line). This line not only runs parallel to the length of the film, but also runs through a damaged area close to the beginning of the film. During processing in the lab, this is the area where the processor places clips to hold several rolls together. Damages like these can also occur when the film is loaded into the camera and threaded improperly onto the take-up spool.
- The roughly triangular "shapes of light" in photo #1 are not the only features that are repeated parallel to the length of the film. There is also a smeared-out vertical streak of uneven thickness where the strip was cut in two, flanked by a weaker copy of it on the right (denoted in Fig. 191 by the blue ovals).
- Dark streaks and blobs (denoted by green circles) also appear outside the area where the photographic image is formed.

These elements are sufficient evidence that the bright blobs in the printed versions are not actual lights that were photographed, but merely film

artifacts. By way of comparison, Fig. 193 shows another example of dark shapes appearing in the first frames of a negative film (this one in color.)



Fig. 193. Film artifacts at the beginning of a filmstrip.

Photos with similar artifacts can be found at:

photoofthedayetc.wordpress.com and megalithicmatt.wordpress.com

They also appear in three color transparencies taken by Bruyneel on November 4, 1973 (see our entry for that date).

Accidental photographic artifacts would explain Bruyneel's amazement over the fact that the developed prints showed something totally different and of much bigger size than what was seen visually, namely a single star-like light, presumably not that much bigger than a satellite since Bruyneel didn't want to rule out that possibility altogether. Actually, when discussing the incident briefly in an unfinished manuscript in 1978, Bruyneel stated: "Probably this was the Russian satellite *Salyut*". The authors haven't checked, but a white light following a rectilinear path would certainly qualify as a satellite.

There is a reason why Bruyneel attributed a higher strangeness to this particular incident than to his sightings from the days before (and which, in his own words, involved "the same light or something similar"). While taking notes of his many observations, Bruyneel had gotten convinced that the alien craft visited his community at regular intervals of 27 days. On May 19, 81 days (i.e. 3 times 27 days) had elapsed since he took his February 27 photos. With March 24 and April 22 being cloudy and not suited for observation, he was set on finding proof of a UFO on May 19. Associating an uninteresting light in the sky with some blobs on a negative strip must have been tempting in that situation. The next dates that were to match the 27 days cycle would be June 15 and July 12, 1973. And indeed, on both days the "UFOs" were on schedule (see respective entries in the present catalog for more details). Despite it being based primarily on misinterpreted film flaws and other everyday phenomena, this "discovery" got Bruyneel quite a bit of media attention. Our collage of published articles on the next page testifies to this.



Fig. 194. Press reports covering Bruyneel's UFO predictions.

[1] It is not the first time Bruyneel referred to this archeological site 3km Southeast of where he resided at the time of his sightings. It was also named as the spot from where the "UFO" ascended that he photographed in the early evening of February 27 (and which was almost certainly identified as a jet fighter). The site later became the theatre of other experiences that involved alleged UFOs and paranormal phenomena (see, in particular, our entry for Assebroek, June 1, 1974).

(References: Werner Bruyneel, letters to Frits van der Veldt, 1974 and unfinished manuscript, 1978, page 40. Hans van Kampen, *UFO's boven de Lage Landen*, De Kern, Bussum, 1978, pages 163-169 and photo section. Unsourced article, presumably from the journal *Kritis* published by the Kommunistische Jeugd (Communist Youth). *UROS Informatie*, Vol. 12, August 9, 1988, page 18. Jacques Bonabot, meeting with Wim van Utrecht on June 27, 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Saturday, June 2, 1973

Location: Sint-Pieters-Leeuw (Flemish Brabant)

Time: 20:50

Duration: 14 minutes

Assessment: aircraft, condensation trails

The letter below was sent to Flemish literary man and UFO writer Julien Weverbergh only moments after its author, the 16-year-old Stefan Corbesier, had photographed something in the sky he could not identify.

Dear Sir,

When I turned away from my TV screen this evening, i.e. Saturday June 2 at +/- 20h50, after a peculiar phenomenon had caught my attention as I looked through the window, and because I noticed a couple of things afterwards that are described below, I thought you would be interested in what I discovered.

The Sun had already set and the sky was still red-colored when, like I already said, at 20h50, I saw a trail of light and immediately went to the window to take a closer look. It appeared to be "shifting" slightly to the left (= towards the South). This looked really weird, so I ran to my room where my (loaded) camera was. I ran outside and took the picture. (Unfortunately, the lens of my Kodak Instamatic S-10 always makes the image look smaller and I'm afraid that not much will show up...) I then got back inside. However, at about 20h55, the weirdest thing happened. In about 2 to 3 second's time, the "thing" gradually disappeared (or, eventually, flew away into the distance), as if it "extinguished". Only a couple of seconds later it reappeared, but now way more to the left, i.e. more southerly. (Perhaps this "way more" was an enormous distance but because it was impossible for me to estimate the size of the phenomenon, it was also impossible to judge the distance.) The "disc" then got about one fifth longer. After that, the trail of light changed into a big dot of light (+/- 21h01). From time to time it moved a little but it always stayed in the same place. Next, I ran back upstairs to get the binoculars. Through them, I discovered that the "dot" had the usual "UFO shape", i.e. the profile of a triangular saucer [witness' sketch, see below, inserted here] just like the ones you come across so often in the reports published in your books (. . .).

It took the luminous dot about 3 to 4 minutes to fade out before it became totally invisible. It did not come back anymore.

May I add that this is a real event, the way I saw it tonight with my own eyes together with my mother and two sisters and that this report has nothing to do with UFO hysteria or hoaxes.

May I, finally, ask if it would be possible to keep me informed in case there were other witnesses to this event?

Thanking you beforehand, I assure you that the picture I took will always be at your disposal.



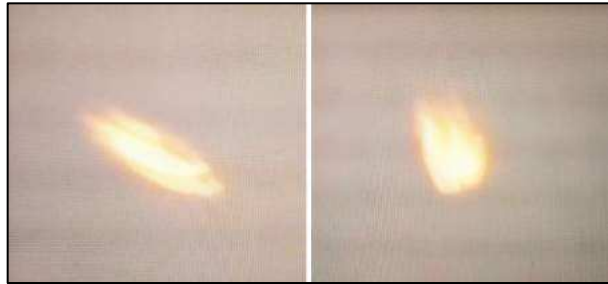
Fig. 195. Sketch by Stefan Corbesier incorporated in his handwritten letter of June 2, 1973.

Weverbergh forwarded the young man's letter to Jacques Bonabot of GESAG, but neither Weverbergh nor Bonabot seem to have made an attempt to obtain the negative or a print thereof. No further inquiries were carried out. Still, the description contained in the letter leaves little doubt as to what was observed. Most likely, what the witness saw was the short contrail of an airplane illuminated by the last rays of the setting Sun (sunset was at 8:47 p.m.). The disappearance and reappearance of the phenomenon can be explained in two ways: either the plane momentarily travelled through a less humid region of the atmosphere, or the witness mistook two different contrails for one. The reported changes in length of the "second" trail (growing one fifth, then changing into a big dot) may have been due to a changing perspective: airplane first coming towards the witness from the right, then following a trajectory more or less perpendicular to the line of sight, and finally turning away from the witness.



Fig. 196. Sunset contrails of various sizes over Antwerp Cathedral.
Photo by Wim van Utrecht.

Fig. 197. Two stills from a video of a short sunlit contrail over Argentina. The images show how perspective can change the contrail's shape from a disc-like light to a "big dot". Video at: [https://www.metabunk.org/explain-d-floating-ball-of-fire-over-argentina-short-sunlit-contrail.t5654/](https://www.metabunk.org/explain/d-floating-ball-of-fire-over-argentina-short-sunlit-contrail.t5654/)



(References: Jacques Bonabot, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, May 9, 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Thursday, June 14, 1973 (astronomical deduction)

Location: near Bruges (West Flanders)

Time: ~22:30 (astronomical deduction)

Duration: not known

Assessment: aircraft or satellite

The six photographs below are part of the GESAG archives. They are numbered on the back from 1 to 7. Date, time and location are not given, nor is there any information about the circumstances in which they were taken. Who took them is also unknown.



Fig. 198. 1973, West Flanders. Picture #1. Photographer unknown.



Fig. 199. 1973, West Flanders. Picture #2.



Fig. 200. 1973, West Flanders. Picture #3.



Fig. 201. 1973, West Flanders. Picture #4.



Fig. 202. 1973, West Flanders. Picture #5.

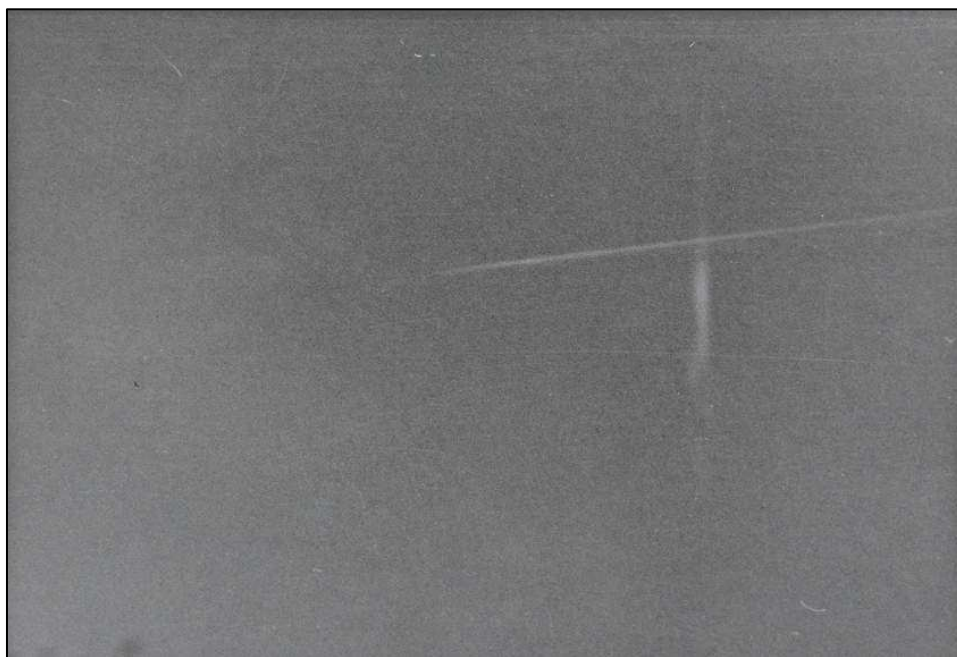


Fig. 203. 1973, West Flanders. Picture #6.

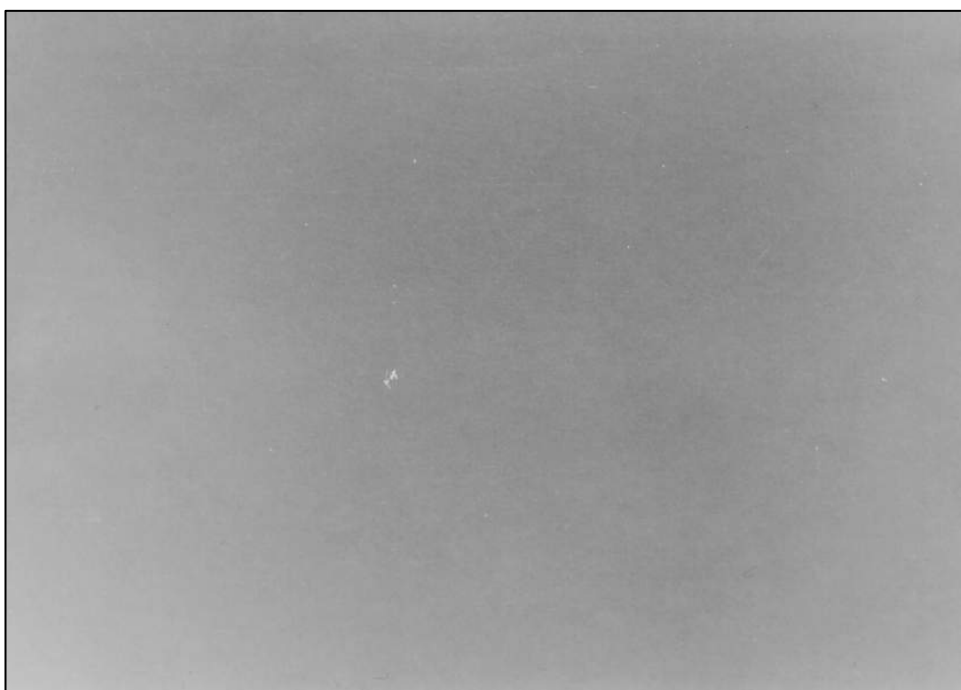


Fig. 204. 1973, West Flanders. Picture #7.
All seven photos courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

Each of these black & white prints has photo lab number “813” stamped on the back. Besides the stamped and handwritten number, the seventh photo also carries the mention “SKYLAB”. Other photographs in the GESAG files, and in particular those taken by repeater witness Werner Bruyneel near Bruges on February 27 and May 19, 1973 (see respective entries), have a similar stamp on the back, but here the number is “799” instead of “813”. Asked in 2015 about the origin of the pictures, GESAG Director Jacques Bonabot stated that they must be related to Bruyneel, and that the lab’s serial number would indicate that they were processed shortly after May 19, 1973. However, going through Bruyneel’s personal files, we did not find a single mention of these seven black & white pictures, not in the book manuscript he had been writing, nor in his hand-written notes, or in his letters to UFO researchers and astronomers. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that, considering the identical looking lab numbers and the fact that they were kept by a Bruges-based UFO group, the seven photos were taken by someone close to Bruyneel.

Examining the pictures more closely, we detected several faint light trails in the sky on pictures #1, #2, #3, #4 and #5. These trails retain the same mutual position in each picture and have an identical camera shake signature for each separate shot. They are fixed lights with no visible support, and can therefore be safely attributed to stars. In addition, a brighter trail of light can be seen shining through the branches of a tree in pictures #2, #3, #4 and #5. In each of these shots, this light shows the same amount of motion blur as the stellar lights. There are reasons to believe that this bigger light is the Moon (see further in this summary.) The remainder of the white specks and linear features in the photos that are not affected by any motion blur are dust particles. Unfortunately, the blurred aspect of the images, and the fact that they were not all taken from exactly the same position, make it impossible to use the star positions for establishing the correct order of the shots. However, we were able to locate each of the stars on a sky chart and pinpoint the date on which the Moon was exactly at the place where the brighter light is (see illustration further down the text). This unique situation occurred on June 14, 1973, thus confirming Bonabot’s remark about the date. The time the pictures were taken must have been around 10 or 11 p.m.

The stars are best visible in picture #5. This picture also shows long trails, running rectilinear and parallel to one another. These are moonlit contrails. The same is probably true for the crossing trails in picture #6.

Having identified most of the bright features and film artifacts in the pictures, we are left with an unidentified squiggly light trail in pictures #1, #3 and #4. The shape and length of these trails is markedly different from the way in which the camera shake affected the astronomical bodies. It can be assumed that the light that caused them was what caught the photographer’s attention. If correct, there is nothing intrinsically strange about these lights either. In fact, we can think of no reason why these trails would have been produced by anything other than an aircraft or a satellite.

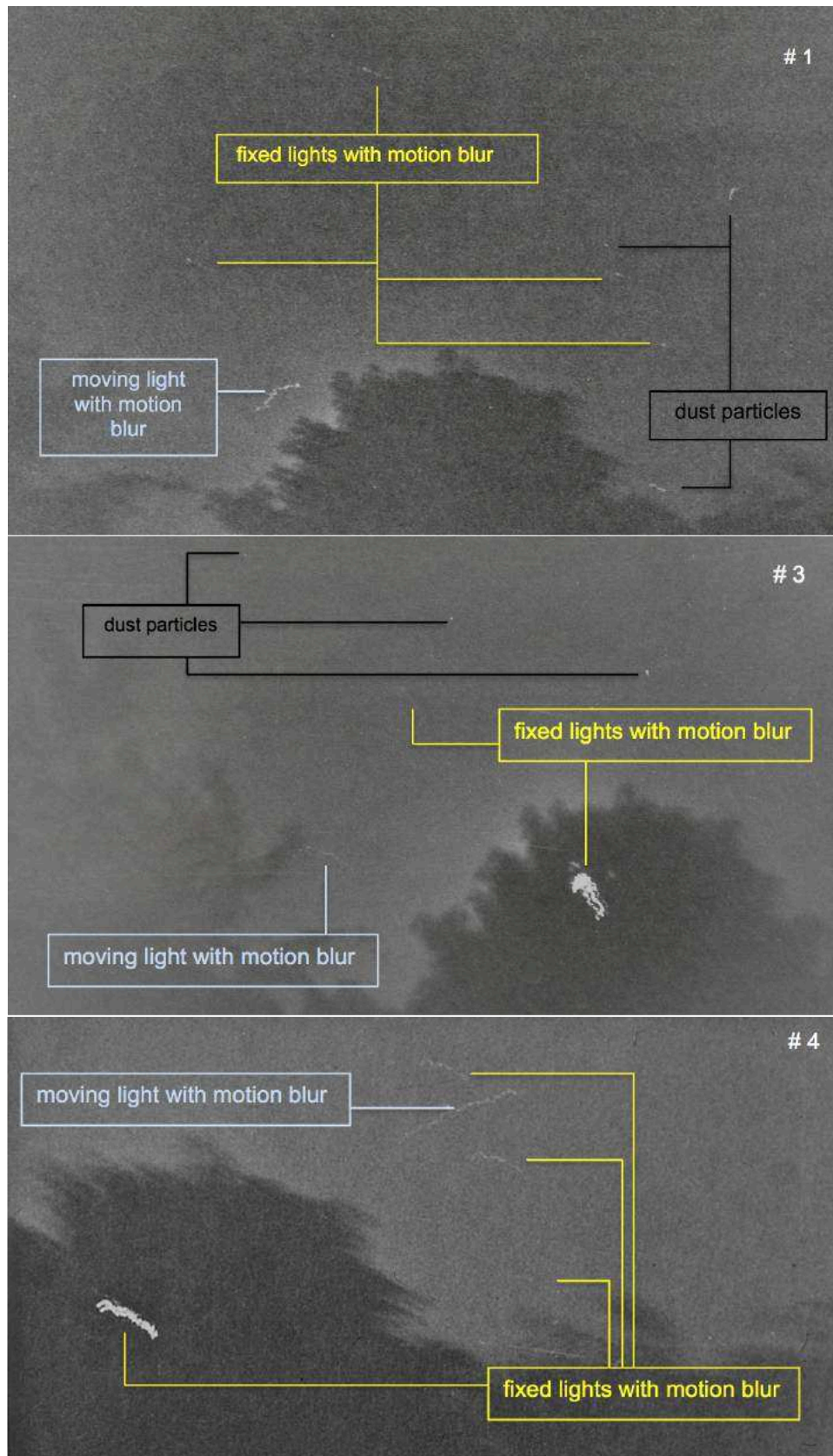


Fig. 205. Cropped enlargements of pictures #1, #3 and #4 with added explanatory captions as to what they show.

Asked about his opinion as a photo expert, FOTOCAT consultant Andrés Duarte commented that, if the light trails in the photos were from an aircraft or a satellite, they should follow an approximate linear motion. In other words, the Point Spread Function [1] of both the moving objects and the fixed lights should have the same projection on any line perpendicular to the direction of movement. This actually occurs in pictures #1 and #4. Duarte:

In picture #4 each PSF becomes pictures #1 and #4. I think photo #3 shows something similar, with a track appearing to the left of the brightest light. In conclusion, the objects with a PSF that is different from that of the fixed lights follow a rectilinear movement. The direction of movement in photo #1 is about 13° from the horizontal axis of the photo, and in photo #4 it is about 9° .

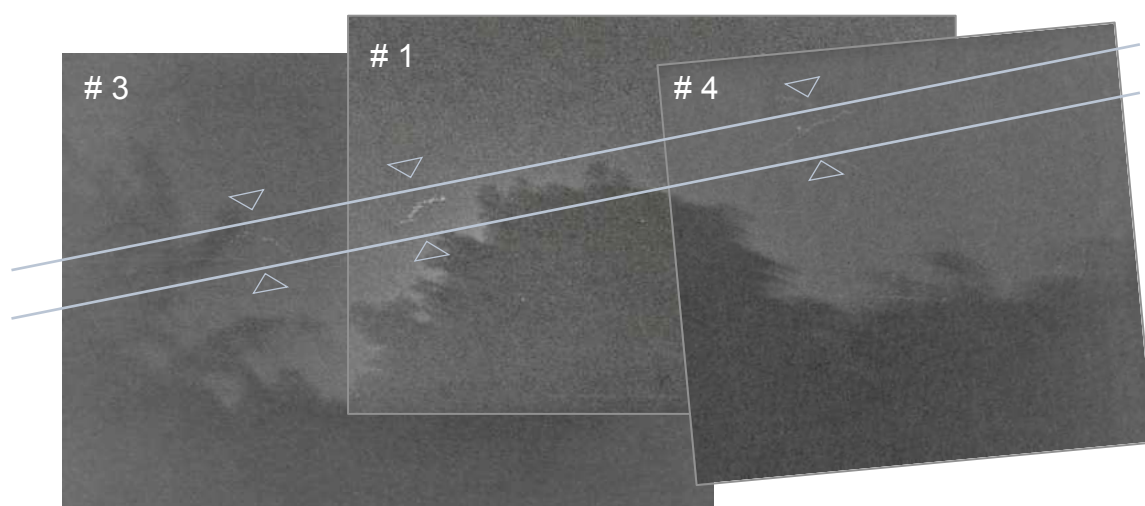


Fig. 206. Overlay of pictures #1, #3 and #4 showing that all three light trails are located within a narrow band. Note that, in order to get the overlay right, picture #4 had to be tilted a couple of degrees, which brings the direction of movement of the light in this shot very close to that in the other shots.

With this information, i.e. all trails being not only rectilinear but also aligned, and therefore probably showing the flight of one unique object, it would seem that the handwritten numbers on the prints are not in agreement with the order in which the pictures were taken. With the original negatives not in our possession, it is impossible to check the numbering on the back of the photos against the numbers on the negative strip.

We first set out to verify the possibility of the light having been Skylab. Perhaps the handwritten caption that was found on the back of picture #7 referred to all seven images. Fact is that after it was launched into space on May 14, 1973, the space station became a new object in the sky that everybody wanted to catch a glimpse of.

To find out if *Skylab* could have been responsible for the unidentified lights in pictures #1, #3 and #4, we contacted Canadian satellite expert Ted Molczan. Having consulted the ephemerides of all the *Skylab*-related objects that, given a clear sky, would have been visible from West Flanders between May 14 and December 31, 1973, Molczan concluded:

From Bruges, the slope of Skylab's setting trajectory occurs only in the ESE and on low passes. The discovery that the scene in the photos was in the SSE eliminates Skylab or its related pieces as possible explanations of what was photographed. I checked for other large objects, like the KH-9 (aka Hexagon) spy satellites, but none were in orbit on the date in question.

In a consecutive mail Molczan added:

As a work-around, I compiled a subset of all objects in orbit on the date in question that includes only those of inclination and altitude that could have accounted for the track on the photos. I found 121 such objects. Using an alternative query method suitable for small numbers of objects, I checked Space Track for TLEs [2] for the 121 objects, within +/- 2 weeks of the date in question. It returned at least one TLE for 87 objects. Extending the query to 1973 Apr 01-Aug 30 yielded 5 more, for a total of 92.

Nearly all of the 29 objects for which TLEs were not found, had low inclination and perigee, but very high apogee, so were highly unlikely to have been the cause of the trails on the photos. Probably they were lost to NORAD at the time, or their orbits were infrequently updated, or their TLEs may have been lost in the interim (a not unusual occurrence).

*A brute force search for passes within 5 deg radius and 10 min time, revealed no close matches by the 92 objects. **The closest in time and track was Copernicus (72065A / 6153).** [Our emphasis.]*

Copernicus was one of three Orbiting Astronomical Observatory (OAO) satellites. It was put into orbit in August 1972 to observe the celestial sphere from above the Earth's atmosphere. On August 14, however, its magnitude was only 6.7/6.8. In close proximity to the Moon, a satellite with such a low brightness would have been invisible to the naked eye and certainly not as bright as the light in the pictures (note that *Schubba*, which is the brightest star in the pictures, has a magnitude of 2.35, which is markedly brighter than *Copernicus*.) There remains a possibility, though, that shiny parts of the satellite were oriented in such a way that they caused a momentary brighter glow. In a mail of May 30, 2015 Molczan addressed this issue:

I vaguely recall that the three OAO satellites were known to flare brilliantly)...I estimate that Copernicus passed closest to the Moon at 21:23:05 UTC, 1.0 degree from the center of its disk, at a position angle of ~350 degree...Contrary to some speculation that its mirror was the source of flares, I believe the solar arrays are the more likely cause. In June 1973, Copernicus was early in its operational life. Therefore, it would have been 3-axis stabilized. I could imagine prolonged flares under ideal circumstances, but flares are not my special interest.

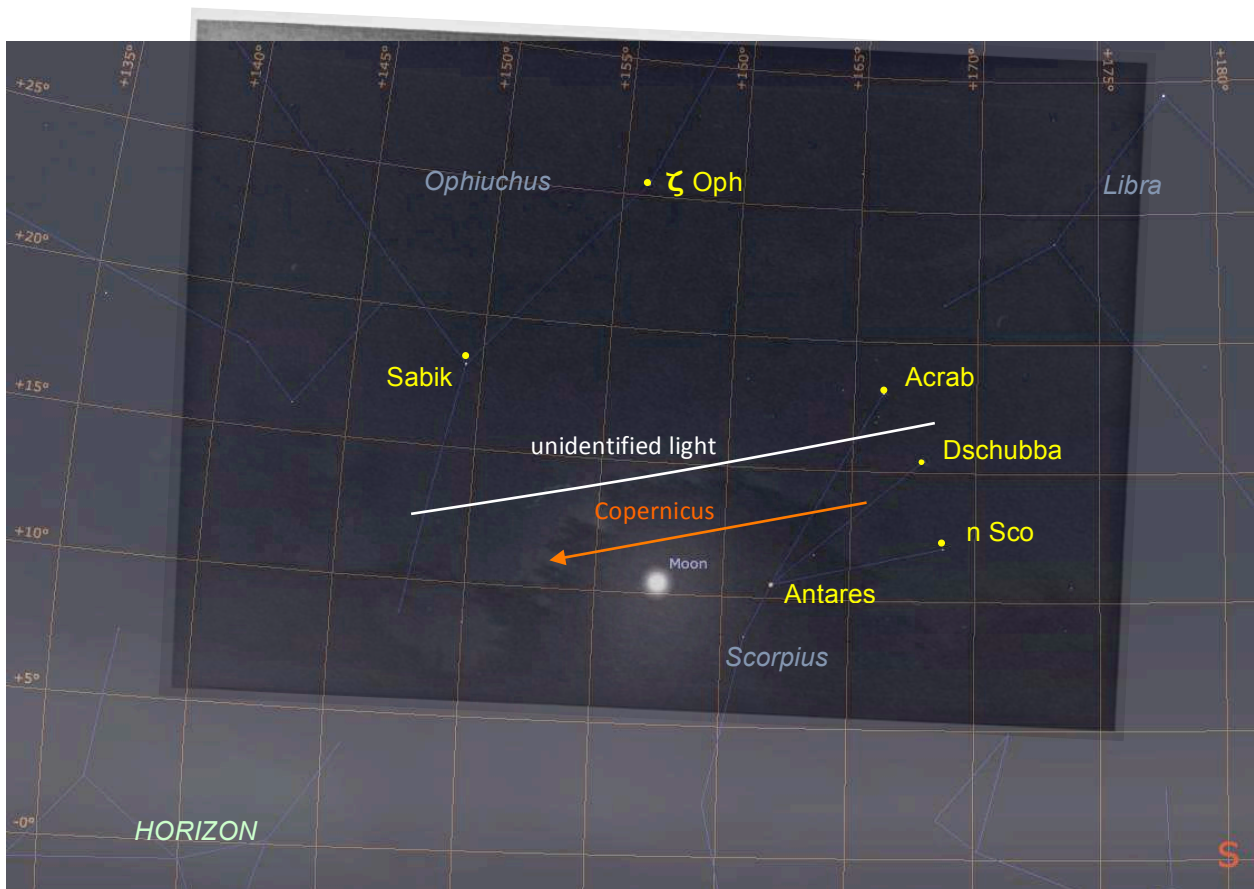


Fig. 207. *Stellarium* sky map of the southeastern sky as seen from Bruges on June 14, 1973 at 10:23 p.m. The map is superimposed on picture #3. The white line indicates the presumed path followed by the unidentified light. The orange arrow shows the trajectory of *Copernicus*.

We can see from the diagram above that the match is close, but not perfect. Further searches turned up no better candidates, but Molczan emphasizes that:

I cannot exclude the possibility that some other visible object that met the search criteria was missed due to its TLEs having been lost. It is a known fact that many historical TLEs, known to have

existed, are missing from the Space Track database, in most cases apparently lost. I recall being told by someone at NASA/GSFC who was involved in assembling the historical TLEs that are now in the Space Track database, that some of the old computer data tapes proved unreadable after decades in storage.

So there is still a possibility that the light was another satellite, but the chances are better that it belonged to an airplane. In this regard it is interesting to note that the moonlit contrail on picture #5 and the horizontal one on picture #6 have an orientation that is very similar to that of the presumed flight path of the mystery light, hinting that there's a corridor for airplanes in that direction.

The blurred light in picture #7 may have been *Skylab* photographed later that night. There are no points of references in this shot that can help determine at which time it was taken. We cannot even be certain that pictures #6 and #7 were taken on the same day, from the same location and with the camera pointed in the same direction.

[1] The Point Spread Function or PSF is the recorded response of an imaging system to a point source or a point object.

[2] TLE or Two line Elements refers to a standard mathematical model to describe a satellite's orbit.

(References: Jacques Bonabot, personal communications to Wim van Utrecht, May-June 2015. Andrés Duarte, personal communications to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, May 2015. Ted Molczan, personal communications to the authors, May-July 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Friday, June 15, 1973
Location: Assebroek, Bruges (West-Flanders)
Time: ~23:00
Duration: over one minute
Special features: repeater witness
Assessment: insufficient information

The present entry concerns another photographically documented sighting reported by repeater witness Werner Bruyneel (see earlier entries for "Assebroek"). Despite an extensive search through the witness' slide collection, the photos in question could not be located. All we have is the following summary of the event written by Bruyneel himself on page 43 of an unfinished manuscript drafted in 1978.

*2 slides of a yellow circular light that travelled from West to Southeast.
First shot 2 seconds exposed.
Second shot 10 seconds exposed.*

*It could not have been the American space station (Skylab) because that went from 180° (South) to Northeast.
The first shot shows only a circle that looks double because of the 2 seconds exposure time.
The 10 seconds exposure shows a trail of a couple of cm.*

Whether “a couple of cm” refers to the size of the trail on the transparency, on a print or on its projected image is not clear. Still, a yellowish light following a regular path is not intrinsically strange and could be anything from a satellite to a distant aircraft.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Monday, June 18, 1973
Time: 21:10
Duration: 13 minutes
Location: Beverlo (Limburg)
Special Features: nothing unusual showed up
Assessment: helicopter?

The text below is from *SUFO-INFORMA*, a short-lived stenciled magazine from the mid-seventies that carried the story in the witness' own words, though sometimes in the third, sometimes in the first person.

On June 18, 1973, L.V. from Beverlo spotted a UFO. The object was of a black color and disappeared in the West. It was about 2cm in diameter. [What is obviously meant is: “2cm in diameter at arm’s length.] The time was 9:10 p.m. The object ascended very slowly and stopped suddenly. It then looked as if the object was going to crash. Probably this falling motion was only an illusion and, in reality, the object was moving away with a terrific speed. Time: 9:23 p.m.

When the object appeared to fall, the white (perhaps illuminated?) bottom part became visible. Then it disappeared.

Other witnesses were my parents, sister and brother-in-law. There were a lot of jet planes in the sky during the sighting and they came close to the object (perhaps, it only looked that way, but they should at least have noticed it). The military airfield in the area did not respond to the letter L.V. sent them.

L.V. took 7 slides. After development, everything showed up: a part of a house, trees, but noooooo UFO. Yet, L.V. is convinced that he did not hallucinate.

The witness (Ludo Vankrunkelsven) was 16 at the time of the sighting and a regular subscriber to various UFO journals. His personal experience led him to establish his own UFO group: SUFO, the very same group that published the journal from which we quoted the above. As a matter of fact, the first details of the case appeared in a newspaper article alongside an invitation to become a subscriber to SUFO-INFORMA. The name of the newspaper is not known, but the date is mentioned as October 18, 1974.

About a month later, on November 20, 1974 Joseph Smeets, collaborator of the Ghent-based UFO group SPW, visited Vankrunkelsven at his parents' home in Beverlo, which is also where the event took place. A questionnaire was completed and sketches were made. Following a request by Smeets addressed to the witness on December 3, additional situational sketches were obtained along with a list with the names, addresses, professions and birthdates of the four other witnesses.

During his on-site inquiries, Smeets recorded some additional data that can be summarized as follows:

- There were no details visible on the object. The outline was sharply delineated and the object had an oval or round shape.
- When it disappeared it seemed to tip over a couple of times, making the bottom part look brighter. The witness got the impression that the object was illuminated from the inside.
- Seven slides were taken. The film was developed at *Kodak NV* in Vilvoorde, Brussels.
- One slide was forwarded to the Space Center Andromeda in The Netherlands. In the early 1970s, this astronomical society had a special division (Nederland's UFO Studio Centrum - NUSC) that investigated UFO reports. No response was received from these quarters and the slide is considered lost.
- Another slide (No. 19) was handed to Smeets.
- The witness is not sure about the number of fighter planes that were in the air. He believes there were three of them. He has no idea what type they were but it is common knowledge that fighter planes from the nearby basis of Kleine Brogel regularly overfly the community.
- The binoculars were a lightweight "*foco 7x50mm 372Ft/1000 YDS*". It was the father who used them during the sighting.

More specifications were found in the questionnaire and in an undated report drafted by SPW Director Rudy de Groote:

- The camera used was a *Petri 7s* loaded with *Kodachrome* slide film of 19 DIN/64 ASA; shutter speeds varied from 1 second to 3 seconds (camera set to time exposure).
- The weather was fine with no wind and no clouds.
- The object's size was 2.5cm at arm's length.
- A cupola was seen, but the line between the cupola and the rest of the object was not visible.
- The estimated distance between the street where the witnesses stood and the object was 2km.
- The elevation was "30° above the horizon" with the object climbing to 35° just before it shot downward.
- The object disappeared behind some trees and shrubs.
- During the sighting, the witness got frightened and his legs were shaking.

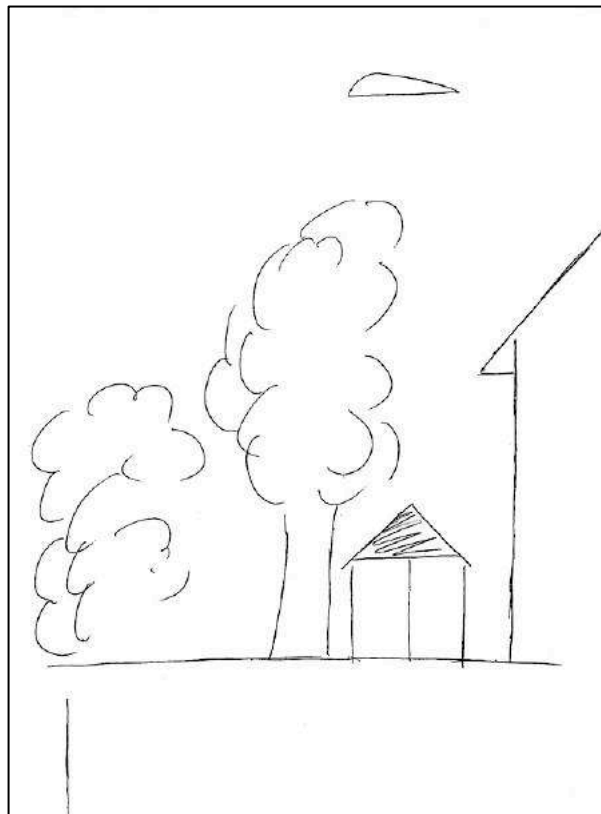


Fig. 208. Traced version of a sketch made by Joseph Smeets following the descriptions given by the witness. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

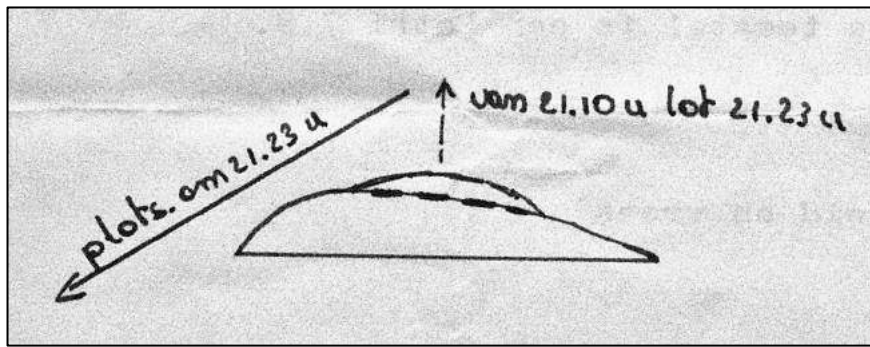


Fig. 209. The black object as sketched by investigator Rudy de Groote.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

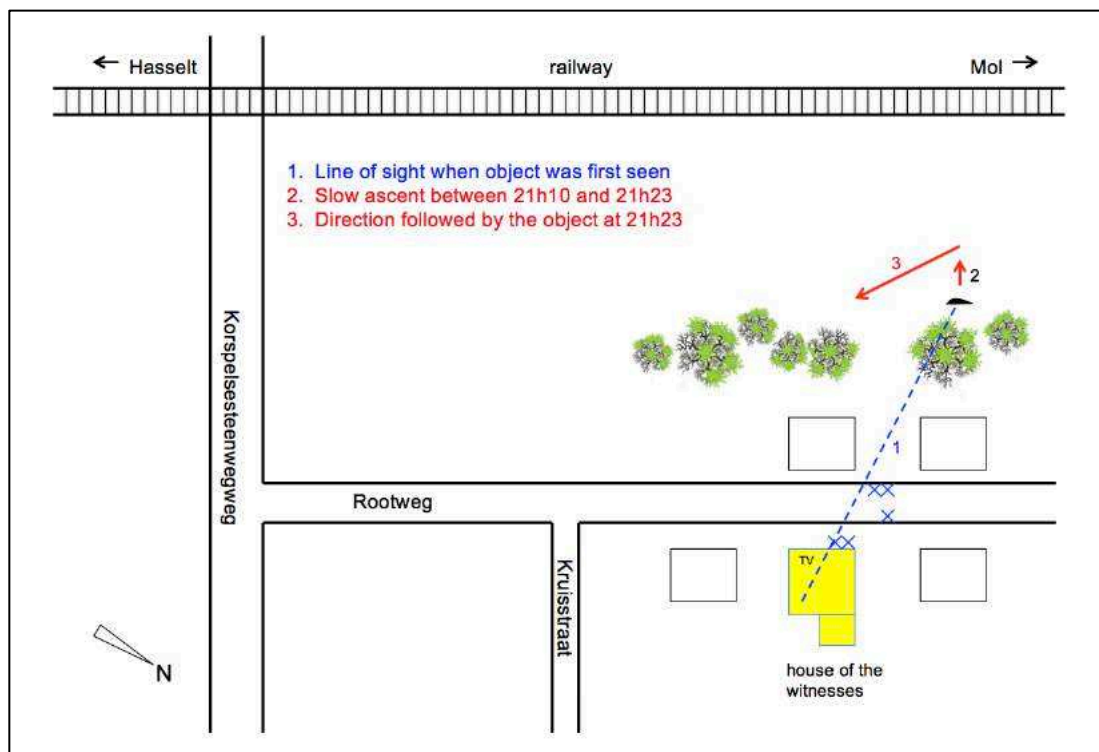


Fig. 210. Simplified diagram based on three situational sketches that are part of the GESAG/SPW files. The blue crosses mark the location of the five witnesses.

There is no evidence to examine. The slide that was handed to Smeets is not in the GESAG/SPW files. It was probably returned to its owner. All we know about the pictures is that they show houses and trees and, quoting from Joseph Smeets' investigative notes, "a lighter area where the UFO is supposed to have been". Sunset was at 8:55 p.m. on June 18, so 15 minutes later the sky would still have been quite bright in the West. The relatively long exposure times (1 and 3 seconds) may thus have overexposed the background sky, rendering a small, dark object invisible. The estimated angular width is clearly greatly overestimated. Even if we opted for the

smaller estimate (2cm at arm's length instead of 2.5cm), this would compare to an object with the apparent size of 4 times the Moon's diameter. At a distance of 2,000m, that would give a true size of about 70m. On a clear warm evening, an object of that size would have been noticed by other people living in the area.

Jacques Bonabot of SPW's sister organization GESAG argued that the training blimp from the Belgian Air Force Base in Schaffen, 2.1km North-Northeast of the city of Diest, would be the likeliest candidate to explain the object described by the five witnesses. This tethered balloon has a cage underneath that carries paratroopers to a height of 200 to 300m from where they practice their first parachute jumps.

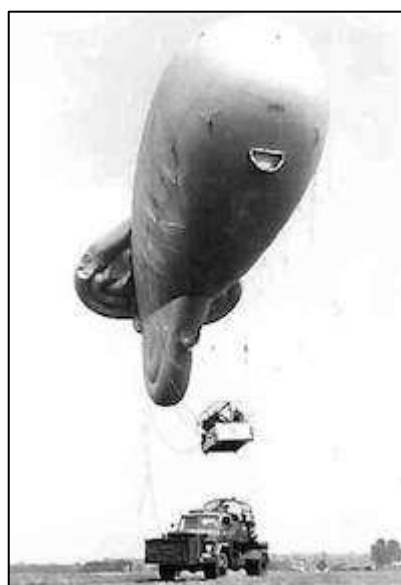


Fig. 211. A 1960s picture of the training balloon of the Belgian Air Force.
Borrowed from
<http://advalorum.weebly.com/3-para--organigram-60er-jaren.html>

In a letter of March 29, 1975 to SPW, L.V. strongly opposed to this explanation. Our own verifications learned that the field where the blimp was stationed lies 15.5km Southwest of Beverlo. With the balloon measuring about 30m in length, it would have been visible as a tiny dot, barely visible to the naked eye. But it are the elevation and azimuth angles that completely kill the blimp theory. With the balloon at its maximum height of 300m, it should have been slightly more than 1° above the horizon when spotted from Beverlo, certainly not 30° . Typically, elevations are overestimated by 200 to 300%, but even if these 30° were to be read as 10 or 15° , this would still be much too high an angle. A virtual visit to the sighting location using Google Earth's Street View app, further tells us that houses and trees obstruct the view to the West and Southwest. Moreover, the fact that in one of the witness' sketches the object is drawn a good bit above a big tree that was only about 40m away from the road, also indicates that the object was nowhere near the horizon. As for the azimuth, it is also off. With Schaffen being in the SW on an azimuth of 231° , the situational sketches tell us that the unknown object was seen due West.



Fig. 212. 2007 Google Earth view of the sighting location. The yellow line connects the spot in the street where the witnesses stood with the AF Base in Schaffen (the base itself is not visible in this image). The light blue arrow shows the direction in which the object was seen.

Asked in 2015 about his current views on the sighting, L.V. sent us the following e-mail:

Sure, I still think about that sighting from time to time. Mostly when I read about an unusual phenomenon in the newspaper.

I am still convinced that it was a strange phenomenon. I remember that I was watching TV with the family when my attention was drawn towards the object in the sky. We all went outside and the phenomenon remained stable in the air for quite a while, something like a small quarter of an hour, I think. There was plenty of time for me to take a couple of pictures, which—as it later turned out— showed nothing. It was clearly saucer-shaped and had a grey/black color. I remember that it suddenly went off at great speed making tilting motions. What struck me at that moment was the white (illuminated?) bottom. I think it was a nice summer evening. The sky was clear with little or no clouds.

I never found an explanation for it. However, I did report the incident to a number of UFO groups that were active in those days. After all those years, the pictures are no longer in my possession. My mother died a short while ago and probably they ended up in the container when the parental house was cleaned out.

So what was this black object? With the information at hand, it is impossible to say with any degree of certainty. Details were not observed and the object's angular width was apparently too small for it to be captured on film.

From the documents gathered, it also transpires that the other family members were not interviewed. We can think of two non-exotic objects that can perform a slow ascent and then dive rapidly to the ground in complete silence: a predatory bird and a kite. In both cases, the distance would have been greatly overestimated. A third option, and perhaps the most likely, is a helicopter that took part in a military exercise that also involved the jet fighters. Not only is Beverlo located in between the military AF bases of Kleine Brogel and Schaffen, it also borders on the military training camp of Leopoldsburg. The presence of the jet planes could easily have masked the sound from a distant helicopter. With the Sun having set just moments earlier, the underside of the helicopter may still have reflected some sunlight from time to time, which would account for the “illuminated” bottom part. Another element that supports the helicopter theory is that all sketches show the object to be thicker on the left. This would be compatible with a helicopter nose-diving in that direction.



Fig. 213. Backlit helicopter at sunset imaged by Jeffry Carter.
Image borrowed from <https://jeffreycarter.wordpress.com/2009/11/#jp-carousel-4024>.

(References: Ludo Vankrunkelsven, *SUFO-INFORMA*, No. 2, September 1974, page 7. Joseph Smeets, *UFO INFO*, No. 39, March 1975, pages 18-19. Jacques Bonabot, *Bulletin du GESAG*, No. 67, March 1982, pages 7-8. Manuel Borraz Aymerich, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, July 9, 2015. Ludo Vankrunkelsven, personal correspondence with Wim van Utrecht, July 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Thursday, July 12, 1973
Location: Assebroek, Bruges (West-Flanders)
Time: 22:53
Duration: ~10 minutes
Special features: repeater witness / telescopic images
Assessment: aircraft

Werner Bruyneel's conviction that UFOs were visiting the region of Bruges every 27 days (see entries for May 19 and June 15, 1973) received a new boost when on July 12 two lights appeared over the historical city. Oddly, Bruyneel himself thought the UFOs were one day off. We quote from a summary of the incident found in an undated notebook kept by the witness:

What, according to the calculations I made, was expected to arrive on July 11 at 10:46 p.m. became true, but on July 12 at 10:53 p.m. Belgian Time. All explanations that this light belonged to Skylab can be annihilated with a single blow because, as far as I know, this space station doesn't carry a red light that is followed by a yellow-orange light trailing a few meters behind. Also, Skylab does not fly from West to South. [Actually, it did, but the period of visibility ended that month on July 10.]

To the naked eye, the phenomenon became visible as a very bright star, positioned South of Bruges, coming from the West and moving towards the East in my direction. I mounted the telescope (magnification 56x) and through the viewfinder (objective 6cm), I clearly saw a yellow round light with a red light behind it. The red light was +/- 1 cm behind, implying that, in reality, it was in front of the yellow one because a telescope reverses the image (left is right).

After having observed it through the reflector, I put the camera on the telescope, focused on the Moon, then pointed to the West and tried to get this light in the center of the crosshairs of the finder. I took a first exposure, then a second and a third (all black & white). It was not yet in proximity of the Moon at that moment. [At 10:53 p.m. the lunar disc was 94% illuminated. Azimuth was 181°, elevation 13°.]

I took another camera with color reversal film and made another picture, even though at that moment I only saw the red light (no yellow). When it approached the Moon the yellow light became visible again. It probably passed in front of the Moon. It didn't reappear after that.

I removed the camera and took another look through the telescope (+/- 30 seconds) There was nothing to be seen anymore, not in front and not in proximity of the Moon, that is apart from a bright star and two other aligned stars close to the Moon. [The "bright star" may have been Antares (azimuth 194°, elevation 11°, and magnitude 1.05). It is not clear which other two stars Bruyneel is referring to.]

Total duration from appearance to disappearance was +/- 10 minutes.

Only after development, and after finishing all the remaining 17 black and white pictures on the roll, I will be able to prove what I saw, if the photos turn out right, of course.

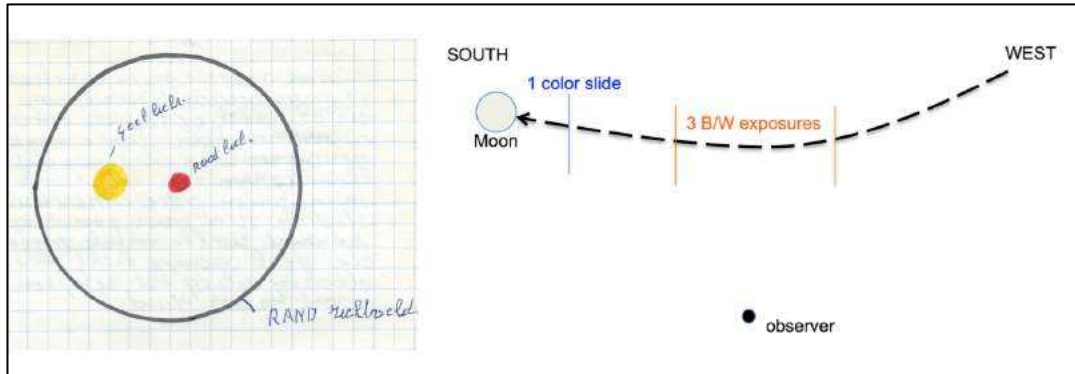


Fig. 214. LEFT: witness' sketch of the phenomenon as seen through the telescope (represented by a black circle). RIGHT: the path followed by the two lights (adapted from another sketch by Bruyneel).

Discussing the incident five years later on page 44 of his unfinished book manuscript, Bruyneel specified that the photographs—now described as “3 to 4 black and white exposures and 2 color slides”—had “failed” because the lights had been “of too small a size”. Yet, in a letter sent to Dutch researcher Frits van der Veldt in late September 1974, he wrote “I took 4 black and white exposures through the telescope but all turned out underexposed. Nonetheless, something was visible and I sent the exposures to Van Kampen.” Apparently, Dutch UFO writer Hans van Kampen never returned the pictures since they are no longer part of Bruyneel’s slide collection.

The sighting is of low strangeness. All that was observed is a pair of distant nocturnal lights, apparently moving at a constant speed with no sudden trajectory changes. There is no reason to believe that the reported lights did not belong to an airplane. A steady (not flashing) red position light on the left wingtip (i.e. the wing that faces an observer who watches a plane fly by from left to right) in combination with the bigger white light that is commonly mounted as far aft as possible on the tail (see, for example: <http://learntofly.ca/aircraft-navigation-lights>), is in good agreement with what is described here. The third mandatory light, namely a green position light on the right wingtip, may have been hidden from view by the hull of the plane. The yellow-orange color of the taillight may have been due to its light travelling through a large amount of atmosphere because of the great distance to the observer and the relatively low elevation.

(References: *Universum*, Nederlandse Vereniging voor Weer- en Sterrenkunde, Vol. 7, No. 3, September-November 1973, page 35, <http://www.sterrenkunde.nl/jwg>). Others, as noted.)

Date: Monday, September 10, 1973
Location: outer space, Moon, photographed from Embourg (Liège)
Time: ~20:30
Duration: ~1 minute
Special features: telescopic image / photograph lost
Assessment: insufficient information (possible Lunar Transient Phenomenon)

On September 19, 1973 a 25-year old resident of Embourg, a small community just south of the city of Liège, sent the following letter to Jacques Bonabot, Director of GESAG:

Sir, I have the honor of sending you the present report regarding the photograph herewith enclosed.

It was taken last Monday September 10, at about 8:30 p.m. with the following set-up.

Astronomical telescope equipped with a four elements objective lens of focal length 900mm and an eyepiece Huygens of 20mm; photo camera Zenit 3M without objective, the image coming directly from the telescope and projecting itself in the back of the dark room onto the sensitive surface of the film. Film used: Ilford type HP4, expiration date 1977, 400 ASA, processed with Acufine developer, thus pushing the sensibility to 1,600 ASA.

The ensemble was mounted on a tripod in heavy oak, assuring great stability (theodolite standard.)

To operate it, the following procedure was adopted:

- (1) Target the subject with the help of the reflex viewfinder of the camera.*
- (2) Place a cardboard mask in front of the objective of the telescope as to obscure it completely.*
- (3) Put the shutter of the camera on bulb with the help of a flexible release cable.*
- (4) Remove the mask from the telescope, but keep it in front of the objective, with the objective still shielded, but without touching the telescope. It is indispensable to keep the mask this way for 16 to 20 seconds in order to make sure that any oscillations of the ensemble that may otherwise produce a blur have died out.*

(5) Remove, then replace the mask during a time exposure determined beforehand.

(6) Close the shutter of the camera, then reset for the next photo. (The photograph in question is the first of a series.)

So, I was busy targeting the Moon in the reflex viewfinder of the camera, when I noticed a luminous point over the Sea of Crises. The grain of the polished glass from the viewfinder being too rough, I wasn't able to make out any detail, and I couldn't switch to direct observation because that would have implied partially disassembling the telescope and there was no time for that. I took the photograph, but only about 30 seconds later because I had to go through the entire procedure enumerated above. When that operation was finished, the luminous point was no longer visible. I was convinced that I had witnessed a natural phenomenon and didn't give it any further thought at that moment; at no point in time was this dot visible with the naked eye; it was obscured by the glare of the Moon, and I never saw it move.

I took several more pictures but those showed nothing special.

I developed the film the same day, about 1 hour (at most) after taking the first picture, and found that not only the above-mentioned light showed up, but that, on the same print, another much more important light (one that could hardly be called a point) was visible in front of the lunar disc.

Other photos of the same area, taken approximately 3 to 4 minutes after the first, did not show this light.

I was unable to identify these objects and discarded the idea of an airplane or a satellite because the exposure time was from 0.75 to 1 second, and there are no trails.

Enclosed:

Photo #1: contact print of the negative film showing all the pictures that were taken.

Photo #2: enlargement of the full photograph.

Photo #3: extreme blow-up of the light that was first observed.

Photo #4: extreme blow-up (same scale as #3) of the second light.

Photo #5: another photo, taken about 4-5 minutes later, showing the same region of the Moon as in #4.

With the present, I grant you permission to publish this text in full or in part, but I request anonymity. I also give you permission to publish the enclosed photographs. Sighting location: my house,

from the open window of a room. The lights were out. There were no other witnesses. [Signed J.E.]

Unfortunately, the enclosed photographs are no longer part of the GESAG archives. In 2017, Spanish researcher Jaime Servera contacted the witness/photographer in an attempt to obtain the picture with the unidentified lights and to solicit a current opinion on what it showed. J.E., now a respected science and space writer, replied as follows: "I admit I'm not closer to an explanation now than on the day I took it. Nor did I obtain anything conclusive from the people I showed it to". It further transpired that J.E. is no longer in possession of his photo. This makes a proper evaluation impossible and forces us to qualify this otherwise detailed report as "insufficient information."

This report could be considered an example of what astronomers designate as Lunar Transient Phenomena or LTPs (also referred to as TLPs). An LTP is the apparition of an unexplained luminous phenomenon, usually of short duration, on the surface of the Moon. Explanations proposed for these lights include volcanic eruptions, meteorite impacts, glints of sunlight on raised crater rims, pockets of gas released through tidal stresses, and friction in dust-clouds causing electrostatic glow discharges. The authors feel that a more plausible explanation for LTPs is that those who report these sightings have been duped either by technical defects (such as film flaws and imperfections in telescopic lenses creating optical effects near the edges of contrast-rich areas), or by events occurring in the Earth's atmosphere (like point-source meteors, satellites, space balloons, high-altitude balloons, etc.) However, there is recent work that "supports the verity of phenomena occurring on the Moon that are not explainable by terrestrial atmospheric or instrumental effects". [1] We have checked the latest catalog of reported LTPs [2] but found that there is no entry for September 10, 1973.

[1] W.S. Cameron, Analyses of Lunar Transient Phenomena (LTP) – Observations from 557–1994 A.D., 2003, <http://users.aber.ac.uk/atc/tlp/cameron.pdf>

[2] W.S. Cameron, Lunar Transient Phenomena-Catalog Extension, July 2006, <http://users.aber.ac.uk/atc/tlp/cameron2006.pdf>

(References: Jacques Bonabot, *Bulletin du GESAG* No. 68, June 1982, p. 13. Jacques Bonabot, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, June 17, 2015. J.E., correspondence with Jaime Servera, February 2017.)

Date: Saturday, September 15, 1973
Location: Sint-Denijs-Westrem (East Flanders)
Time: 21:00
Duration: unknown
Special Features: repeater witness / slides lost
Assessment: astronomical

The following brief summary is from a catalog of Belgian UFO reports compiled by Jacques Bonabot in 1982:

A luminous point, appearing in the WNW, moving very slowly to the NE. Through the telescope, it turned out to be a rocket-shaped object, vertically oriented with regard to the horizon. Halfway, the object came to a stop. Several slides taken.

Bonabot's catalog further informs us that, earlier the same evening, between 07:00 and 08:30, the same group of witnesses had spotted other objects in the sky that could not be readily identified.

The details of the observations were written up in a letter sent to Bonabot in December 1974. Bonabot mentions "H." as the source, which stands for Cedric and Bruno Heyndrickx, two teenagers who claimed to have spotted and photographed "UFOs" on other occasions as well, the first time on October 6, 1972 (see our entry for that date).

In the summer of 2014, in an e-mail to one of the authors, Bruno Heyndrickx admitted that, with the exception of the October 6, 1972 incident, the UFO sightings he and his brother reported in the early 1970s, were almost certainly caused by misinterpretations of astronomical bodies. Asked about the pictures they had taken, Bruno replied that these were no longer in their possession.

(References: Jacques Bonabot, *Bulletin du GESAG*, Vol. 17, No. 68, June 1982, pages 13-14. Bruno Heyndrickx, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, August 13, 2014.)

Date: Monday, October 1, 1973
Location: Assebroek, Bruges (West-Flanders)
Time: 20:45
Duration: several minutes
Special features: repeater witness
Assessment: aircraft

During one of the sky watches organized by Werner Bruyneel and a couple of his friends on the rooftop of the eight-story high Saint Lucas Hospital in Assebroek, photographs were taken of "an orange/yellow light that travelled from West to East". "When the light approached Jupiter", Bruyneel asserts, "it transformed into a red light made up of three lights." At the time of the sighting, Jupiter was in the South (azimuth 185°) and 18° above the horizon.

Similar trios of reddish lights were seen at 10 p.m. and again at 11 p.m.

An examination of Bruyneel's slide collection revealed that two pictures were taken. The photographs, taken with AGFA color reversal film and carrying

serial numbers #12/13 and #14/15, are nearly identical. They show a string of three tiny blobs of decreasing brightness against a uniform dark blue background. The second photo, shown in full in Fig. 215, can be described as a slightly brighter version of the first.

As with previous sightings reported by Werner Bruyneel, this one too is of low strangeness. We see no reason to believe that the photographed lights were anything other than aircraft lights.

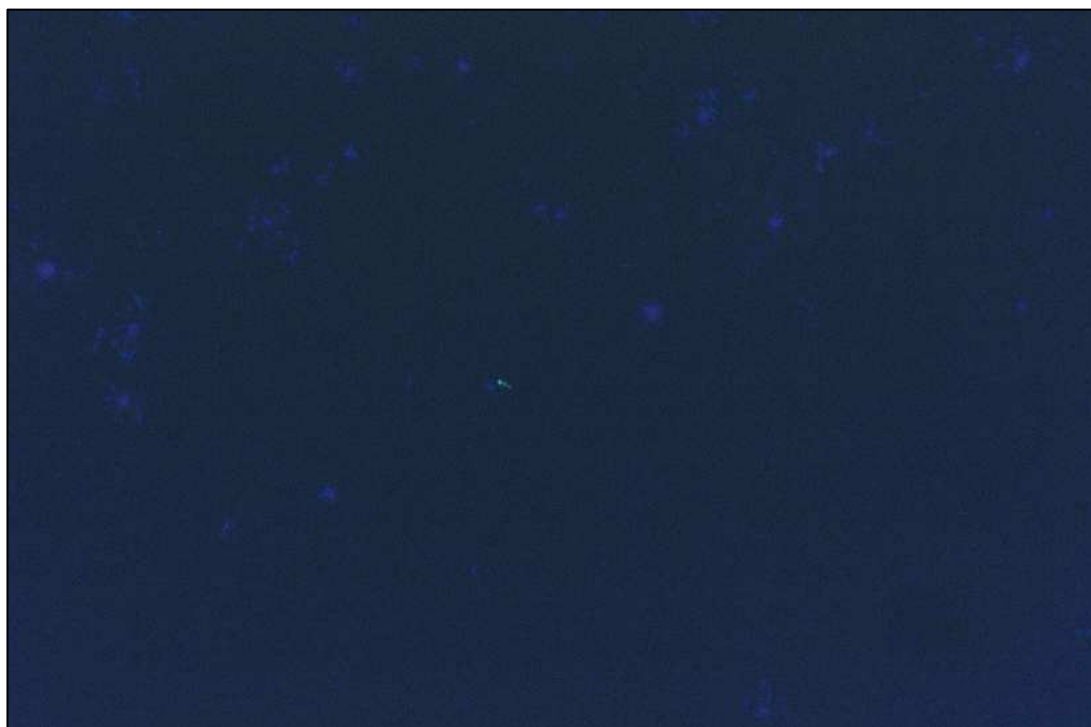


Fig. 215. October 1, 1973, Assebroek. Photo #14/15 with unidentified lights near the center.
The blue spots are stains on the emulsion side of the film

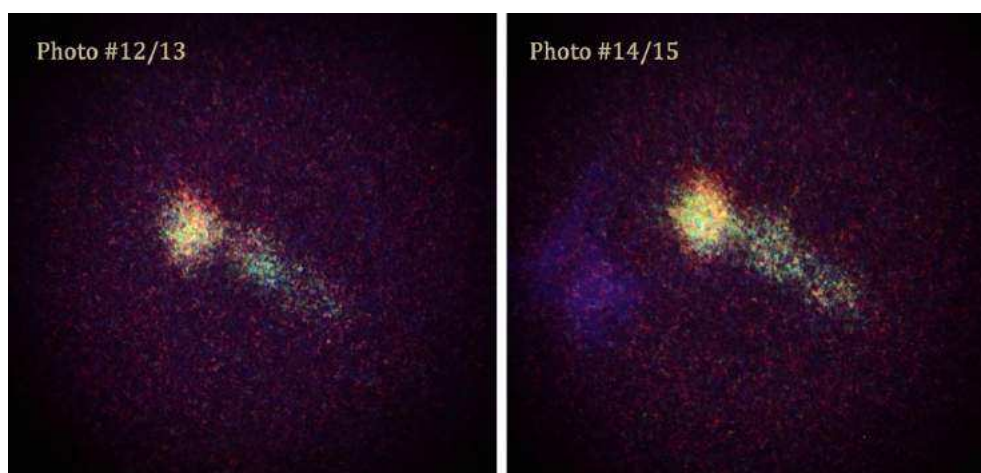


Fig. 216. Microscopic images of the lights in both shots.

(References: Werner Bruyneel, unfinished manuscript, page 48. *Zondagsblad*, No 1290, November 11, 1973. Hans van Kampen, *UFO's boven de Lage Landen*, De Kern, Bussum, 1978, pages 163-169 and photo section. Jacques Bonabot, correspondence with Wim van Utrecht throughout 2015.)

Date: Thursday, October 11, 1973

Location: Sint-Denijs-Westrem (East Flanders)

Time: 19:30

Duration: 1 minute

Special Features: repeater witness / photos lost / nothing unusual showed up

Assessment: astronomical

We quote from a catalog of Belgian UFO reports compiled by Jacques Bonabot in 1982:

Cedric and Bruno Heyndrickx observe a triangular object in the southeastern sky. Color is red to orange. The apparition disappears behind a row of trees. Several photos taken. These showed nothing. Sighting duration: 1 minute.

The scarce details of this observation were written up in a letter sent to Bonabot in December 1974. The witnesses are two teenagers who claimed to have spotted and photographed “UFOs” on other occasions as well, the first time on October 6, 1972, a second time on September 15, 1973.

In the summer of 2014, in an e-mail to one of the authors, Bruno Heyndrickx admitted that, with the exception of the October 1972 incident, the UFO sightings he and his brother reported in the early 1970s, were almost certainly caused by misinterpretations of astronomical bodies. Asked about the pictures they had taken, Bruno replied that these were no longer in their possession.

(References: Jacques Bonabot, *Bulletin du GESAG*, Vol. 17, No. 69, September 1982, page 9. Bruno Heyndrickx, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, August 13, 2014.)

Date: Monday, October 29, 1973

Location: Bruges (West Flanders)

Time: 21:10

Duration: unknown

Assessment: insufficient information

We first read about this case in a Dutch book from Hans van Kampen that focuses on UFO reports from the Low Countries. The full text runs as follows:

Mr. Persijn, Mr. Van Maele and Mr. Branders were in the vicinity of Bruges when they witnessed the manifestation of a UFO. Mr. Branders reported: "Time was around 9 p.m. Belgian time when we saw an orange ball appear from behind some trees in the East, flying to the West and having about the same size as this 'O'. Halfway the sky, it disappeared. During the whole time, it remained some 30° above the horizon. We took a picture of it." The photograph showed nothing more than a short light trail and as such added nothing of interest to the report.

The photo itself does not appear in the book.

A loose page with handwritten notes about the sighting was found in the archives of Marc Broux, who in the 1980s headed the group UFO 21 (later UFO Belgium). The notes have "personal observation" written on top of them, but it is not known who jotted them down. They are not signed, not dated and do not even mention that a photograph was taken. Still, some new elements are brought forward:

- The object was observed through a "60mm telescope with a 20mm eyepiece". If correct, this would have resulted in a magnification of only 3 times the size visible to the unaided eye (namely 60/20 focal lengths).
- The color of the light emitted by the unknown "object" is now described as "yellow".
- The phenomenon faded out when it was practically in the zenith (thus contradicting the 30° elevation angle mentioned above).
- The trajectory is sketched as follows (adapted here for publication):

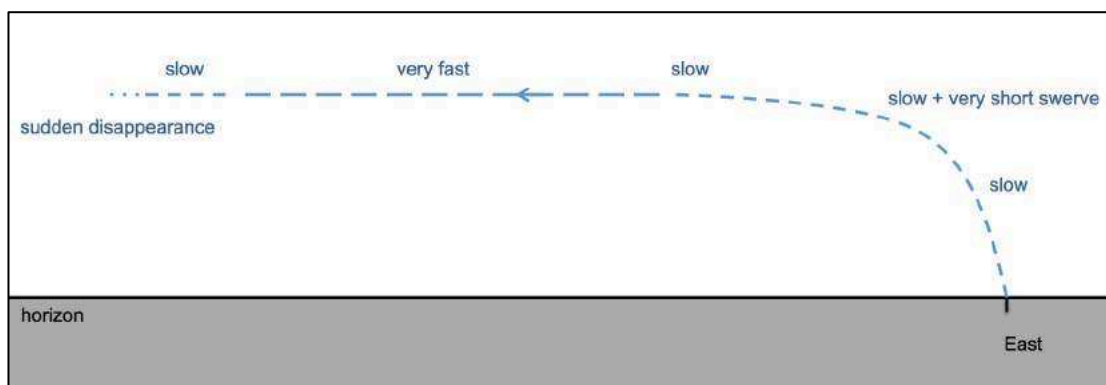


Fig. 217. Diagram of the trajectory followed by the "ball" based upon a sketch made by one of the witnesses.

No changes in speed, elevation and trajectory are mentioned in Van Kampen's book. These important discrepancies between the two

descriptions, and the fact that the photo is no longer available make it impossible to properly evaluate this report. Also, the notes obtained from Broux make mention of only two witnesses: “Wim Vanmaele” (*sic*) and “Marc Branders”, two young men who regularly took part in the sky watches that were held in the margins of the UFO craze that surrounded the claims made by Werner Bruyneel (see previous entries).

(References: Hans van Kampen, *UFO's boven de lage landen*, De Kern, Bussum, 1978, page 25. Jacques Bonabot, *Bulletin du GESAG*, No. 69, September 1982, page 11. Others, as noted.)

Date: Thursday, November 1, 1973

Location: Beert (Flemish Brabant)

Time: ~10:00

Duration: unknown

Assessment: fake

On November 3, 1973, the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* published an article illustrated with a spectacular daytime photograph of a flying disc. According to the story, a couple (referred to as “J.E. and his wife”) was driving through the municipality of Beert on a sunny All Saints’ Day when they spotted “the evolutions of what they could only describe as a ‘flying saucer’”. They snapped two pictures. One would later turn out to be overexposed and totally blank, but the other clearly showed a saucer-like object in the sky reflecting the sunlight. The newspaper asked readers to come forward if they had seen this strange object too.



Fig. 218. November 1, 1973, Beert. Photo by Jef Elbers. Borrowed from *Spectator* magazine.

An analysis by experts from “an important photographic lab” showed that the negatives had not been tempered with and that the object in the picture was “not close to, or at moderate distance from the camera.” The witnesses were described as responsible citizens who had never read a single book about UFOs or space mysteries, but were only interested in finding out what this object may have been.

The following week, readers from Aalst, Lembeek, Klabbeek, Oostmalle and Brecht approached the newspaper with sightings of their own. Despite the fact that these were from different locations and different times, the idea settled that a genuine UFO had been photographed. However, that illusion was soon to be shattered when on November 10, the popular TV show “Echo” broadcast by the Belgian Radio & Television (BRT) revealed that the photo was “a hoax designed to prove the non-existence of the UFO phenomenon.” A group of five, under the leadership of Mr. Jef Elbers, then 26 and a person well versed in UFO literature, had concocted a plan to fake a flying saucer picture. His intention was to prove that UFO photos are worthless, and that statistics based on UFO reports are unreliable. To create their picture, the pranksters had sprayed a soup plate with silver paint and tossed it in the air in front of the camera. When the group of hoaxers considered they had achieved their objectives, they demonstrated the trick before the cameras of the BRT.



Fig. 219. The five pranksters posing in front of the scenery that acted as a background for their UFO photo. The black arrow points to the soup plate that was used for the picture. Jef Elbers is the second from the left. Borrowed from *De Standaard*

In 2014, CANVAS TV rebroadcast the “Echo” program, an opportunity for the authors to screen-capture the following images of one of the country’s best-remembered hoaxes.



Fig. 220. The hoax exposed on TV.

(References: Guido Kindt, *De Standaard*, November 3 and 10, 1973. Guido Kindt, *Het Nieuwsblad*, November 12, 1973. *Spectator*, November or December 1973. Yves Vézant, *Inforespace*, No.13, 1974, pages 28-29. Wim van Utrecht & Frits van der Veldt, *Unidentified Aerial Object* photographed near Zwischbergen, Switzerland, on July 26, 1975, CAELESTIA, 1994, pages 153-154. Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, SOBEPS files.
<http://www.canvas.be/programmas/memotv/9a839b69-0d26-43df-a332-fba4df76ea0c>)

Supplemental gallery to the Beert case

Tossing *Frisbee* type objects in the air became somewhat of a sport in the years following the hoax perpetrated by Jef Elbers. The images below are from an experiment conducted by Flemish ufologist Ghislain Struys in the late 1970s. They compare well with the typical flying saucer pictures published worldwide between the 1950s and the 1980s.



Fig. 221. Ufologist Ghislain Struys and his flying saucer.
Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

Date: Sunday, November 4, 1973
Location: Assebroek, Bruges (West Flanders)
Time: 18:45
Duration: ~45 minutes
Special features: repeater witness
Assessment: Venus and Arcturus

Basing himself on his self-devised 27-day cycle (see entry for May 19, 1973) and the date of his previous sighting (see entry for October 1, 1973), Werner Bruyneel decided to organize a major sky watch on October 28, 1973. That night, UFO buffs equipped with cameras and telescopes were monitoring the sky from two of Bruyneel's favorite sighting locations: an archeological site Southwest of where he lived and the roof of the Saint-Lucas Hospital in Assebroek. The press was there too, but the UFOs were not. A disappointed Bruyneel blamed their absence on the cloudy weather. One week later, however, his luck turned when two bright lights appeared over the city center of Bruges. We quote from a loose, undated scrap of paper found in the witness' archives:

At about 6:00 p.m. I was driving home with my car when, about 1km from my house, below the thick grey storm clouds packed with rain, a big orange light flew over me (from North to South). I hurried home and went upstairs right away. The orange light was still there, far away in the South, just on top of a flat. It was stationary and close to the spot where Venus should have been. Yet, neither color nor size was in agreement with Venus. I took a transparency with an exposure time of about ten seconds. Suddenly it was not there anymore, but then it lit up again, equally bright, but now in the West, over Bruges. I took two more transparencies, one with 10 seconds exposure and one with 20 seconds (in the pouring rain). After that, it disappeared for good.

The photos are the first three frames of a film roll. This can be derived from the narrow, unexposed area on the left-hand side of the first photo, and from the fact that the first frame has no numbering, whereas the second and third frame carry serial numbers #1 and #2 in the margin. The blue-colored spots and streaks in the images are film flaws that are typically found at the beginning of a filmstrip. They are caused by rough handling when inserting the film into the take-up spool. In fact, Bruyneel attributed a series of similar defects to a pair of “merging UFOs” in two photos he took on May 19, 1973 (see our entry for that date).



Fig. 222. November 4, 1973, Assebroek. First unnumbered transparency showing a yellowish ball over a distant apartment building.



Fig. 223. November 4, 1973, Assebroek. Photo #1 with unidentified light over the historic city center of Bruges.



Fig. 224. November 4, 1973, Assebroek. Photo #2 with three of the city's historical towers marked as A, B and C (further explanations in the text). Photo by Werner Bruyneel.
All three photos by Werner Bruyneel. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

With the help of Google Earth imagery, we were able to locate the illuminated apartment block below the light in the first, unnumbered photo. The building is located 745m Southwest of Bruyneel's place. With this information it was possible to determine the precise azimuth of the light. It was found to be 218° . The three towers in photos #1 and #2 offer equally good reference points. We identified these as (A) the water tower at Gentpoortvest located 390m from Bruyneel's home, (B) the Saint Salvator's Cathedral at 1,285m, and (C) the Church of Our Lady at 1,044m. Transposed on a Google Earth map, the situation is this:



Fig. 225. Map showing the camera's viewing angle for photos #1 and #2 and azimuths for towers A, B and C. The blue arrow designates the azimuth of the unidentified light.

Knowing the azimuths of these historical towers, the azimuth for the “stationary light” in photos #1 and #2 could be determined as well. It was 291° (West-Northwest).

In a letter addressed to Dutch researcher Frits van der Veldt in September 1974, Bruyneel mentions “18h45” (6:45 p.m.) as the time of the sighting. Between 6:40 and 6:50 p.m. two bright celestial bodies were located at the positions where the lights in the photographs are: Venus (close to the horizon with magnitude -3.97), and *Arcturus* (a bit higher up with magnitude 0.15).

These findings leave no room for doubt: the sighting of the light that disappeared in the “South” (actually Southwest), then reappeared in the “West” (actually West-Northwest), was not of a single object but of two different objects: a planet and a star that appeared/disappeared in a clear band of the sky underneath a cloud deck. Upon closer inspection, photos #1 and #2 contain another light to the bottom left of *Arcturus*. This weaker light is *Muphris*, a star with magnitude 2.65.

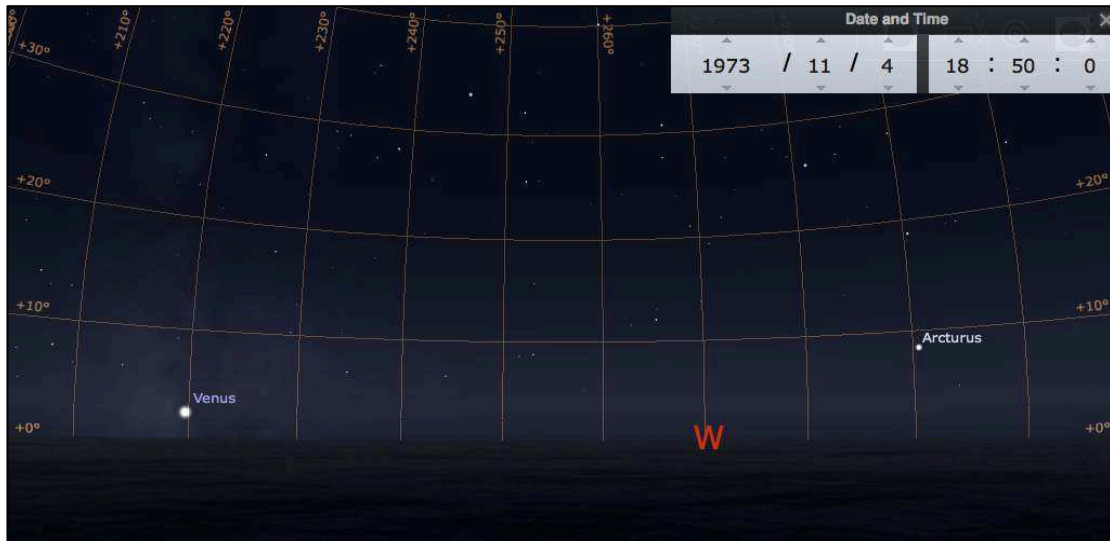


Fig. 226. *Stellarium* rendering of the evening sky as seen from Bruges on November 4, 1973 at 6:50 p.m.

(References: *Nieuwsblad*, October 30, 1973. *Zondagsblad* No. 1290, November 11, 1973, pages 8-9. Jacques Bonabot, meeting with Wim van Utrecht on June 27, 2015; Wim van Utrecht, letter to Jacques Bonabot, July 1, 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Monday, November 5, 1973

Location: Anderlecht (Brussels Capital Region), Vlezenbeek, Dilbeek and Linkebeek (Flemish Brabant)

Time: morning

Duration: unknown

Assessment: journalistic fake

“FLYING SAUCERS OVER OUR COUNTRY” headlined the Dutch-language weekly *Kwik/Zondag Nieuws* on the cover of its November 8, 1973 edition. A second headline on page 6 is more specific: “With three cameras our correspondents shot 28 exclusive images of mysterious spaceships over the territory of Anderlecht, Vlezenbeek, Dilbeek and Linkebeek”. The details of this Earth-shattering news are given as follows:

Since All Saints’ Day different people in different places in Brabant [1] have spotted peculiar aerial objects. These objects definitely did not look like an airplane or an advertising balloon. The telephone of our editorial room was red hot. Everybody saw these “Saucers”. Our reporters Jean Teirlinck and Jan van den Berghe have been criss-crossing Brabant since November 2nd hoping to catch a glimpse of the mysterious craft. Monday morning, they finally got lucky.

These introductory lines are followed by a full account, relating in much detail how the photos were made, what camera and lenses the reporters had used, and how the “shiny saucer” had manifested itself in front them. The following four pictures illustrate the article:



Fig. 227. November 5, 1973, Anderlecht, Dilbeek, Linkebeek and Vlezenbeek.
Images borrowed from *Kwik/Zondag Nieuws*.
Photos by Jan van den Berghe. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

The account, that filled the entire page 7 of the large-format paper, ended with the following paragraph:

When the three films were developed at the lab, it was immediately clear that the four-day-long quest through Brabant had produced several very exclusive pictures. In fact, our two reporters have delivered the proof that an illustrated story printed on the front page of a Flemish newspaper was true, despite the fact that it was met with skepticism from scientific quarters.

The front-page story referred to above was an account published by another newspaper (*De Standaard*) two days earlier. It reported on a flying saucer picture taken in Beert on November 1, 1973 (see our entry for that date on pages 231-234 of this catalog). Now we had 28 new photos taken by news reporters. It sounded too good to be true, and so it was: on page 19 *Kwik/Zondag Nieuws* ran the pictures of Teirlynck and Van den Berghe [2] below another screaming headline that read: "These are the men that are responsible for the flying saucers over Brabant."



Fig. 228. Jean Teirlynck (left) and Jan van den Berghe.

The text that follows leaves no doubt as to the nature of the photographed objects:

The canteen of Uitgeverij Hoste [the publishing house in Ghent that published Kwik/Zondag Nieuws] is short of five soup plates. Never before was the term "Flying Saucers" more applicable than to the objects that, thanks to the muscular strength of Jan van den Berghe and Jean Teirlynck, flashed across the airspace of Brabant on Monday morning." Teirlynck threw the plates in the air, while

Van den Bergh took the pictures. When Van den Berghe launched the saucers, it was Teirlinck who acted as photographer. The result was this amazingly “authentic” photo series printed on pages 6-7!

The composite photo below, also on page 19, compares one of the shots taken by Van den Berghe (larger photo) with the picture from Beert taken on November 1 (which was still considered unexplained at that moment). The purpose was to show how easy it is to fake UFO pictures like this. A historical feat, actually, with a tabloid-type journal (*Kwik/Zondag Nieuws*) sneering at what is generally regarded as a quality newspaper of high journalistic standards (*De Standaard*).

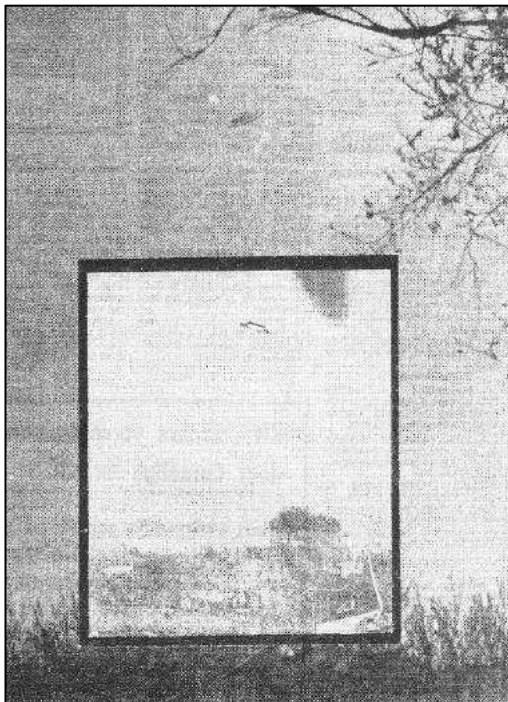


Fig. 229. One more picture of the flying soup plate over Brabant, here with the (cropped) photo from Beert included as an inset.

[1] In 1995 “Brabant” was split into three areas: Flemish Brabant, Walloon Brabant and Brussels Capital Region.

[2] Jan van den Berghe later became a renowned journalist, royalty-watcher, writer and TV personality.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Monday, January 30, 1974

Location: Brussels (Brussels Capital Region)

Time: 07:45

Duration: ~10 minutes

Assessment: Venus

The information we have for this case is limited to the following short news release from The Associated Press, published in the Ghent-based newspaper *Het Volk* on February 5, 1974.

Brussels, Feb. 4 (AP) — Michel Lagasse, a member of the NATO staff stated: "On Wednesday, Jan 30 at 0645 GMT, I saw a strange object in the sky. It moved from East to South travelling upwards and covering about 15 degrees in about 10 minutes. I aimed my Nikon camera through a window using binoculars enlarging 12 times, for a better picture." The result on a 35mm negative obtained from Mr. Lagasse was a tiny dark dot. Substantially enlarged it resembled amazingly the picture recently published of an inverted saucer shape as photographed from the French Concorde plane (AP Wirephoto).

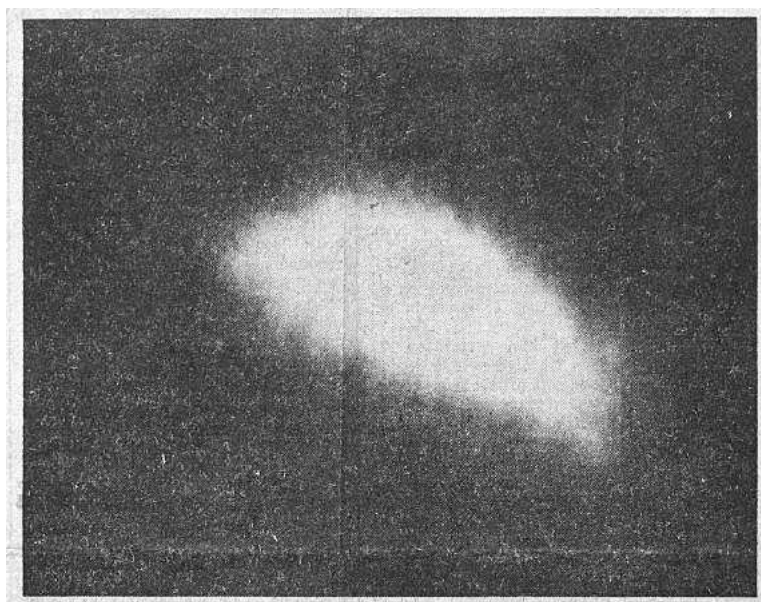


Fig. 230. January 30, 1974, Brussels. The photo as published in *Het Volk*.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

The photograph alluded to at the end of the press release concerns a picture taken during a *Concorde* flight over Chad (Africa) on June 30, 1973. On board of the plane was a team of scientists of the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. Their mission was to study a total solar eclipse from the supersonic plane as it flew inside the shadow cast by the Moon on the African continent. Technician Jean Begot was assigned to photographically document the event. It was only after the team had returned from their mission that a strange blob was discovered in one of his shots. Seven months later, an extreme blow-up of the photo appeared in the international media associating it with a possible UFO.



Fig. 231. The Concorde “UFO”. Photo by Jean Begot.
Image borrowed from the online AP archives.

The potential relevance of a comparison with this picture is called into question by the mere fact that mainstream science attributed the *Concorde* photo to a meteor disintegration cloud that was accidentally caught on camera. In the section “Eclipses in Flight” of their book *Total Eclipses*, (Springer, 1999, page 135), Pierre Guillermier & Serge Koutchmy published this print of the full picture:

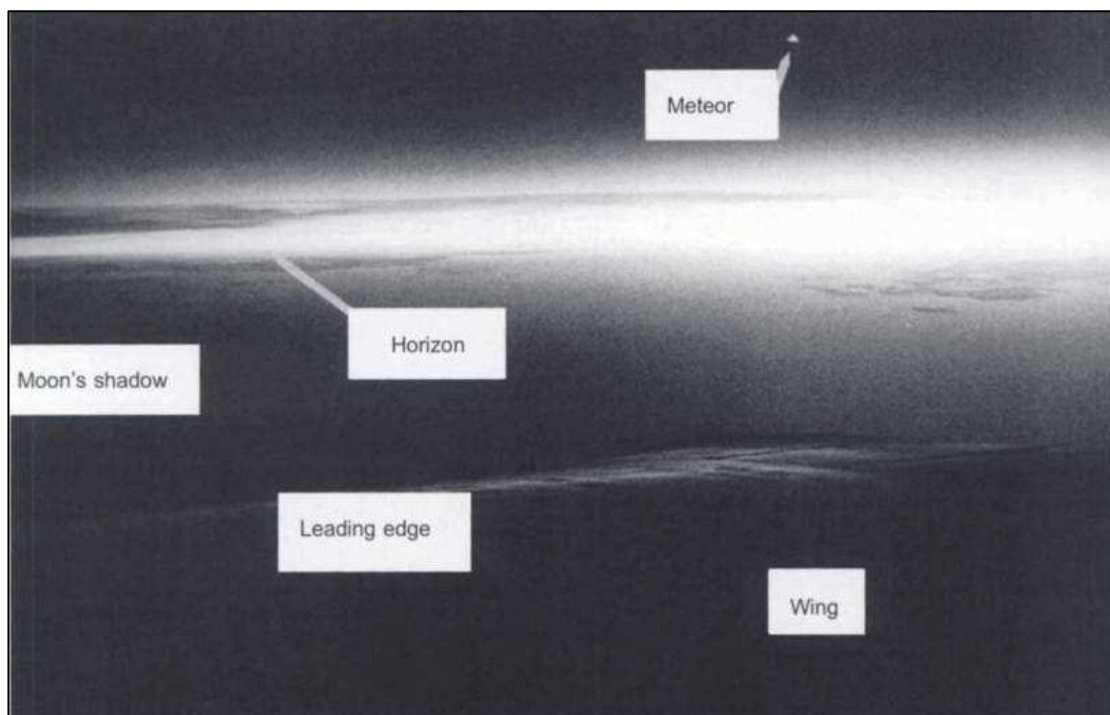


Fig. 232. Fulll version of the Concorde photo.
Borrowed from Guillermier & Koutchmy, 1999.

Returning to the Brussels UFO photo, the time mentioned in the press release is “0645 GMT” (7:45 a.m. local). According to the *Stellarium* program, at that time Venus with magnitude -3.45 was in the Southeast (azimuth: $117^{\circ}02'$) at an altitude of $4^{\circ}49'$, moving towards the South, and climbing to an altitude of $6^{\circ}11'$ at azimuth $119^{\circ}03'$ at 07:55 a.m. (thus covering an angular distance of approximately $2^{\circ}30'$ or five Moon diameters in 10 minutes). This is substantially different from “about 15° in about 10 minutes” but like with elevations, overestimation of angular distance is more rule than exception. With the witness mentioning only one (apparently small, since only “a tiny dot” on the 35mm negative) luminous object on the Eastern horizon, we are confident that what was photographed was the queen of UFOs. If not, Mr. Lagasse would certainly have reported seeing two lights in the East.

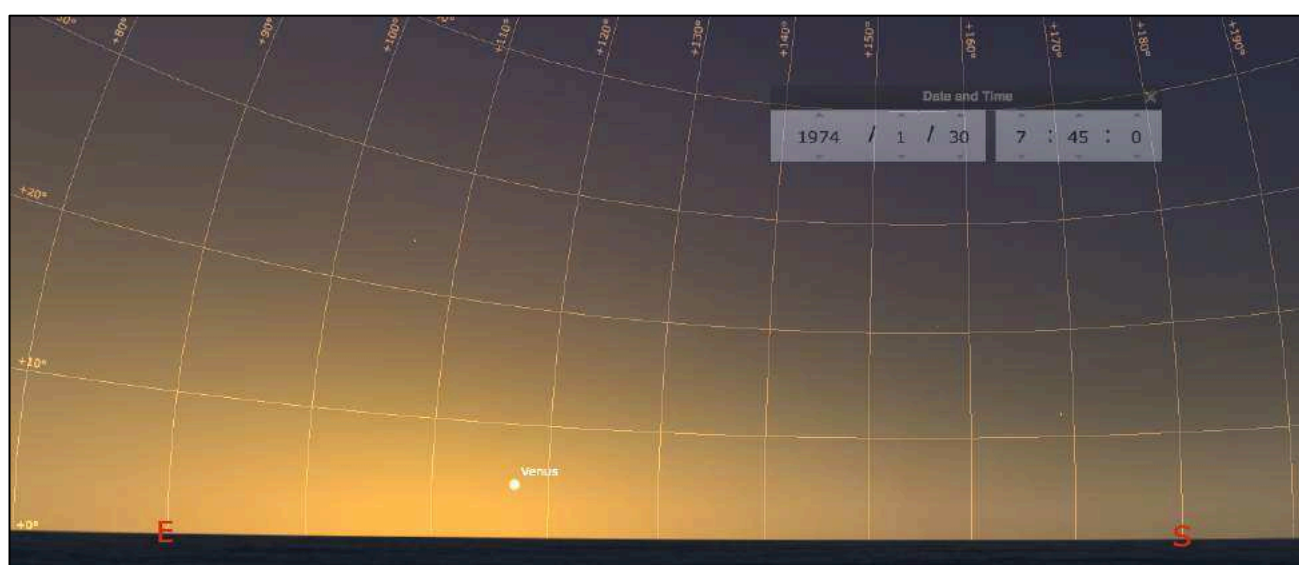


Fig. 233. *Stellarium* screen capture showing the astronomical situation at Brussels on January 30, 1974 at 07:45 a.m.

Considering the circumstances in which the picture was taken (through binoculars and with temperatures nearing zero), it must have been extremely difficult for the photographer to obtain a clear image of Venus without motion blur. Perhaps this explains why the orientation of the oval-shaped blob in the picture is not what one would expect from a bright object moving upward from South to East. On the other hand, it should also be emphasized that newspapers have a bad habit of printing UFO pictures, and in particular nocturnal shots with little or no background information, in wrong orientations.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Thursday, March 21, 1974
Location: Le Rissart, Flawinne (Namur)
Time: 20:10
Duration: 20 minutes
Assessment: fake

On March 21, 1974 the Brussels UFO group SOBEPS received a phone call from a man whose son claimed to have sighted a UFO on two separate evenings: the first time in the company of a friend on March 19, 1974 between 8:10 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., the second time at about the same time but two days later. The boys had returned to the site of their first sighting with three more witnesses hoping to spot the unidentified craft again. On both occasions, they saw an object flying over the countryside, always remaining within a perimeter of about 5km². From statements collected by SOBEPS collaborator Franck Boitte at the sighting location, it appeared that the witnesses had observed three lights, looking alternatively as a row or a triangle. The lights at the far sides were white-yellowish in color, did not dazzle and had an apparent size comparable to that of a half moon. The central light was red, smaller and seemed to display a back and forth motion. All lights blinked in an alternating pattern. The object—the witnesses were convinced the three lights were part of the same structure—circled the area in complete silence at an estimated altitude ranging from 20 to 200m. The youngsters used the light of their motorbike to signal the craft, to which it responded by heading towards them and stopping abruptly at a distance of less than 50m before retreating to its original position and continuing its evolutions. The sighting lasted 20 minutes; there is no information on how the UFO disappeared from sight.

In the course of the events of March 21, photographs were shot with a Russian *Lubitel* 2 T22 twin lens reflex camera with a fixed objective (focal distance: 75mm; lens set at infinite focus; aperture: 4.5mm; exposure time: 1/100 seconds). The camera was loaded with black and white *Verichrome Kodak* film of 12 exposures, format 60x60mm and 100 ASA. All 12 pictures were used. The following Monday, the photos were developed but only negative #3 was found to show something.

A (presumably cropped) version of this photo is presented on the next page as Fig. 234.

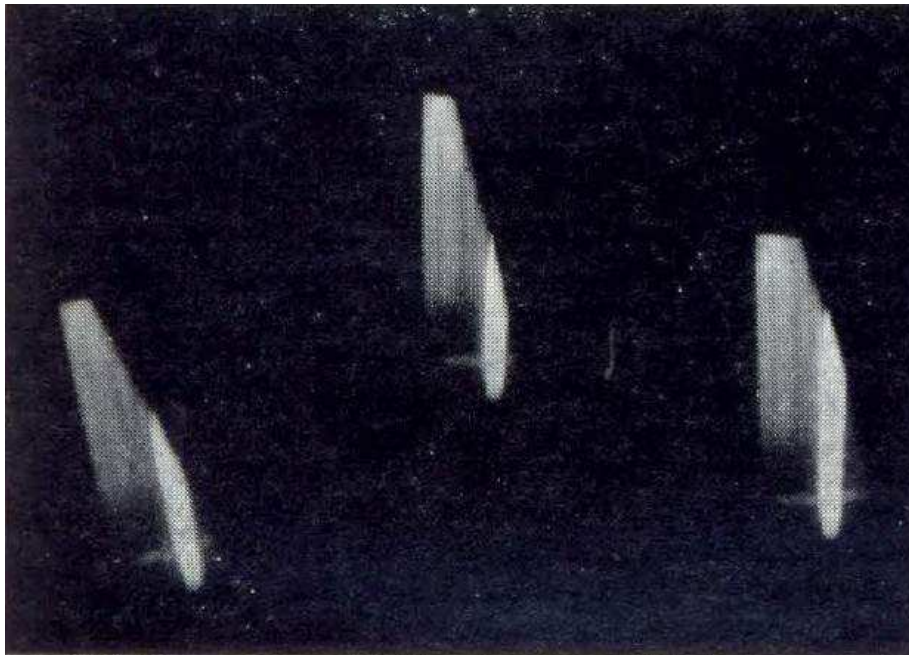


Fig. 234. March 21, 1974, Le Rissart (Flawinne). Courtesy of SOBEPS.

The SOBEPS analysis of the photograph (printed here as Fig. 231) resolved that the speed used (0.01 sec) was too high for the diaphragm aperture (4.5) and the film sensitivity (100 ASA). Only if the object were very bright and close to the camera something would have showed up. But the image does not fit the witnesses' description of three lights flashing alternately. In fact, it looks more like a single image of a structured object that is repeated three times. Examination of the camera showed that it allowed multiple exposures, opening the possibility that an element of the landscape could be at the origin of the image. With that information, the SOBEPS investigator revisited the sighting location and found a public streetlight equipped with two vertically superposed neon tubes. Shot three times from the right angle, it would produce the effect that can be seen on the alleged UFO photograph. Jean-Luc Vertongen, also from SOBEPS, took a picture of the streetlamp, which pretty much confirmed the identification.



Fig. 235. Lamppost found on location photographed by Jean-Luc Vertongen.

Presumably, what triggered this group of teenagers to concoct a prank was a SOBEPS communiqué released to the press concerning an increase in UFO reports from Wallonia during the previous months.

(References: Franck Boitte, *Inforespace*, No. 17, 1974, pp 32-34: http://ns6.freeheberg.com/~flawinne/pdf/ovni_flawinne_1974.pdf Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, SOBEPS files.)

Date: Tuesday, April 9, 1974

Location: Haversin (Namur)

Time: 20:50

Duration: ~60 seconds

Assessment: street lamp and illuminated windows distorted by camera motion (photograph); artificial satellite? (visual sighting)

The following case summary is based on a 4-page investigative report compiled in July 1974 by Jean-Luc Vertongen, then Chief of Investigations at SOBEPS.

On the evening of April 9, 1974, 16-year old Guy Caufriez, weather enthusiast and subscriber to the SOBEPS journal *Inforespace*, was observing the sky from his parents' garden in the small community of Haversin. The young man was equipped with an *Electro* 35 fitted with a 45mm lens. The camera was mounted on a tripod and directed towards the Southwest, at an elevation angle of around 30°-40°. It was loaded with black and white film of 125 ASA and ready for use. Aperture was set at maximum (1:1.7).

At 8:50 p.m., the young man spotted a luminous point, crossing the sky from Northeast to Southwest, passing not far from the zenith. The speed was constant and its size larger than a star. No trail was visible and no noise was heard. The luminosity of the point was stable, without any blinking or pulsating. The point disappeared towards the horizon at an elevation of around 8°. The sky was clear and completely starlit. The Moon was not visible. From the moment the object came in sight, the witness pressed the shutter button and left the aperture open for a few seconds.

Once the film was developed, the photo showed a lot more than what had been observed with the naked eye, one of the most striking features being a bright, dashed line. Vertongen writes in this regard: "The dotted line is suggestive of a blinking light. Yet, we understand that the intensity of the point-like light did not vary during the observation. Likewise, the irregular trace at the end of the trajectory was not observed either. And, finally, the picture reveals three luminous shapes whereas the witness had noticed only one single point." Despite these striking discrepancies, the picture and the

story were published in *Skylook*, predecessor of the influential U.S. monthly magazine *The MUFON UFO Journal*.



Fig. 236. April 8, 1974, Haversin. Photo by Guy Caufriez. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.



Fig. 237. The picture, as it was first published in *Skylook* in November 1974.

In 2010, parts of the photographic archives kept by SOBEPS were donated to FOTOCAT, a project managed by one of the authors (VJBO). In these archives, there was a splendid set of original 18x24cm prints, full pictures as well as close-ups. This quality material allowed the authors to carry out an analysis of their own.

A close look at a cropped enlargement of the photograph reveals a great number of short star trails. This confirms that we are dealing with a time exposure of the night sky, shot from a tripod. The length of the trails indicates that the aperture was open for a period exceeding “a few seconds”, and that the exposure time was probably in the order of one or one minute and a half.



Fig. 238. Star trails depicted in the photograph.

Chilean photo analyst Andrés Duarte was able to identify the group of stars that is visible in the photograph: it is the *Auriga* constellation, with *Capella* as its most prominent member. Duarte's find shows that the photograph had been published upside down in *Skylook*, the correct orientation requiring a 180° turn.

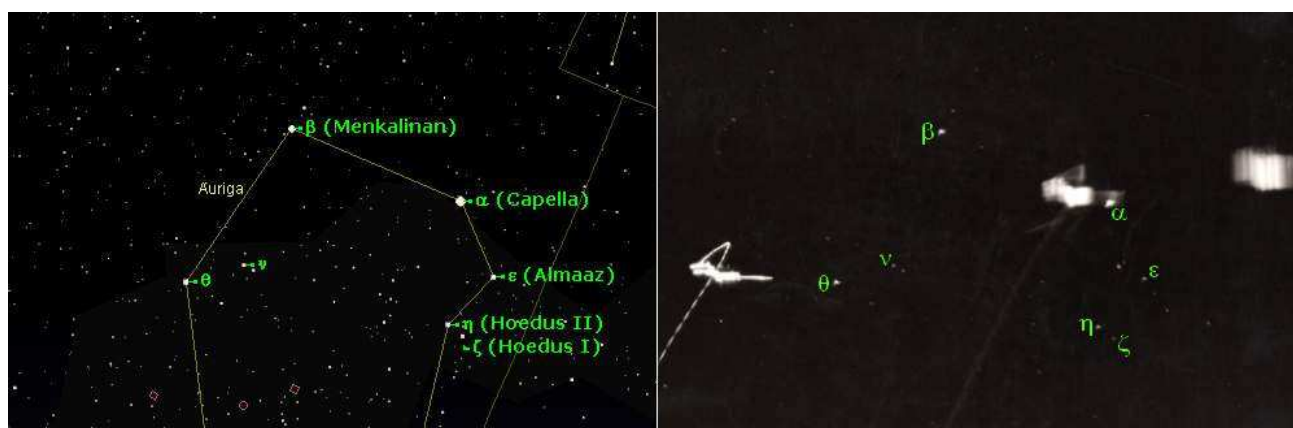


Fig. 239. LEFT: stellar map of the Western sky. RIGHT: the picture (slightly cropped) in its true orientation. (See also Fig. 240 for a wider view.) Montage by Andrés Duarte.

The fact that two bright lights in the picture left a complex, nearly identical trace on the photographic film is a sure indication of camera motion. Oddly, this motion blur pattern is different from that of the stars, meaning that the image of the brighter lights was captured at another instant during the exposure, one that was typified by a relatively slow and limited camera shake followed by a very brief but distinct upward right movement of the camera. Duarte points out in this regard that the upper section of the luminous shapes is brighter than the rest. This tells us that the camera movement was slower during this moment in time. Similarly, the individual pulsation traces in the lower section of the elongated trail—we will discuss the nature of these pulsations further down the text—are longer than in the section that extends upward from the brighter area. This pattern is consistent with a brief downward shake of the camera followed by a long but very fast upward movement. The third light, i.e. the one closest to the right edge of the photograph, was not bright enough for this linear trace to be captured on film.

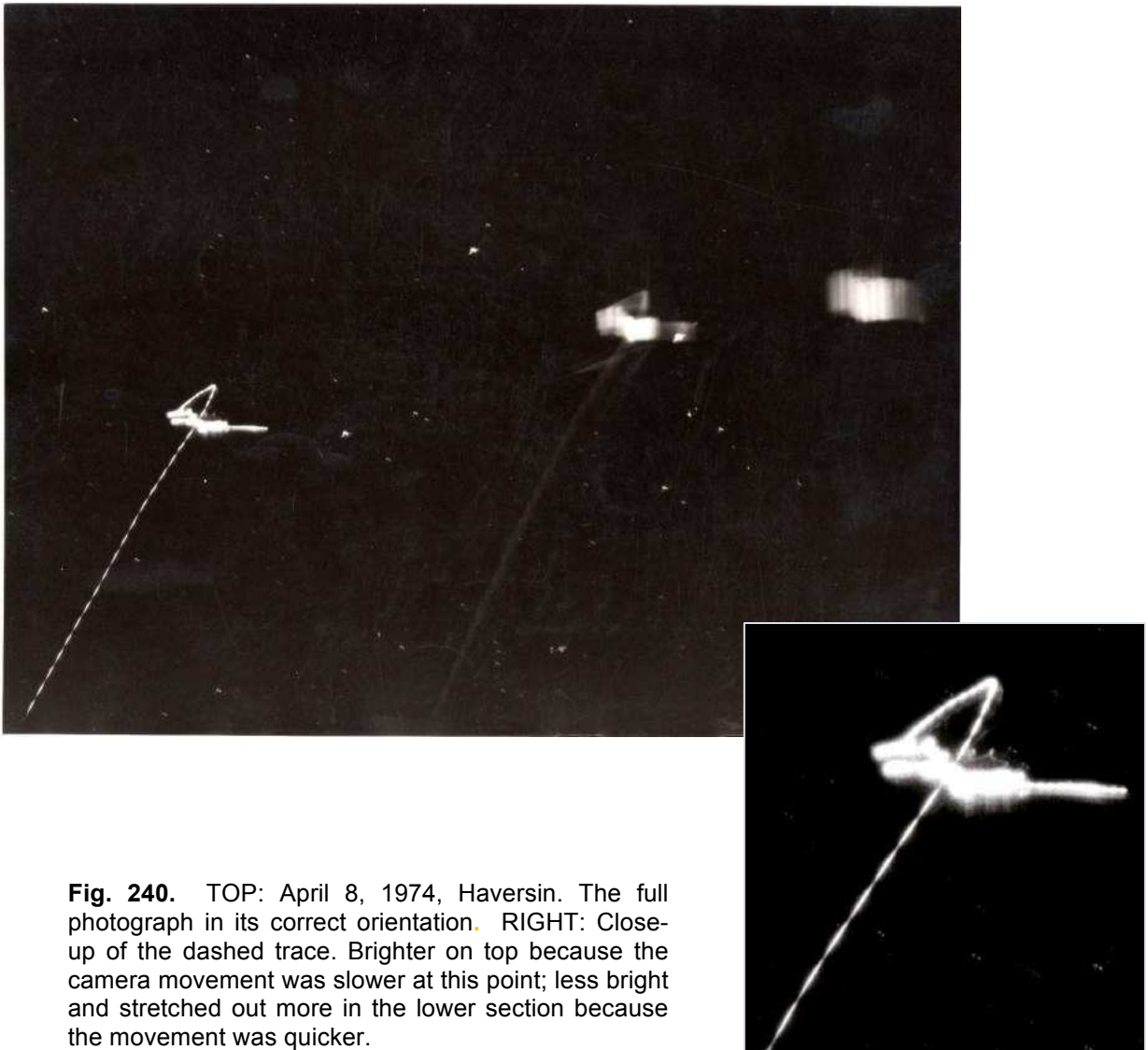


Fig. 240. TOP: April 8, 1974, Haversin. The full photograph in its correct orientation. RIGHT: Close-up of the dashed trace. Brighter on top because the camera movement was slower at this point; less bright and stretched out more in the lower section because the movement was quicker.



Fig. 241. Streetlights and illuminated windows of an apartment building photographed by one of the authors (WVU). The handheld camera was briefly pointed at the building then was moved quickly upward.

Having established that the motion blur that affected the three brightest lights in the picture was due to camera movement, and not to any motion executed by the lights themselves, the question arises if there were any fixed bright lights below left of the photographed sky that could have entered the camera's field of view and created these images. First, we checked the star positions for Haversin, April 9, 1974, 8:50 p.m. It turns out that the direction the camera was aimed at was not SW, as claimed in the report, but due West.



Fig. 242. *Stellarium* image with blue rectangle showing the part of the sky that appears in the photograph. The full and dashed mint-colored lines correspond with the trails of the two brighter lights in the pictures and represent the direction in which the camera moved.

The width of the photographed part of the sky measures approximately 52° (which corresponds to the horizontal viewing angle of a 45mm lens in combination with a camera that uses the 35mm film format). Fig. 243 shows this viewing angle superimposed on a Google Earth image of the sighting location. The full yellow lines mark the camera's field of view when it was pointed at the sky; the dashed yellow lines show the presumed field of view before the camera was directed to the sky.

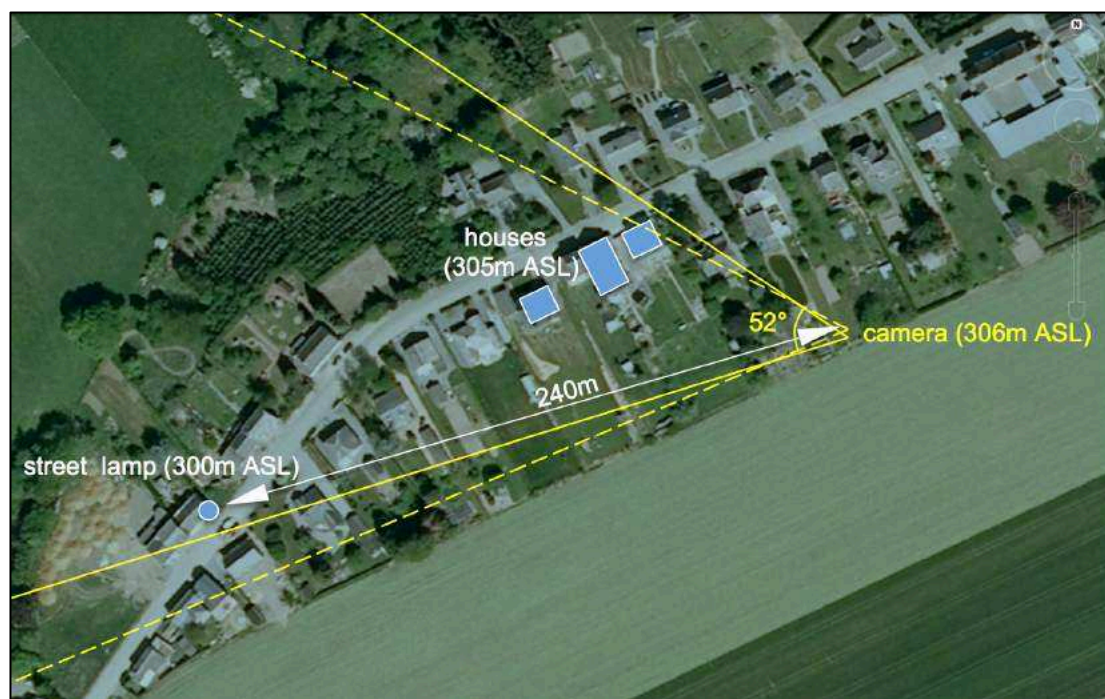


Fig. 243. Map of the sighting location.

We find three houses in front and to the right of the camera at distances comprised between 75 and 105m. They are shown in the diagram as blue rectangles. It is conceivable that at 8:50 p.m. there would have been light shining from the windows of two of these houses. We therefore suspect that the two luminous patches on the right-hand side of the picture are illuminated windows. The darker vertical lines that run through these fuzzy rectangular patches are probably the repeated images of the vertical elements between the individual window units.

But what about the bright light on the left that created a more outspoken trace? The solution lies in the aspect of the trail: its interrupted appearance is typical of street lamps that are powered by alternating current. The very rapid pulsing of these gas discharge lights—usually between 50 and 100 pulses per second—cannot be seen by the naked eye, but it can be captured in motion-blurred exposures. Visiting the sighting location with Google Earth's Street View app, we found that there is a series of street lamps bordering the far side of the road towards which the camera was pointed. As the above

map shows, there is one lamp that should have been visible to the witness and would match well with the light on the left in the picture. It is situated 240m downhill from where the witness was.

Similar luminous trails can be seen in our comparison photo above and in the much-publicized picture taken by Roy C. Jennings at Castleford, Yorkshire (UK) in the dawning of September 3, 1961. Here too, the photographer did not see any intermittent luminous object when the picture was taken. In this particular case, the photograph was placed in the context of the ball lightning phenomenon, but an on-site inquiry by Steuart Campbell in 1980 revealed that it shows an ordinary sodium vapor discharge streetlamp, with the camera motion turning the pulsating light into a dashed line (*Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena*, Vol. 2, No. 5, August 1983, pages 88-89.)



Fig. 244. September 3, 1961, Castleford (UK). Not ball lightning, but a street lamp smeared out by camera motion. Photo by Roy C. Jennings. Borrowed from the dust cover of Maxwell Cade and Delphine Davis, *The Taming of the Thunderbolts*, Abelard-Schuman, London, 1969.

In summary, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that, while in a hurry to capture the unknown light, young Guy Caufriez accidentally moved his camera upward with the aperture already open, capturing two illuminated

windows on his right and a more distant street light on his left which then unwillingly became part of the image of the starlit sky.

As for the rectilinear moving light that prompted Caufriez to take the picture, we appealed to Ted Molczan, an experienced amateur satellite observer. His advice indicates that the Northeast-Southwest trajectory implies a satellite with a strong and rare retrograde orbit. A search for a possible candidate was not carried out. As such, the luminous point remains unidentified. A spy plane or a stratosphere balloon travelling at an altitude of several tens of kilometers is not an option because the Sun was already 13° below the horizon at 8:50 p.m., meaning that an object would have to have been at a minimum altitude of 217.5km for it to have reflected the sunlight back to an observer.

Whatever this light was, a luminous point, moving with a constant speed and following a rectilinear path, can hardly be considered a phenomenon of high strangeness.

(References: Jean-Luc Vertongen, SOBEPS report, July 21, 1974. *Skylook*, November 1984, page 16. Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos. Ted Molczan, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, December 10, 2013. Andrés Duarte, personal communications to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, December 2013 and January 2014.)

Date: Sunday, April 14, 1974

Location: Woluwe-Saint-Lambert (Brussels Capital Region)

Time: unknown

Duration: not applicable

Assessment: sunlit airplane?

In 2009, thanks to the good care of Belgian researcher Jacques Scornaux, one of the authors (VJBO) received a photocopied version of the UFO files kept by Michel Monnerie, author of two skeptical UFO books and before that photo expert for the French UFO group *Lumières Dans La Nuit*. In a subsection of Section X that carries the name “Divers documents et photos”, we came across a file called “Défauts photo” (photo defects). In it, there is a picture with just two lines of information. We translate: “black & white picture transmitted by Jacques Scornaux, taken at Woluwé St Lambert, near Brussels, 14/04/1974, witness anonymity requested.”

On the next page is a scan of a Xerox copy taken from a cropped enlargement of this picture. We suspect that the anomaly is the slanted, rectangular white spot shown in the blow-up on the right. Since there are a great number of specks and dots in what appears to be a very badly developed photograph, we cannot be entirely sure that this is the “UFO” that was allegedly photographed.

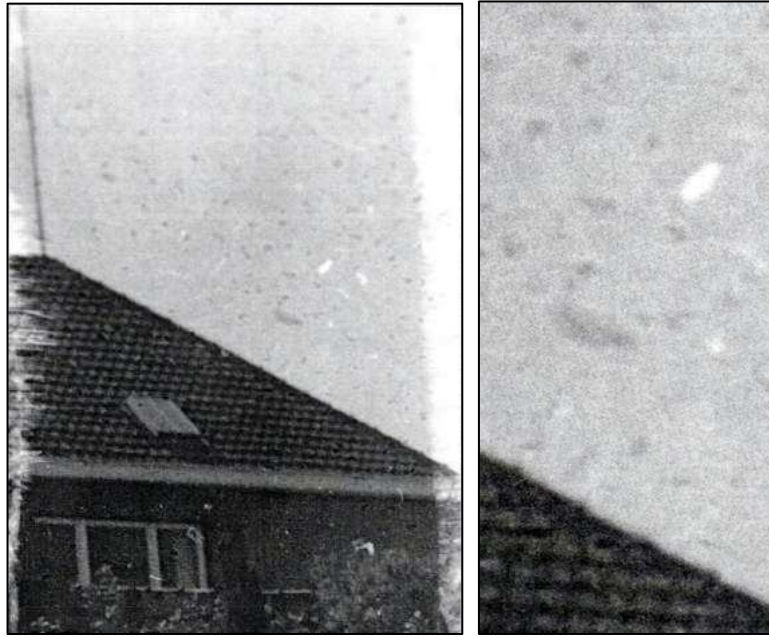


Fig. 245. April 14, 1974, Woluwe-Saint-Lambert. Photo by Christiane Piens.

Jacques Scornaux informed us that the photo was taken by Christiane Piens, 18 at the time, and author of two books on UFOs, one of which she co-authored with Scornaux in 1976. The photo is difficult to evaluate and Monnerie may have had good reasons to classify it as a photographic artifact (possibly, because he had the original print in front of him.) According to Scornaux, however, Miss Piens insisted that she actually saw the "UFO" when she took the picture. Unfortunately, due to health problems, the author of the picture was unable to provide us information about the circumstances of her sighting. It is possible that a dust particle that settled on the negative was wrongly identified as the "UFO" (the observed object itself may have been too small or not bright enough to be captured on film), but we think the most likely scenario is that Miss Piens saw and photographed a sunlit airplane. On clear days, airliners typically appear as elongated white blobs, like in the following two (cropped) images.



Fig. 246. Sunlit airliner over the Austrian Alps. Photo by Wim van Utrecht

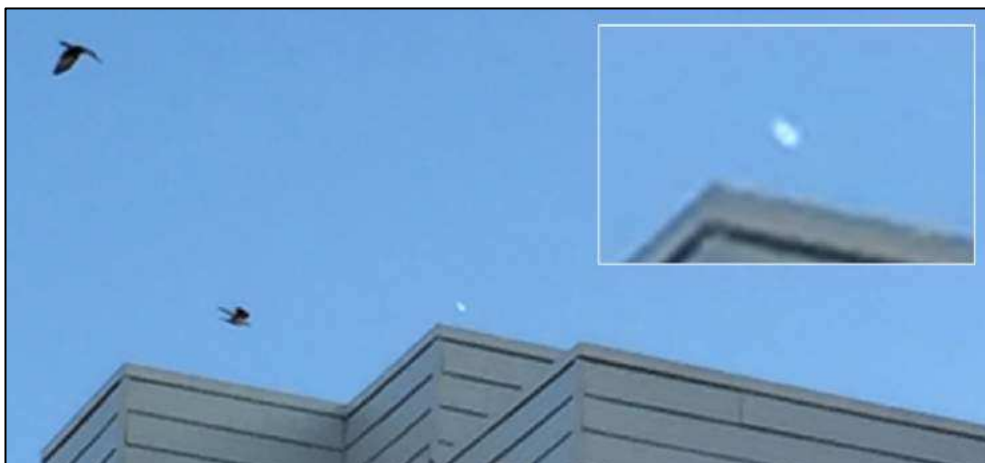


Fig. 247. Sunlit airliner over Beerse, Belgium. Photo by Tim Geentjens.
Courtesy of Belgisch UFO-meldpunt.

(References: Archives of Michel Monnerie. Jacques Scornaux, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, September 30, 2009.)

Date: Saturday, June 1, 1974

Location: Assebroekse Meersen, Bruges (West Flanders)

Time: ~22:00

Duration: not applicable

Special features: unseen by photographer / repeater witness

Assessment: crimp mark in the film

Half a year after he took his pictures of Venus and Arcturus (see entry for November 4, 1973), Werner Bruyneel reported a new photographic incident. This time, it concerned a series of three photos taken from the archeological site in the natural reserve of Assebroekse Meersen, located 3km Southwest of Assebroek. [1] Believing that much of the UFO activity he had witnessed previously from his house was centered on this spot, the idea was to photograph any strange on-goings that might be taking place there. A couple of friends who shared his passion for UFOs and the paranormal were with him on the site. In a letter sent to Dutch UFO researcher Frits van der Veldt on August 17, 1974, Bruyneel reports:

It was 9:30 p.m. and still not dark. To kill the time we placed a tape recorder in the center of the site to check for any unusual sounds coming from the surroundings. Twenty minutes later, we listened to the tape. Everything was normal (cows, dogs) until, at a certain moment, there was a sound of footsteps that seemed to be drawing closer. Next, one could hear two voices having a conversation. Impossible to make out what they were saying but it sounded Spanish-Italian. (We ourselves had not heard anything,

had not said a word and were about 200m away when the recording was made.)

Meanwhile, it was 10:30 p.m. and already dark. Following the sound on the tape, I took a picture (transparency) from the center of the site towards the South, a second shot of the entire site with the camera pointing West and a third aimed at a star. All photos were taken in bulb mode with an exposure time of circa 10 minutes. When I got the slides back something abnormal seemed to have happened. Although it was dark when the shots were taken, the first shot shows the entire place bathed in light, as if illuminated by the Sun. Even shadows of trees and grass are present. The same goes for the second slide. The central platform of the site, which is 100m across, is clearly visible. Outside this structure it is a little darker, and right on the edge of the platform is something like a white-grey misty figure. It is clearly standing on the grass on the edge of the platform. As for its shape and dimensions, these are fully in agreement with those of a normal person. Yet, it was dark and there was no one out there in the pasture, certainly not at 30m from where we were.

The transparency with the “misty figure” is in the possession of one of the authors (WVU). What Bruyneel describes as a human-like figure is actually little more than a fuzzy, light-colored crescent shape close to the left edge of the picture.



Fig. 248. June 1, 1974, Assebroek. Photo by Werner Bruyneel.
Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.



Fig. 249. Google Earth image of the archeological site at Assebroekse Meersen. The bright segment shows the camera's viewing angle as gleaned from the transparency and from a sketch made by Bruyneel. The larger ring measures approximately 275m in diameter.

The authors encountered these crescent-shaped features before (see for example our entry for Baasrode, 1970). They are a well-known type of film defect caused by mechanical wrinkling or creasing of the film. Blemishes like these usually occur during loading of film into the tank prior to processing or during removal of processed film from tank reels. With the original negative at hand, it is easy to locate the crease mark by simply viewing the negative under the right lighting conditions:



Fig. 250. Cropped print placed next to a photo of the original transparency. A crimp mark is clearly visible at the spot where the “misty figure” appears.

The brightness of the pictures that were taken that night is not overly strange. The images look like what can be expected from a 10-minutes exposure taken with the nearly full Moon illuminating an open landscape (At 10:30 p.m., the Moon was in the South and approximately 20° above the horizon. Its phase was 0.91.) Moreover, we noticed that the third picture with the bright star—which we identified as *Arcturus*—has “22:10” written on the slide mount. Going by Bruyneel’s narrative, this would mean that the picture with the misty figure was taken closer to 10 p.m. At that time, the Sun was only 8° below the horizon and the Northwestern sky still relatively bright.

Finally, Bruyneel’s personal archives contain a cropped black and white print of the photo with the following handwritten post scriptum on the back: “On June 4, 1974 another slide was taken showing two similar white shapes in front of the Moon” This “other slide” is the subject of our next and final entry concerning Bruyneel’s ufological exploits.

[1] The site is a pattern of concentric rings formed by the remains of an early 13th Century castle, the largest ring having a diameter of approximately 275m. See also: <https://www.openaire.eu>

(References: Werner Bruyneel, 1978 unfinished manuscript, page 115. Others, as noted.)

Date: Tuesday, June 4, 1974 (astronomical deduction)

Location: outer space, Moon, photographed from Assebroek, Bruges (West Flanders)

Time: 22:20 (astronomical deduction)

Duration: not applicable

Special features: telescopic images / unseen by photographer / repeater witness

Assessment: crimp marks in the film

The final picture in Werner Bruyneel’s “UFO collection” is, in a way, a return to his first series from October 1972: a Moon shot with bright features that appealed to his imagination.

On page 7 of his 1978 book manuscript, one that never appeared in print, Bruyneel wrote the following about this transparency:

On June 4, 1975, when in the process of making a series of slides of the lunar eclipse, it turned out that one slide contained two identical shapes (specters).

Where Bruyneel writes “identical”, he means identical to the “misty figure” that appeared in the photograph he took on June 1, 1974, and which we identified as a crease mark in the film (see our previous entry).



Fig. 251. June 4, 1974, Assebroek. Photo by Werner Bruyneel.
Courtesy of Frederick Delaere.

The year mentioned in the above quote is wrong: it should be June 4, **1974**. This can be inferred from a second mention of the case on pages 115-116 of the unfinished book manuscript; from a reference to the case in a letter Bruyneel sent to Dutch investigator Frits van der Veldt on August 17, 1974; and, finally, from the fact that on June 4, 1974 there was indeed a partial lunar eclipse visible from Belgium.

Using the *Stellarium* program we further established that the photograph was taken at approximately 10:20 p.m.:



Fig. 252. *Stellarium*'s rendering of the partial lunar eclipse of June 4, 1974.

Like with the June 1 picture, taken only three days earlier, the crescent-shaped features in this Moon shot are due to mechanical wrinkling or creasing of the film. Viewed under the right angle, here too, the crease marks are readily detected:



Fig. 253. LEFT: the transparency in its original slide mount. RIGHT: a printed version of the transparency.

(References: as noted)

Date: Thursday, July 18, 1974
Location: Vierves-sur-Viroin (Namur)
Time: ~23:00
Duration: ~2 hours
Assessment: Jupiter?

Around 11 p.m., Mr. Ernest Zebier (29) and his wife (28) saw a white-yellow, star-like object in the sky due South. For one hour and a half they did not notice any displacement, but at 0:30 a.m. the light appeared to get closer, growing rapidly to the apparent size of a “pea (1/6 of the full Moon).” A few moments later it shrank and returned to its departure point, at which time a picture was taken. Next, the object moved towards the South-Southeast (azimuth 170°), then back to the South without any increase in size. The last phase consisted of a movement to an azimuth of 200° (SSW), with the object growing to the apparent size of a “ping pong ball (1/2 of the Moon’s

diameter).” The sphere shone intensely and disappeared promptly around 1 a.m.

The picture was taken with a *Zenit* camera, using a 58mm objective lens and an aperture set at f/2. It was loaded with a slide film of 19 DIN. Exposure time was approximately 0.5 seconds. A SOBEPS report compiled by Michel Abrassart mentions that the unidentified light is in the center of the image, and that there is a luminous trail at the bottom left that can be attributed to a "neon tube from the public lighting". We are further being told that, when projected, the light appears as a brilliant center surrounded by other, weaker luminosities.

Belgian researcher Michel Bougard, also of SOBEPS, labeled the witness as a “UFO enthusiast” and assessed his claims as a mistaken observation of the planet Jupiter. In the months that followed, SOBEPS collected several misidentifications of this planet. The authors have not viewed the image, but a look at the astronomical situation revealed that, on July 18th, Jupiter appeared on the horizon at 10:35 p.m. in the ESE. The planet was in opposition, a point in its orbit where it is roughly closest to Earth, making it to appear bigger and brighter (magnitude -2.27).

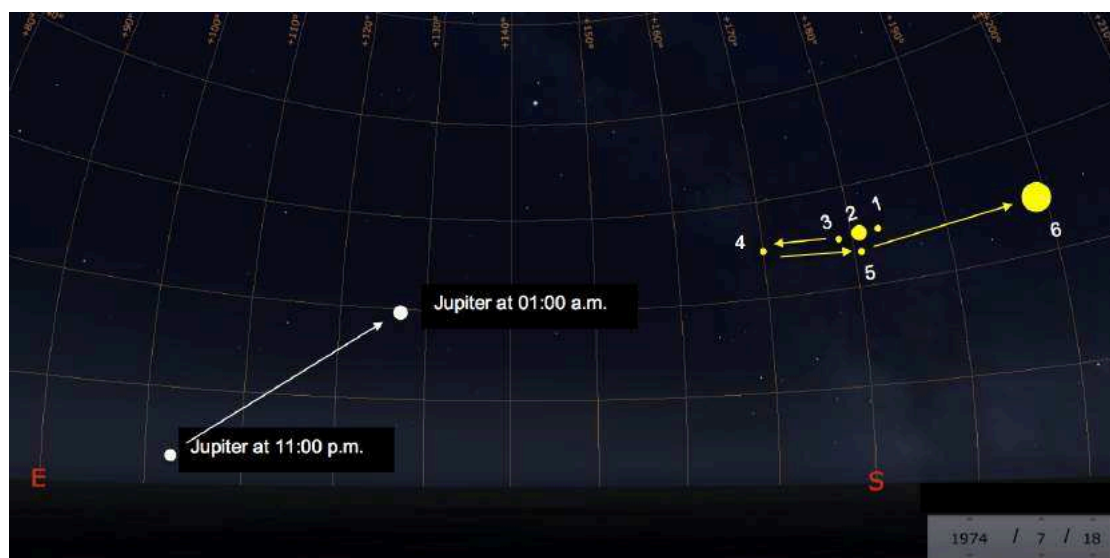


Fig. 254. *Stellarium*-based diagram showing the position of Jupiter at the start and end of the sighting. The yellow globe and arrows show the consecutive phases of the sighting and the claimed positions of the unknown light. Sizes have been exaggerated for clarity.

As Jupiter slowly climbed from an elevation of 3° at 11 p.m. to an elevation of 20° at 1 a.m. (see Fig. 254), its light would have traveled through layers of haze close to the horizon, which is probably what caused the yellowish tinge and the apparent changes in size and brightness. However, an explanation in terms of Jupiter, would imply that both witnesses were grossly mistaken about the position of the light. In fact, South (for the beginning of the sighting)

should have been East-Southeast, and South-Southwest (for the end of the sighting) should have been Southeast. These are not uncommon mistakes for untrained observers, though. The temporal movement from right (“South-Southeast”) to left (“South”) is more difficult to account for, but may have been a perceptual illusion caused by nearby clouds moving in an opposite direction. (www.infoclimat.fr confirms that the sky was partly clouded that night.) A cloud drifting in front of the planet may also explain the sudden disappearance. Mr. Zebier and his wife claimed that, throughout the sighting, the light remained at a constant elevation of “about 25°”. Taking into account that elevations are almost always overestimated by a factor 2 or 3, it is more likely that the elevation was closer to 10°, which would better fit the elevation of Jupiter. We should also point out that the witnesses’ narrative was obtained more than one year after the incident and that the reported azimuths were not verified on-site. (The couple was interviewed at their home in Mont-sur-Marchienne, some 40km North-Northwest of Vierves-sur Viroin.)

Especially the long sighting duration, coupled with the fact that Jupiter was the brightest object in the sky that night, seems to endorse the solution proposed by the SOBEPS team. If the star-like object was not Jupiter, one would expect the witnesses to have mentioned seeing two bright, star-like objects in the Southeastern quadrant of the sky: the unknown object and Jupiter. Yet, the witnesses made no mention of a second light.

(References: Michel Abrassart, SOBEPS investigative report, August 16, 1975. Michel Bougard, *Inforespace*, special issue No. 8, December 1984, pages 26-27.)

Date: Saturday, July 20, 1974 (approximate date)

Location: Jalhay (Liège)

Time: ~04:30

Duration: unknown

Assessment: Venus

Just before sunrise (which was at 4:50 a.m. on July 20), J.-P. Huby spotted “a very bright, motionless object in the sky”. He compared it to “a star that had come down.” Intrigued at first, Mr. Huby took a series of pictures of the phenomenon but growing weary of the fact that the apparition did not move, he stopped watching and went inside. Unfortunately, no copies of the photographs are available.

In an *Inforespace* article that deals with UFO reports caused by astronomical bodies, Michel Bougard reports that a basic check had quickly revealed that Mr. Huby had seen the planet Venus. A *Stellarium* sky map for July 20, 1974 corroborates this. As shown below, 20 minutes before sunrise, the ‘morning star’ was in the East-Northeast at an elevation of 15°. Its magnitude was -3.34.

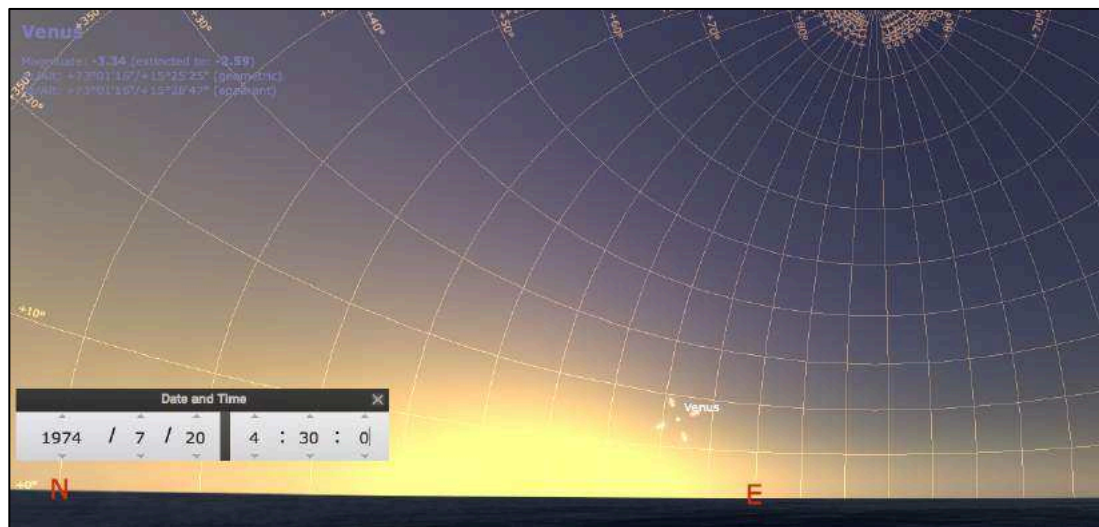


Fig. 255. Pre-dawn sky on July 20, 1974.

(References: Michel Bougard, *Inforespace*, special issue No.8, December 1984, page 28.)

Date: Thursday, August 1, 1974

Location: Wondelgem (East Flanders)

Time: 23:25

Duration: over 1 minute

Special Features: repeater witness / negatives allegedly lost

Assessment: Moon (mirror ghosting)

The picture below is one of a series of six taken by 24-year old Erwin Vangampelaere. In a letter of May 12, 1976 addressed to Jean-Luc Vertongen of SOBEPS, the photographer refers to the series as “almost identical” to the photos he took on October 19, 1972 (see entry for that date.) “Almost identical” because, as Vangampelaere points out, “the UFO from ’72 had a nice round shape whereas the one from ’74 was six-cornered.”

No photographs were enclosed with the letter. According to Vangampelaere, he sent the entire film roll (36 exposures) to UFO author Julien Weverbergh, who never returned them. Apparently, Weverbergh had sent the film “to Liège for analysis.” One print from the series could be retrieved, though. It was found in the files of Dutch researcher Frits van der Veldt, who obtained the print through Werner Bruyneel, author himself of tens of “UFO” photos already discussed in the present chapter.

In a letter of August 17, 1974 to Van der Veldt, Bruyneel explains:

On August 1 a friend of mine took a series of 6 exposures. It concerned a hexagonal light that described a half circle around the

Moon. It consisted of a white-yellow surface, very bright and sharply defined against the background sky. Inside there was a round surface, slightly less bright. The lot is 3 to 4 times bigger than the Moon, and also 4 times brighter.



Fig. 256. August 1, 1974, Wondelgem. Photo by Erwin Vangampelaere.
Courtesy of Frits van der Veldt.

Bruyneel then contacted Vangampelaere and asked him to comply with Van der Veldt's request for a more complete report. In a letter of November 14, 1974 Vangampelaere provided Van der Veldt the following extra information:

Technical data:

- 1) Film: Agfa 21 din – 100 ASA, black & white, miniature film*
- 2) Camera: Konika Autoreflex T, automatic, 1/1000*
- 3) Lens: Konica Ø 55mm, 1.8*
- 4) Diaphragm number for the shots: 2.8*
- 5) Because the phenomenon remained at the same place, I was able to make several shots with intervals of circa 12 seconds. The Moon is on top of the hexagon.*

Fact is that Werner [Bruyneel] and I were convinced that we were going to have an important sighting that day, Werner in Assebroek, I myself in Wondelgem. I had the camera and telescope ready that evening. At about 23h25m, I saw something red and bright in the East that seemed to be coming my way. My first idea was an airliner, but suddenly it stopped and remained motionless (± 15 seconds), then it set course to the South. As this happened, a bright white light suddenly flashed on under the Moon

(the hexagon), but with the naked eye it appeared completely round. After ± 1 minute it extinguished (flashed off). After that, that is after it had extinguished, I could see six smaller objects that went from North to South.

Like with the October 19, 1972 pictures, Vangampelaere wrongly attributed the smaller of the two lights to the Moon. In reality, the big hexagonal light is our natural satellite. The round light just above and to the right is a ghost image, caused by the reflection of the Moon in a filter that was placed in front of the camera.

The hexagonal shape of the Moon is equally simple to explain. The image is not only overexposed, it is also out of focus. When this happens, the light that enters the camera will take the shape of the camera's diaphragm. This mechanical aperture is not a perfect circle, but rather a geometrical shape with a number of sides corresponding to the number of blades the camera uses for opening and closing the diaphragm. The hexagonal shape of the Moon in Vangampelaere's image tells us that an aperture with a six-bladed mechanism was used. Not surprisingly, the *Konica Hexanon AR 52mm* lens has six blades:



Fig. 257. Six-bladed diaphragm of the *Konica AR 52mm* lens with hexagonal lens opening.
Image borrowed from http://digichar.com/unt/57619-konica_hexanon_ar_52mm_f1_8_lens.html

Vangampelaere's explicit claim that he actually saw this hexagonal light "flash on under the Moon" and remain motionless for " ± 1 minute", suggests that he evolved from an overzealous UFO spotter in 1972 to a downright hoaxer in 1974.

(References: as noted)

Date: Thursday, August 15, 1974
Location: Havelange (Namur)
Time: 21:15
Duration: ~1 minute
Special features: repeater witness
Assessment: Jupiter? (photographs); aircraft? (visual sighting)

One typical error that is apt to disorientate investigators of UFO reports consists of intuitively combining different events into a single phenomenon under the artificial concept of a “wave” or “flap”. This is what we think happened with the case we are about to review.

August 15, 1974 was a hot day followed by nocturnal temperatures as high as 24°C. People took to their balconies for a breath of fresh air, and with UFOs being big news again, misinterpretations of common sky phenomena were bound to occur, and they did. An article in the SOBEPS journal *Inforespace* tied together 10 sightings that were reported that night from 9 different locations all over the country. The times of the sightings were scattered between 9 p.m. and 11:15 p.m. In their article, SOBEPS referred to the events as “Les OVNI de la mi-août” or, in English, “The mid-August UFOs”. [1] Yet, not only times and locations varied, the appearances and dynamics of the reported phenomena did not tally either. The same was true for the flight paths attributed to the lights and objects, and which were found to cover the entire 360-degree range of the compass. This incoherence suggests a lack of relationship. It is against this background that we must view the present case.

Havelange is a rural village located 15km South of the city of Huy. Mr. Gilbert Suijkerbuijk and his wife were looking through an open window at the back of their house, facing South. The sky was clear with lots of stars. The view was wide and unhampered by artificial lighting.

At around 9:15 p.m. they saw, coming towards them from the Southeast, a “circular object of milky white” color, “the size of one fourth of the full Moon.” While bright and progressing almost at tree level, the luminous globe did not illuminate the landscape. It followed a rectilinear trajectory towards the Northwest, advancing without any noise at the speed of a small tourist plane. As the light disappeared behind the roof of the house, Mr. Suijkerbuijk immediately ran to the front, but could not relocate it anymore. The observation was brief, but there was enough time to snap three photographs. According to Mr. Suijkerbuijk he took his pictures in less than one minute.

Through Patrick Ferryn, one of the co-founders of SOBEPS, the authors received a scan of the three prints that accompanied the letter in which Mr. Suijkerbuijk had described his sighting.



Fig. 258. August 15, 1974, Havelange. The three photos taken by Gilbert Suijkerbuijk. Both the order and orientation of the shots are uncertain. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

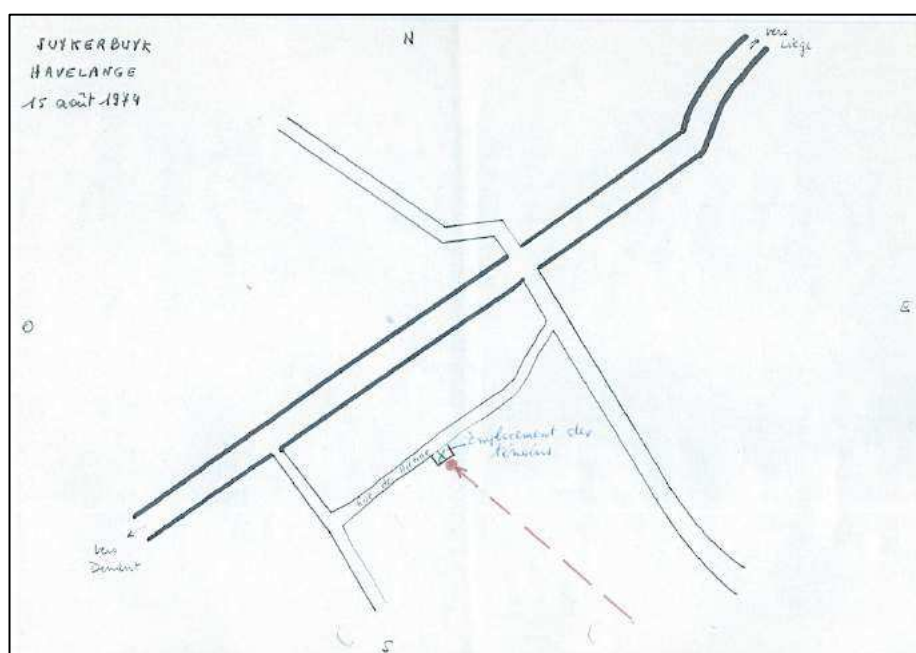


Fig. 259. Sketched map of the sighting location drafted by SOBEPS investigator Willy Breidenbach. The dashed arrow denotes the trajectory followed by the spherical light until it disappeared from view behind the roof of the house.

SOBEPS member Willy Breidenbach investigated the case in September 1975. In his report, he included the following technical data: “camera, *ZENIT-E* with 135mm lens; film, *KODAK 400 ASA*; aperture, *f/2.8*; exposure time, not known; focus, set at infinite.” Mr. Suijkerbuijk told the investigator that he had processed and printed the photos himself using an *ASTRALUX 66/35* enlarger, soft printing paper and his bathroom for a dark room.

An examination by another SOBEPS member, amateur photographer Michel Lambotte, disclosed that the pictures were developed under poor conditions, i.e. processed at too low a temperature and covered with spots resulting from improper use of developing liquids. Lambotte also pointed out that hard paper would have given a better result for nocturnal images like these.

Photos #1 and #2 show a well-defined luminous trail with an irregular pattern. In addition, photo #2 also has a black, roughly triangular shape to the left of the trail. In a second print of the same negative, found in the archives of Jean-Luc Vertongen, formerly chief of investigations at SOBEPS, a similarly-shaped area is visible, but now on the right side of the luminous trail. The obvious conclusion is that these dark structures are merely developing artifacts.



Fig. 260. The second print of photo #2 unearthed from the files of Jean-Luc Vertongen. Courtesy of Patrick Ferryn.

Photo #3, finally, is devoid of any interest and there seems little point in discussing it further. All it contains is a fuzzy blob of a lighter color than the background.

The grainy aspect of the photos tells us that these prints are enlarged crops of much larger images. Actually, the complex trails in photos #1 and #2 look exactly like any image of a small point of light that is photographed with a handheld camera. Fig. 260, for example, is a picture of Venus captured without the use of a tripod—or any other support—and with a long exposure time of 2.8 seconds.

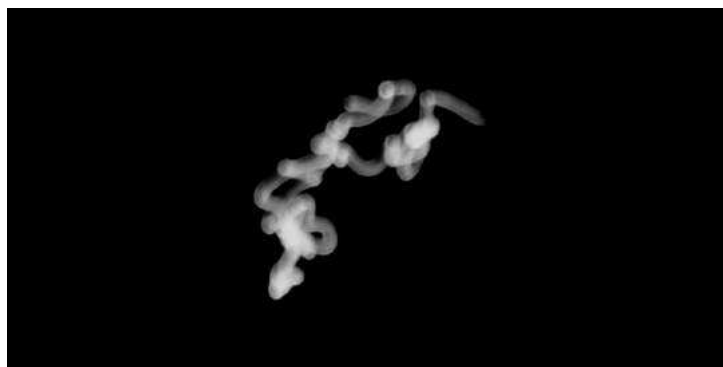


Fig. 261. Slightly out of focus image of Venus with typical motion blur due to an unstable camera. Photo by Wim van Utrecht.

We note in this regard that on August 15, at 9:15 p.m., there was a very bright Jupiter (magnitude -2.4) sitting only 4° above the East-Southeastern horizon. Since the witnesses were looking at an approaching light in the Southeast, they should not have missed the planet. Naturally, the reported speed (which was compared to that of a tourist plane) and the disappearance of the light over the roof of the house would rule out an astronomical explanation, but there's a twist to the story: shortly after Breidenbach's visit to Havelange, Mr. Suijkerbuijk claimed that, one or two days before or after his sighting, he had also seen and photographed a **stationary** point of light. We suspect that the photos that accompanied his letter to SOBEPS, and which we published above, relate to this second sighting. Supportive of this idea is the fact that a new set of pictures, also from the archives of Jean-Luc Vertongen, and of which Mr. Suijkerbuijk claims that they back up his second sighting, show anything but a stationary point of light. These new photos (only two of them, plus cropped enlargements) are printed below as photo #4 and #5.

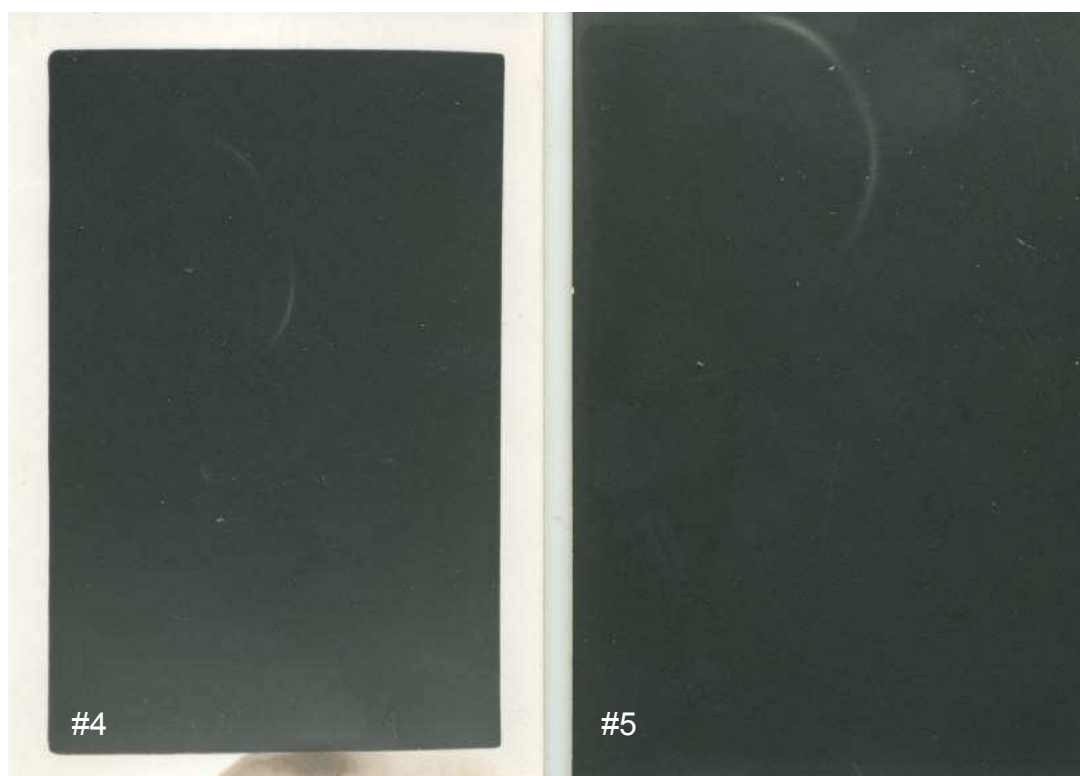


Fig. 262. Photos #4 and #5 taken by Gilbert Suijkerbuijk. Here, too, the order and orientation are uncertain.

Like with the other photos submitted by Mr. Suijkerbuijk, these negatives too were developed under very poor conditions. In addition to the many specks and scratches, crescent-shaped crimp marks testify to the rough handling of the negatives (for another example of this type of film damage, see, for instance, our entry for Assebroek, June 4, 1974).

Judging from the rounded edges of the print, photo #4 seems to be a full-size uncropped representation of its original. Besides the two crimp marks and the many dust particles and scratches, one can distinguish a rather large, light-colored shape dotted with darker areas. The shape is delineated on one side by a rather smooth, arc-shaped edge and fades into the darkness on the opposite side. It appears to be the only object of interest in this photograph.



Fig. 263. Close-up of the “anomalous object” in photo #4

Mr. Lambotte, correctly we think, remarked that this rounded shape bears a strong resemblance to the Moon that is partly obscured by clouds. Yet, on August 15, at 9:15 p.m., the Earth’s satellite was only 6% illuminated and 18° below the horizon. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to detect any stars in the picture that could help determine if this was the Moon or not, but it is already clear from the smooth appearance of the rounded edge that this is not a picture of a point source nor of a moving object photographed with a handheld camera.

Star trails do appear in Photo #5, but despite lengthy checks, the stars responsible for them could not be identified. Towards the center of the shot, there is another trail. It is not so smoothly outlined as the star trails, and appears to be composed of bright and less bright specks. If not a scratch, it can be assumed that this is what the photographer was trying to capture with this photo.

Evidently, photo #5, which is shown on the next page, is not a picture of a stationary light either, but could it be one of the photos of the ball of light that was seen to approach the witnesses’ house? Four elements assure us that this is not the case:

- (1) The photographer claimed that he took three photos in less than one minute. This is irreconcilable with the length and regular appearance of the star trails, which clearly indicate an exposure time of several minutes and the use of tripod.
- (2) The length of the trail in the center is only a little bit longer than that of the stars, meaning that its displacement would have been equally difficult to discern with the naked eye as the movement of a star. Again, this is not what the witnesses told.

(3) The trail is equally thick at both ends, which is suggestive of a very distant object. If close by (the light reportedly travelled from tree-top level to a point over the witnesses' house), one would expect to see a brightening of the light as it approaches the camera.

(4) The size of the light that produced the trail is smaller than the brightest star in the picture. It is definitely not "the size of one fourth the full Moon", as claimed by the photographer.

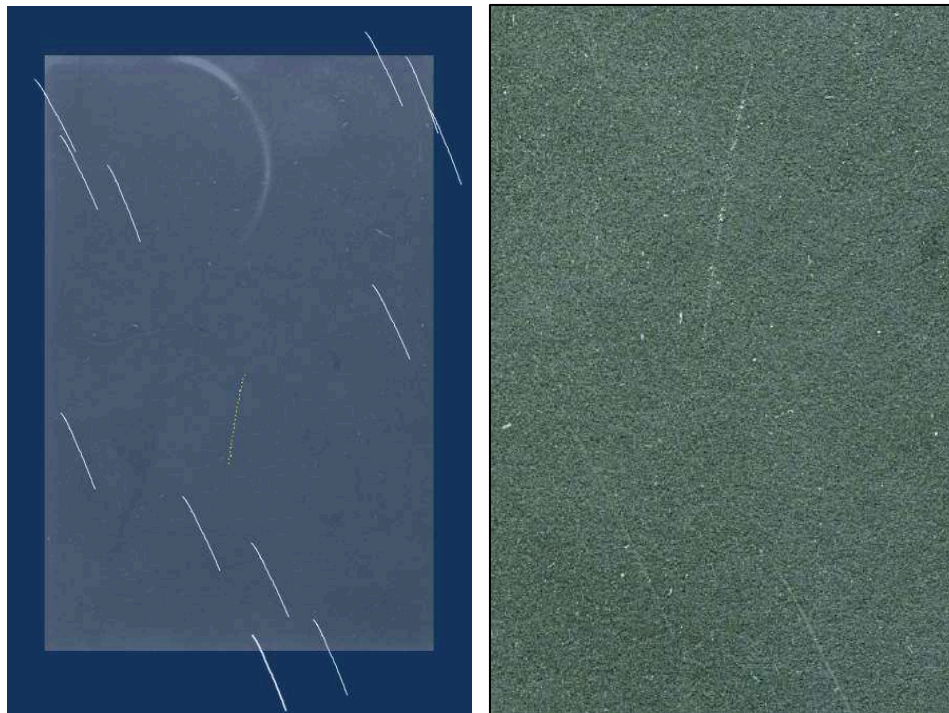


Fig. 264. LEFT: photo #5. Light blue lines represent the star trails. The yellow dotted line near the center of the image is believed to be the targeted subject. RIGHT: brightened and sharpened close-up of this trail.

In summary, it turns out that both photo #4 and photo #5 are unrelated to either one of the reported sightings. With no narrative that explains what they are supposed to show, the pictures need not show anything out of the ordinary and are of no further interest to our present study.

Regarding, the initial sighting (a rectilinear moving white light at tree level), this may have been either a helicopter or a small airplane, with the latter being the favorite candidate because of the absence of sound.

It is important to emphasize here that, understandably, the SOBEPS investigators were not impressed with the photographic evidence. They point out that the witness/photographer is a member of SOBEPS and has an avid interest in UFOs. In fact, the report tells us that Mr. Suijkerbuijk used to

spend many hours each week scrutinizing the sky and he had reported seeing weird skylights since 1971 (specifically, eight “UFO” sightings up to August 15, 1974, and several more after). “The entire family is a bit over-excited when it comes to UFOs”, Breidenbach writes. In cases like these, the impossibility to identify an object in a photograph has more to do with false and/or mixed up data provided by the photographer than with the photographed object itself.

Post scriptum

It is interesting to note that the second stage of the *Saturn V* rocket—the rocket used to launch the *Skylab* space station—was visible from Belgium from May 1973 to January 1975. On August 15, 1974 the rocket booster became visible to the naked eye at about 9:13 p.m., i.e. at exactly the time the approaching white ball was spotted. Satellite expert Ted Molczan calculated that it would have travelled from West to Southeast, culminating about 29° above the South-Southwest horizon. In other words, an orbital path running in almost the opposite direction as the one reported by the witnesses, which, according to the on-site inquiry was found to be from azimuth 130° Southeast to 310° Northwest. Still, it is difficult to conceive that the passage of this rocket booster, combined with a bright Jupiter in the same quadrant of the sky as an approaching light, would not have been unnoticed by someone who is in the business of scrutinizing the sky for anything unusual.

[1] An unpublished catalog compiled by Franck Boitte mentions 21 UFO reports for August 15, 1974.

(References: Gilbert Suijkerbuijk, letter to SOBEPS, September 15, 1974. Willy Breidenbach, SOBEPS investigative report, September 25, 1975. Michel Abrassart & Jean-Luc Vertongen, *Inforespace*, No. 24, 1975, pages 24-29. Ted Molczan, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, November 27, 2016. Franck Boitte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, November 28, 2016.)

Date: Tuesday, September 10, 1974

Location: Gerpennes (Hainaut)

Time: 01:00

Duration: several minutes

Assessment: Jupiter?

September 1974. The tentacles of a major “UFO wave” in France were gaining an ever-firmer grip upon the French-speaking part of Belgium. Following the media attention that surrounded the subject, it did not take long before almost any bright light in the sky was labeled a possible UFO.

In its September 9 edition, the Charleroi daily *Le Journal* recounts that, on the previous night, many witnesses in the community of Gerpennes had seen

a “UFO” in the night sky. One of the witnesses described what he saw as “a very bright object, bigger than a star, changing shape rapidly and having a purple tail.”

Because of the high number of witnesses, the local Gendarmerie launched an *enquête* and produced an investigative report signed by Captain-Commander Bouvy. The report, submitted to SOBEPS, listed various sightings of a “flying object” maneuvering over Gerpinnes and surroundings between 10:15 p.m. on September 7 and 5:00 a.m. on September 8. Among the witnesses were members of the *gendarmerie* from both the city of Charleroi and Gerpinnes. The latter group was able to observe the object through field glasses and described it as “an object that changed from a round shape to a triangular shape, very luminous, with intensity and colors also changing and some sort of protuberance, intermittently rosy and blue, that detached itself from it.”

Two days after the initial article, on September 11, *Le Journal* announced that the UFO had been spotted again in the night from September 9 to 10, and that someone had managed to take a photograph. One of the witnesses, Mr. Marcel Renotte, narrates: “It was around one o’clock in the morning. The sky was cloudless but it seemed to me that the stars were less luminous than on other days. I observed this triangle of fire and said to myself that this was undoubtedly the UFO that other inhabitants of Gerpinnes had seen in the night from Saturday to Sunday.” Mr. Renotte tried to observe the phenomenon through his binoculars but found them of no use because the object moved too much. It was Mr. Renotte’s son, Eric, who took a snapshot of the light. After having contemplated the scene for several minutes, the witnesses decided to go to sleep. The unknown light was still in the sky at that moment. The paper printed the photo but it reveals little more than a light-colored spherical dot against a dark background. It shows no trace of any triangle.



Fig. 265. September 10, 1974, Gerpinnes. Photo by Eric Renotte.
LEFT: the newspaper that carried the story. RIGHT: close-up of the UFO shot, digitally extracted and enhanced from the photo on the left. Courtesy of Benoît Mussche.

According to *Le Journal*, the picture was examined by “astrologers”, which prompted Michel Bougard, Director of the Brussels UFO group SOBEPS, to write: “We hope that this is a typo, but the error was too good not to highlight.” In the days that followed, *Le Journal* continued to publish other UFO reports from the region.

Michel Bougard, writing for the SOBEPS journal *Inforespace*, holds no doubt that “the UFO” was the planet Jupiter. He bases his conclusion on first-hand evidence. In fact, when the SOBEPS team visited Gerpinnes on September 10th, members of the gendarmerie had pointed the “UFO” out to them and gave the investigators the opportunity to examine it through their field glasses, thus unwittingly confirming what the investigators had already suspected, namely that the UFO was just Jupiter and that it were the poorly adjusted binoculars that created the geometric shapes. Bougard ascribes the cause of this mini-wave to a single person, one Léon Dechamp who, while leaving a local pub in the night of September 7, saw a bright Jupiter and alerted his friends to the celestial intruder, resulting in a group of 20 elderly people staring at the planet in bewilderment. The incident sparked the interest of *Le Journal*, which in turn triggered a short “journalistic wave” with other local newspapers, like *La Nouvelle Gazette*, following in its footsteps and generating new reports in the days that were to follow.

The following illustration groups several of the eyewitness drawings that were made of “the” sky object observed between September 7 and 13, 1974.

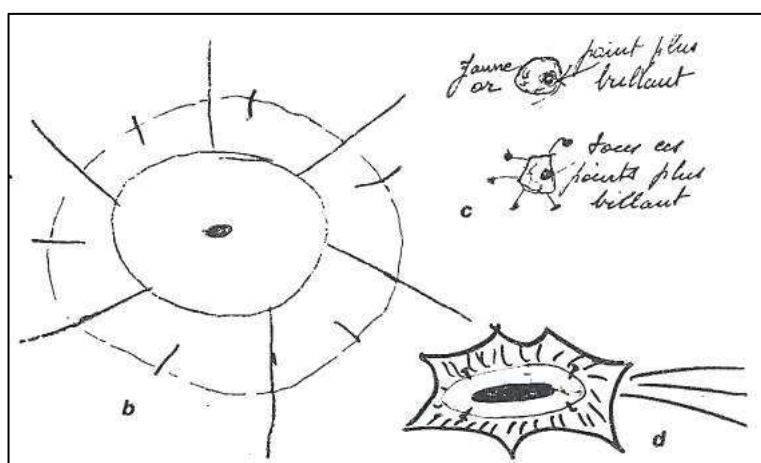


Fig. 266. Borrowed from *Inforespace*, special issue #8.

As explained in a previous entry in this catalog (July 18, 1974, Vierves-sur-Viroin), Jupiter was prominently visible from July 15 to October 30, reaching a maximum magnitude of -2.44 during the first fortnight of September (making it the third brightest object in the night sky next to the Moon and Venus.)

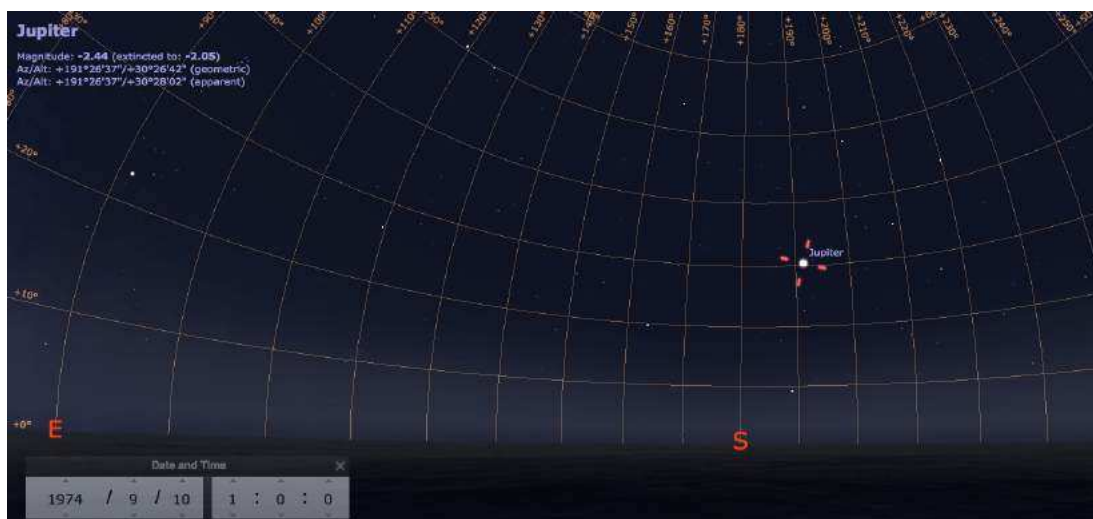


Fig. 267. *Stellarium* screen capture for September 10, 1974 at 01:00 a.m., showing a brilliant Jupiter in the southern sky 31° above the horizon.

Although there is little doubt that the majority of the sightings summarized in Bougard’s article can be attributed to Jupiter, there is not enough information to conclude that the planet was also responsible for the light in Eric Renotte’s photograph. While precise information about the azimuth and elevation of the light is lacking, there is, however, one critical piece of information that speaks in favor of a misinterpreted Jupiter. In his interview with *Le Journal*, Eric Renotte explains: “The UFO was in the direction opposite to the pole star and it was really impossible to mistake the one for the other.” This statement not only confirms a position in the sky that matches the position of Jupiter, i.e. opposite to North, it also indirectly suggests that the shape and size of the unknown object were somewhat similar to those of a bright star. Normally, a star or planet does not show up as a spherical object in a photograph, unless when the image is out of focus or has been retouched. Both are customary in UFO photographs.

An alternative explanation would be that the spherical light is the Moon shining through a thin layer of mist (Mr. Renotte mentioned that the stars looked “less luminous than on other days.”) With the last quarter Moon at an elevation of 17° and having the appearance of a thick crescent (phase was 0.44), its appearance would not have been that different from a triangle with rounded corners. An overexposed picture would show it as round. An argument against this possibility is that the Moon was in the East, so not opposite to the North. The spherical blob also appears to display little or no camera shake. When photographing a distant point of light, a steady image like this can only be obtained with the help of a tripod. Unfortunately, the news article does not mention if an aid was used to stabilize the camera, nor does it give any specifications about the camera itself, the settings, the lens or the film. This lack of data makes it impossible to pass a definitive judgment on what was photographed. The odds, however, point to Jupiter, which in the same period prompted several other citizens to report a UFO. Given the

limited information available, it is impossible to say with any degree of certainty which of the two astronomical possibilities offers the most likely solution.

(References: Michel Bougard, *Inforespace*, special issue No.8, December 1984, pages 26-27. Others, as noted.)

Date: early January 1975 (approximate date)

Location: outer space, Moon, photographed from Hove (Antwerp)

Time: night

Duration: unknown

Special Features: repeater witness / telescopic image / unseen by photographer

Assessment: insufficient information

In an article published on pages 12-15 of the April 1975 issue of the stenciled monthly bulletin *SUFO-INFORMA* [1], astronomy enthusiast Willy de Groof writes:

While at the observatory of Hove [a public observatory named Urania], I took a picture of the Moon that shows a dome-shaped object. During the SUFO board meeting of January 25, 1975, the board of directors was able to study this picture in depth thanks to the “magnetic photo investigative method” that was developed by me.

A board member of the group himself, De Groof then explains how he uses a pendulum to find out if a UFO photo is genuine or not. He continues:

Not everyone possesses the necessary skills to carry out these tests; the person himself should possess an extremely sensitive force-line field. When the object investigated by this method—in our case a dome on the Moon—is surrounded by a magnetic force field that interacts with its immediate surroundings, we can and should conclude that the object is made of magnetic substances allowing us to consider the object as real.

The info contained in this pseudo-scientific excursion, of which we have just quoted only a small portion, is all we have about this photograph. The fact that it was discussed at a “board meeting” on January 25 suggests the picture was taken shortly before that date. What it actually showed is not clear and an attempt to contact De Groof by letter in October 2015 proved unsuccessful.

The article goes on to describe two more sightings of a bright white round light in the crater *Stevinus*, observed by De Groof during consecutive nights

on February 22 and 23. In a later issue of *SUFO-INFORMA* (September 1975), De Groof reports two additional photographically documented sightings. The latter incidents are discussed in two separate entries, one for March 21, 1975, the other for April 22, 1975.

De Groof's fascination with weird luminosities seen in proximity of the Moon became a lifelong obsession. Two of his sightings of odd luminosities on the lunar surface (a "blood red shimmering filling the whole crater of *Aristarchus* on March 13, 1987 and a short-lived "pure white light" that "flashed up" from the crater *Copernicus* on January 26, 1989) ended up in the July 2006 extension to the "Lunar Transient Phenomena Catalog" compiled by Winifred S. Cameron. The March 13 event even made it into the January 2009 issue of the *Lunar Section Circular* published by the British Astronomy Association and, apparently, was confirmed by respected astronomer Martin Mobberly who filmed a similar phenomenon on the same day. De Groof's 1975 pictures, however, do not figure in this catalog, suggesting that, in later years, De Groof may have realized that they did not show objects or lights close to the Moon but something far less exotic.

The last trace we have of De Groof is a message on an astronomical Internet forum [2] that recounts a sighting of another "deep red" glow, this time in the crater *Tycho* in early October 1996. De Groof had asked a friend of his to post a call for other witnesses on the forum because he had "never seen anything like that before" (*sic*).

In a telephone call of November 2, 2015, De Groof's wife told one of the authors (WVU) that her husband is no longer interested in these early sightings, does not want to discuss them anymore and that all the pictures he took have been disposed of. Asked if her husband had ever found an explanation for the lights in his photographs, she replied "No, but sometimes it happens that things cannot be explained." In consequence, hopes of finding an explanation for the photo of the alleged dome-shaped object on the Moon are indeed next to zero. Nothing is known about the color or size of the anomaly. It is not even clear whether this "dome" was also observed visually or if it only showed up in the picture after development. We suspect the latter is more likely. (Why else would its author have resorted to a pendulum to obtain confirmation that this "dome" was really there? And why was this important scientific discovery not followed up by the staff of the observatory?). In the absence of a visual observation, experience dictates that the "dome" was probably a film flaw, perhaps a crescent-shaped crimp mark on the negative, like those that typify several other photos in the present catalog (see for instance our discussion of the photos taken in Baasrode in 1970, and in Bruges on June 4, 1974.) Because the authors have not viewed the picture, and because all attempts to obtain more information on what it shows and how it came about proved fruitless, the case is classified as "insufficient information."

[1] *SUFO-INFORMA* was published by SUFO (Studie van Unidentified Flying Objects), a short-lived initiative established in 1974 by Guy van Dam and Patrick Vankrunkelsven (see also our entry for Beverlo, June 18, 1973.)

[2] The call for witnesses appeared on September 1997 on the forum of the Belgian Association of Amateur Astronomers (Vereniging voor Sterrenkunde – VVS).

(References: as noted.)

Date: Thursday, January 2, 1975

Location: Boechout (Antwerp)

Time: ~15:00

Duration: a few minutes

Assessment: fake

In the winter of 1974/1975, the Flemish weekly magazine *TV-Ekspres* ran a series on paranormal phenomena and space mysteries. It dedicated several articles to UFOs, one of which prompted teenager Paul van Peer to send a letter to the magazine's editor. Paul claimed that he and his friend Eddy had photographed a mysterious object in the sky over Boechout, a municipality Southeast of Antwerp City. The strange object had come into sight when the two were playing a game of soccer in the afternoon of January 2, 1975. *TV-Ekspres* published the story in either January or February 1975 (the clipping we have is not dated). In the article, reporter Rob Jans presented Paul's letter as follows:

It was almost three o'clock. All of a sudden, we saw a luminous object in the sky. Even though it was rather cloudy that day, we could see it clearly. Now and then, it made some crazy jumps. Sometimes it moved with the speed of lightning and sometimes it just hung there. A couple of times it shot up vertically and then lowered itself again. It was difficult for us to estimate the altitude. The shape was that of a big shiny disc. After a few minutes, the craft disappeared in the same mysterious way it had arrived. I know there will be many people who do not believe us. However, Eddy and I saw it clearly. We are sure that it was not a mirage, not an airplane and certainly not a balloon. To us it was a flying saucer.

The article in *TV Ekspres* continues:

To back up their story, Paul enclosed two pictures with his letter which do indeed show a black disc against a clouded sky. There's also a central, dark part surrounded by a somewhat lighter rim. Of course, photos like these do not prove a lot. Moreover, Paul and Eddy were unable to give many details of their sighting. It all happened unexpectedly and was over very quickly.



Fig. 268. January 2, 1975, Boechout.
Photo by Paul van Peer as published in *TV Ekspres*.

TV Ekspres printed only one photograph. The circumstances in which the story became known (only days after the publication of a UFO article), as well as the absence of independent eyewitness testimony, point to a typical teenager prank. Particularly, the slanted position of the object in the published photograph is indicative of a hand-thrown model. Possibly, the boys were inspired by the TV broadcast on the fake UFO photo from Beert, which remained a popular topic in Flanders for years (see entry for November 1, 1973).

(References: as noted.)

Date: early March 1975
Location: Droixhe (Liège)
Time: daytime
Duration: unknown
Assessment: journalistic fake

Fig. 269 shows a news clipping that was found in the files of Marc Hallet, skeptical author of numerous books and monographs on pseudo-science.

Nothing more is known about the published picture other than that it was taken by a certain J. Ruzicka in Droixhe, a suburb of Liège. Still, going by the architectural details of the buildings, Google Earth's Street View quickly brought us to the exact location: a building complex in Droixhe with five apartment buildings, a park and a pool, located between the Rue Armand Rassenfosse and the Avenue de la Croix Rouge.



Fig. 269. March 8, 1975, Droixhe. The full article as published in *La Meuse* of March 8, 1975. Courtesy of Marc Hallet.

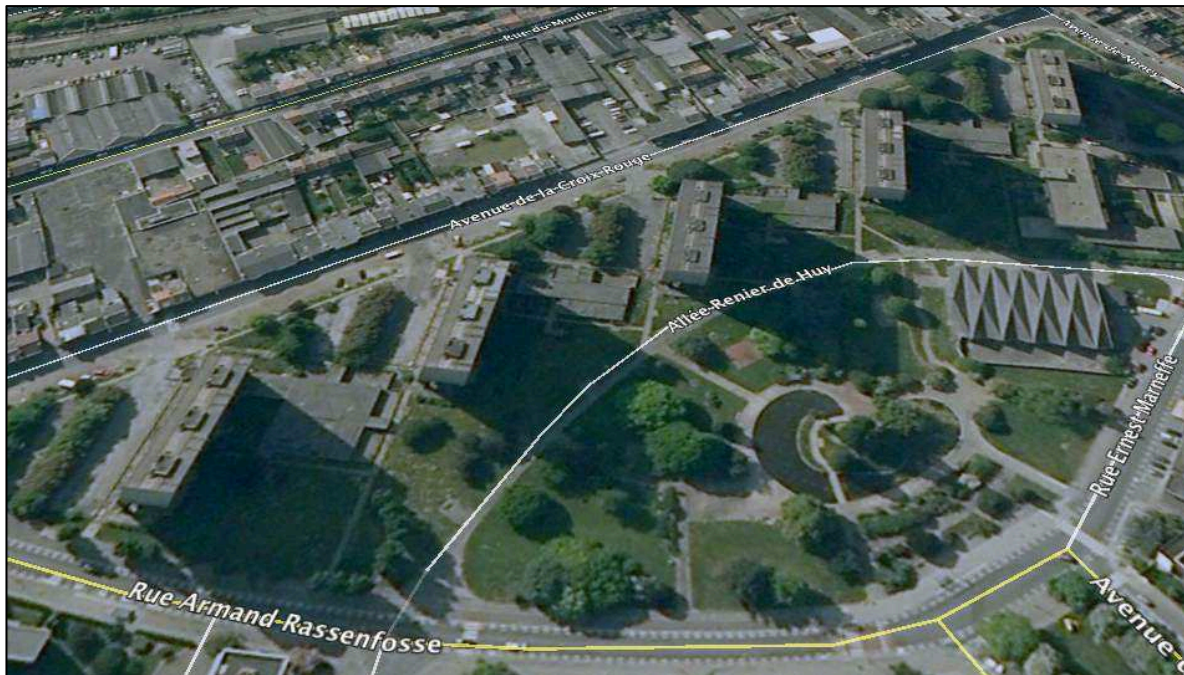


Fig. 270. Google Earth view of the site.



Fig. 271. Google Earth Street View image showing three of the five apartment buildings, as seen from the Rue Armand Rassenfosse. Two of these high-rise blocks formed the background for the UFO shot.

From the moment we set eyes on Mr. Ruzicka's picture, we suspected that the "saucer" was a lamppost. With the Sun shining brightly in the background and turning the sky to a uniform white, it would have been easy to erase the pole with white retouching paint. Searching the Internet for older pictures of Droixhe, we found the culprit in the park just in front of the apartment blocks:



Fig. 272. One of the lampposts that border the pool in the park adjacent to the apartment buildings. The resemblance to the "saucer" in the picture—inserted here for ease of comparison—is striking. Image borrowed from <http://histoiresdeliege.skynetblogs.be/archive/2014/02/17/le-quartier-de-droixhe-a-ses-debuts-8107325.html>

The picture in Fig. 272 was taken with a camera pointing Northeast. It shows a different group of apartment buildings than the one in the newspaper photo. A Google Earth search of the surroundings revealed that the “UFO” shot itself was taken from the same park but with the photographer facing South-Southwest.

We logically conclude that the photo is a hoax, presumably concocted by *La Meuse* itself (this would also explain why the paper did not find this “perplexing” photograph important enough to devote more than a dozen words to it.) In addition, it will not come as a surprise that we did not find any trace of a Mr. “J. Ruzicka” and that it proved impossible to locate a single report that mentions an extraordinary craft maneuvering in between apartment buildings near the city of Liège in 1975.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Friday, March 21, 1975

Location: outer space, Moon, photographed from Herentals (Antwerp)

Time: 21:15

Duration: 1 h 45 min

Special Features: telescopic images / repeater witness

Assessment: insufficient information

In a previous entry (Herentals, early January 1975), the authors briefly discussed a photograph that was purported to show “a dome-shaped object on the Moon”. The photo was shot by Willy de Groof and described by the latter in the April 1975 issue of *SUFO-INFORMA*, published by Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (SUFO). In another article, published on pages 11-14 of the journal’s September 1975 issue, De Groof reports on a new series of peculiar Moon shots. We quote:

For some time now, me and my wife, who is also very interested in ufology and astronomy, have been observing strange phenomena through our telescopes (which are of a good quality!), both on and above the Moon. To study these very peculiar phenomena, SUFO established a project called “Unidentified Transient Lunar Phenomena”. We wrote extensively about this in our journal’s issue of last month. The first results of this big-scale SUFO project are now brought to you by means of a sighting of a series of strange, bright, white balls that appeared at an altitude of at least 20km above the Moon on March 21, 1975. We observed them from 9:15 until 11 p.m. and took a series of 12 photos of these phenomena through one of our telescopes. In this month’s issue, we are showing you the first series of these photos. The original photos are at my place and can be consulted by anyone.

Initially, we thought the round objects were not moving, but from the complete set of photos we determined that they were. Yet, we never noticed this movement through our telescope, but, as you know, the photographic plate is much more sensitive than the naked eye, which explains why we did not notice the movement with the naked eye. On the pictures that will be published next month, you will clearly notice the systematic extinguishing of this bright white ball. The present series only concerns the observation of one ball, but let us first take a calm look at the photos. After that, we will attempt to build a theory around these mysterious phenomena with the knowledge we have gained so far. To this day, these photographs are unique and cannot be forwarded to amateurs.

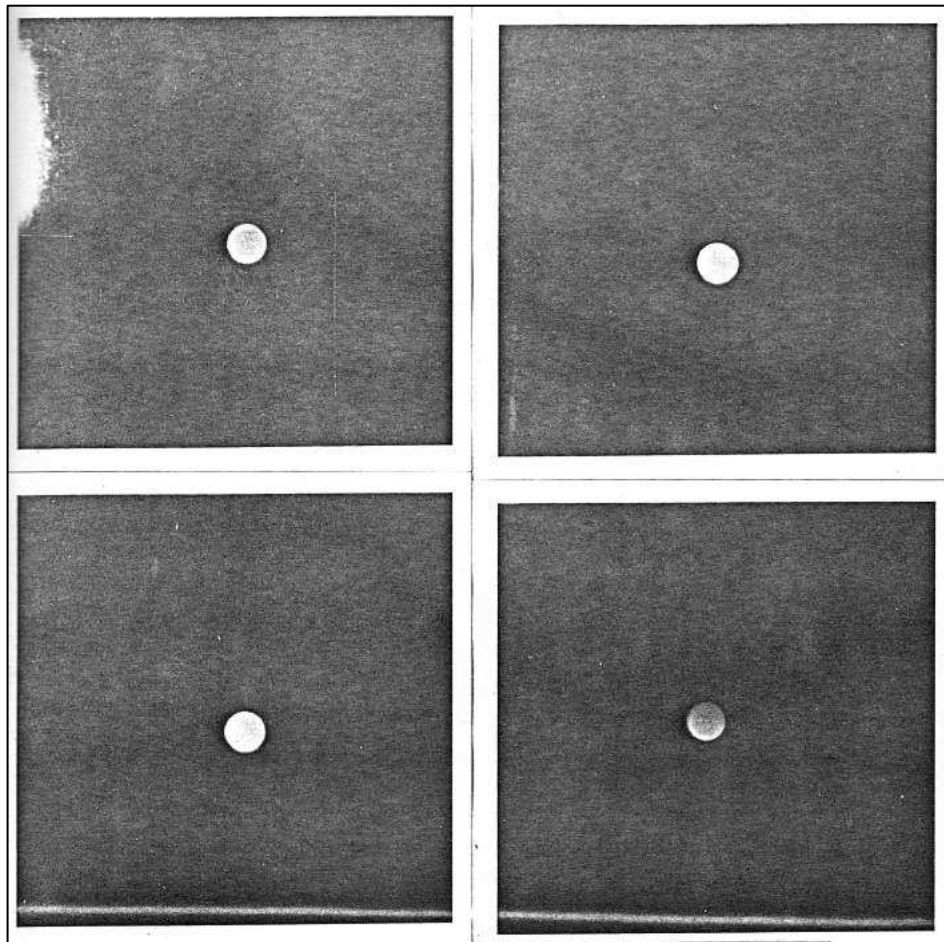


Fig. 273. March 21, 1975, Herentals. First four pictures of a series of twelve.
Photos by Willy de Groof. Borrowed from *SUFO-INFORMA* No. 14.

On the first picture (upper left), you will notice a part of the Moon that is overexposed. It will enable us to study the photograph and the peculiar phenomena in a better way. The Moon was in its last

quarter. On this picture, you can clearly see the real distance between the object and the lunar surface; this distance will get ever smaller. The object is completely round and when you take a closer look, you will notice a less bright area in the center. A very small indentation is visible on top of this ball.

On the second picture of the first row, the unknown object is equally bright as on the first picture and still features the same characteristics. However, the ball has now approached much closer to the lunar surface. When you look closer, you will notice the shadow of the Moon on the left; in reality, this is the surface (with mountains and craters disappearing into space). We conclude that our unidentified ball is moving closer to the lunar surface at a very high speed.

On the second row, first picture, the object is practically in between the lunar mountains; but not completely because its brightness remains the same, as do all the other characteristics listed above.

On the fourth and for now last picture, its light is already obscured by the shadows of the Moon mountains in which it penetrated. If you look closely, you will surely notice the cast shadows.

Next month we will publish the final parts of this series about UTPL. Then you will notice that the ball is completely swallowed up by the lunar surface and extinguishes. These pictures were taken with intervals of several seconds, meaning that the ball must have had a very high speed; otherwise, it could not have reached the Moon that quickly. The spherical phenomenon must have had the size of a building.

We know from previous articles by Willy de Groof that in 1974/1975 he possessed a small telescope equipped with a 20x65 binocular and used *Kodak Ektrachrome 27* Din film for his Moon shots. No other specifications about telescope or camera are known.

In the final pages of his *SUFO INFORMA* article, De Groof speculates as to the nature of the photographed "balls of light". While he had abandoned his earlier idea of extraterrestrial travelers from a planet in the constellation *Sagittarius*, De Groof now considered it more likely that the photographed phenomena were fragments of solar protuberances that cooled off into ball-shaped masses of solar matter and were drawn to the Earth and the Moon by gravity. To check the weight of this new theory, SUFO submitted De Groof's article to the Royal Observatory at Uccle, Brussels. The (obvious) response was that solar protuberances do not behave in that way. The observatory's comments were published as a short note in *SUFO-INFORMA* of October

1975 (page 3), an issue that would also mark the abrupt end of the journal. In consequence, the second part of De Groof's article and the other 8 photographs never made it into print.

De Groof's account contains several ambiguous elements that are to be considered as unfounded appreciations (like his assessment that the ball was "20km above the Moon", had "the size of a building" and was "approaching the lunar surface" at "high speed").

Assuming the published photographs are uncropped (the photocopied prints have the standard 80x80mm size with the 5mm wide white border typical of the 1970s), the unidentified light is too large and too smoothly outlined to be attributed to a dust particle. The claimed visual sighting and the fact that the light-colored sphere appeared on (at least) four consecutive shots, seems to rule out other types of film faults as well. We verified if there were any bright stars or planets positioned close to the Moon on March 21, 1975. This was not the case (Saturn, with magnitude 0.21, was relatively close, but still 3° distant and therefore nowhere near the edge of the lunar disc). What our astronomical check did reveal, though, is that the Moon was not "in its last quarter" as De Groof claims, but in its first quarter (phase: 0.61). Possibly, De Groof confused the reversed image of the Moon as seen in the telescope—and consequently also on the pictures—with the true appearance of the Moon.

FOTOCAT consultant Andrés Duarte is certain that the pictures are "defocused images of a point-like source of light". In that case, the "ball" can be either a star, a planet or a satellite, showing up, not as a mere point, but as a much bigger circular blob. This is known as the *bokeh effect*. [1] The fact that the circular shape is less bright towards the center is due to a lens-related effect called spherical aberration [2]. It is noticeable in all four pictures but is more prominent in the fourth one. The combination of these two photographic effects (image out-of-focus and less bright in the center) is sometimes referred to as *nisen bokeh*.

The question that remains is what this light may have been. In an attempt to find out, the authors requested Toronto-based satellite expert Ted Molczan to verify if there were any satellites that passed in front of the lunar disc between 9:15 and 11 p.m. on March 21, 1975. He replied as follows:

I computed a brute force search against all available TLEs [3], but found no matches. The TLEs are the latest available from USSTRATCOM for the 60-day period that ended on the date of the photos. TLEs of 2916 objects out of a total of 3194 believed to have been in orbit were found. The missing TLEs may have been lost over the past four decades, or the objects they were assigned to may have been lost during the period of interest.

I computed the position of the moon at five minute intervals on

1975 Mar 21 from 20:15 to 22:00 UTC, and ran a brute force search for each time and lunar position, for all objects that passed within 5 deg. and 6 min. time.

If the photographed object was a satellite, then it must have been several thousand kilometers high, given the low angular velocity implied by the time interval between photos, and the short angular distance travelled. I cannot rule out the possibility of a bright specular reflection from a distant satellite not included in the dataset that was used. I have no way to know whether or not it was a satellite.

The photographs printed in *SUFO-INFORMA* are of a very poor quality and difficult to interpret because of the absence of any detail and scale. Almost none of the descriptive elements that are discussed in the accompanying article are visible in the published pictures. In particular, they do not show any Moon features that can confirm if the object changed its position in between shots or not, nor is there any trace of the “very small indentation on top of the ball”. Hoping to obtain the original negatives of all the pictures that were taken that night, we attempted to contact De Groof by letter and phone. The effort proved fruitless. The photos have been destroyed (see our entry for Hove, early January 30, 1975, on pages 277-279). In the given circumstances (only low-quality photocopies available, precise time not known, ambiguous statements, and a flawed description of the lunar phase), we see no other option than to classify this case as “insufficient information”.

[1] <http://toothwalker.org/optics/bokeh.html>

[2] <http://toothwalker.org/optics/spherical.html>

[3] TLE stands for Two Line Elements and refers to a standard mathematical model to describe a satellite's orbit.

(References: Andrés Duarte, personal communication to Vicent-Juan Ballester Olmos, October 24, 2015. Ted Molczan, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, November 2, 2015. Others, as noted.)

Date: Tuesday, April 22, 1975

Location: Herentals (Antwerp)

Time: ~22:00

Duration: ~1 hour

Special Features: telescopic images / repeater witness

Assessment: insufficient information

The article from the September 1975 issue of *SUFO-INFORMA* that published the photos discussed in our entry for Herentals, March 21, 1975, mentions another Moon shot, also taken by Willy de Groof while in the company of his wife, but one month later. De Groof describes it as follows:

The picture below is a totally different phenomenon, which was photographed against a lunar mountain background. The unknown object was lens-shaped and showed a bluish color in the center. Around it, there was a smoothly defined pink glow. This object too must have been very big, as we can see from the size of the mountain when we compare it to that of the oval object. It was first seen visually through both our telescopes during the last quarter of the Moon, from 9 to 10 p.m., and close to the craters Copernicus and Pytheas.

The picture in question is not very revealing:



Fig. 274. April 22, 1975, Herentals. Photo by Willy de Groof.
Image borrowed from *SUFO-INFORMA* No. 14.

Not only is it not clear where the *Copernicus* and *Pytheas* craters are in this shot, it is also not clear where the unknown object is! Just for the sake of completeness, we have indicated the positions of these two craters on an image of the lunar disc.

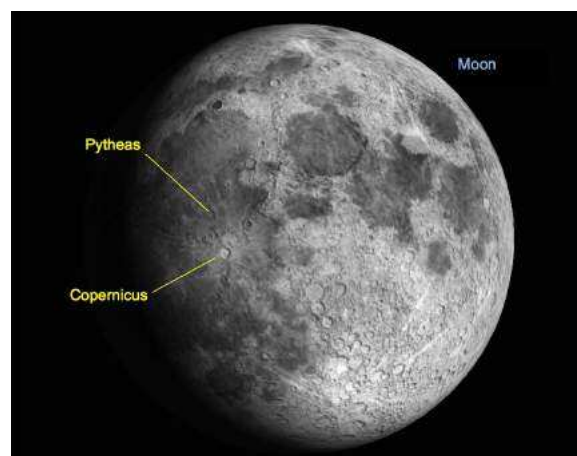


Fig. 275. *Stellarium* image showing the aspect of the Moon on April 22, 1975 at 10 p.m.

A request for additional information sent to Willy de Groof on October 9, 2015 was left unanswered. A subsequent phone call with De Groof's wife learned that the photo had been thrown away years ago, and that her husband is not willing to discuss these issues anymore. In fact, shortly after *SUFO INFORMA* published its last issue (October 1975), De Groof had turned his back on the UFO community to focus on mainstream amateur astronomy. Unfortunately, like his March 21 pictures, the Moon shot of April 1975 cannot be assessed properly due to the paucity of the data and the appalling quality of the photographic reproduction.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Friday, May 30, 1975

Location: Itegem (Antwerp)

Time: ~23:00

Duration: 2 hours

Assessment: light pillar in high clouds

In 1975, the Dutch astronomical/meteorological journal *Zenit* published an article in which amateur astronomer Frans van Loo, residing in the municipality of Itegem, expressed his concern about the increasing number of ground-based light sources that illuminate the lower clouds and make astrophotography nearly impossible. At the end of his article, Van Loo described a personal sighting of "another optical phenomenon", one that "does not belong to the usual daily manifestations". We quote:

What I observed was a vertical band or streak (like a sun pillar) with a length of approximately 7° and a width of 0.5° (visually). No color was noticed, but the streak did show changes in brightness, probably because there was sometimes more, sometimes less cirrus present. With 14x100 binoculars, I could even distinguish variations in intensity in the streak or pillar. Estimating the position with the help of the stars gave 45° East (calculated from the North) and altitude 17°. To enable a more precise measurement, I took the picture that is printed below.

During the observation, there were thin cirrus clouds that covered most of the sky and reflected the lights from Antwerp city. The altitude of the clouds was not known, but it is usually between 5,000 and 9,000m. It is important to know the altitude if we want to know the location of the source that caused the phenomenon. Thinking along the lines of a sun pillar, the source should have been located in the 40° direction [obviously Van Loo meant to write "45°"], in other words somewhere on the line Itegem–Diessen. [1] If it concerns a reflection or mirror image, like the Sun in the water, then the location of the source could be calculated (if

the altitude of the cirrus were known). Sticking to 5,000 to 9,000m, the source should be located somewhere between Turnhout and Diessen.



Fig. 276. May 30, 1975, Itegem.
Photo by Frans van Loo.
Image borrowed from *Zenit*.

This observation was interesting, but I recalled having probably seen the same thing on May 4. In fact, the position was pretty much the same, but that night I thought I was looking at the luminous trail of a meteor. The pillar was visible for only a couple of minutes. Now, May 30, the pillar remained visible from 11 p.m. until 01 a.m. (CET). Probably this source is permanent and may also be viewed from other locations if the right type of cloud is present between the source and the observer.

Mr. Van Loo was right about the underlying mechanism that caused the luminous streak (i.e. a bright light source on the ground reflecting off of the upper and lower surfaces of billions of horizontally-oriented hexagonal ice-crystal plates; see diagram on the next page). While sun pillars and pillars from artificial lights that are surrounded by ice mist usually appear as vertical streaks that intersect with the light sources that cause them, the pillar photographed on May 30 was produced by an ice cloud very high above the ground. Therefore it appeared as unconnected to its source, making it less obvious what caused it. In fact, it never became clear what the bright light source was that was responsible for the pillar in Van Loo's picture. [2]

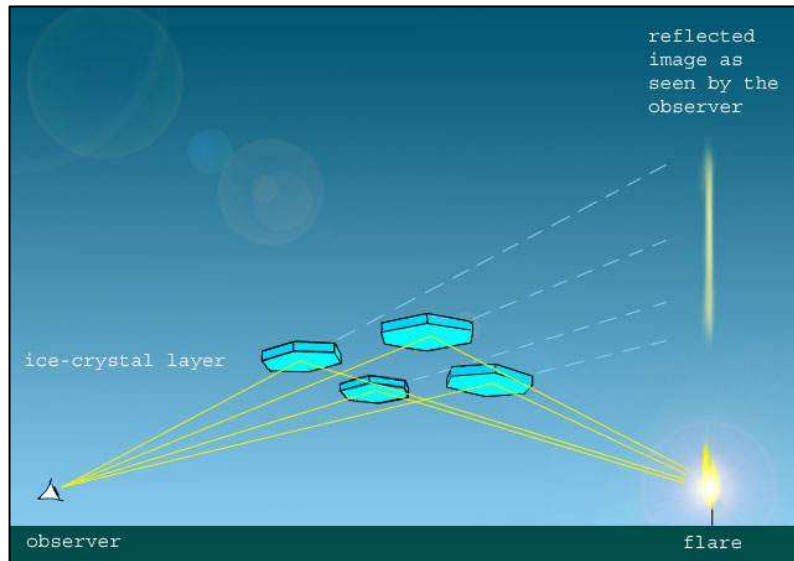


Fig. 277. Simplified diagram showing the reflection of a combustion flame in the flat surfaces of horizontally and nearly-horizontally oriented ice-crystal plates. © CAELESTIA.

Throughout 1976 and 1977, Van Loo managed to capture better images of this rare phenomenon. On each of these occasions, the streak of light had appeared not Northeast but Northwest of Itegem, and the source of the mirrored images had quickly been identified as a blazing flame emanating from a 204m high flare stack at the FINA/TOTAL petrochemical complex in the Antwerp harbor, 32km distant from Itegem. Below are three color slides, all taken from Itegem, but at different dates: October 19, 1976, October 25, 1976 and November 4, 1977.



Fig. 278. October 19, 1976, Itegem. 8 seconds exposure. Photo by Frans van Loo.



Fig. 279. October 25, 1976, Itegem. 180 seconds exposure revealing several more mirrored lights from the Antwerp harbor. Photo by Frans van Loo.



Fig. 280. November 4, 1977, Itegem. 11 seconds exposure. Photo by Frans van Loo.

Using the position of the stars in the photographs, the altitude of the reflecting cloud layer was calculated to have been 4,800m for the first picture, 5,100m for the second, and 3,700m for the third. With the ice-crystal plates this high, only a very powerful light source will reflect enough light back to an observer.

After the publication of one of Van Loo's new color pictures in *Zenit*, another Belgian reader sent in a picture of a light pillar in high clouds, this one taken at Destelbergen, East of Ghent, in the late autumn of 1975.

Fig. 281. Autumn 1975, Destelbergen.
Peeking from behind a brick wall is a needle-
shaped reflection caused by a flare at an oil
refinery near Ghent. Photo by F. de Bergh.
Image borrowed from *Zenit*.



In 1979, one of Van Loo's photographs was used for the cover of a skeptic book on UFOs. Fascinated by this widely ignored atmospheric anomaly, and owning a small roof terrace that faces the aforementioned petrochemical plant in the Antwerp harbor, one of the authors set out to observe the phenomenon for himself. The experiment proved successful: the images below show light pillars caused by a flame from the same flare stack that was responsible for the mirrored images in most of Van Loo's slides, but this time photographed from a distance of only 8.6km instead of 32km.



Fig. 282. Pillars in high clouds over Antwerp. LEFT: September 26, 2000.
RIGHT: November 10, 2003. The segmented aspect of the pillars is due to different
concentrations of ice crystals at different altitudes. Photos by Wim van Utrecht.

[1] Diessen is a small community in the Netherlands, a little over 50km Northeast of Itegem.

[2] Actually, going through CAELESTIA's vast photo collection of light pillars in high-altitude ice clouds, Van Loo's 1975 picture was found to be the second such photo in history, the first one being taken in the late 1960s in Pittsburg, Florida (see: Prof. M.G.J. Minnaert, "Unusual or Neglected Optical Phenomena in the Landscape", *Journal of the Optical Society of America*, Vol. 58, No. 3, March 1968, page 301). A six-part article on light pillars in cirriform clouds, accompanied by an analysis of the photo taken by Frans van Loo on October 25, 1976, is available at <http://www.caelestia.be/article01a.html> A sample of worldwide photos of light pillars can be viewed at <http://www.caelestia.be/lightpillars2.html>

(References: Frans van Loo, *Zenit*, Vol. 2, No. 9, September 1975, pages 316-317 and Vol. 4, No. 5, May 1977, page 181; *Zenit*, Vol. 4, No. 9, September 1977, page 306. J.M. Gantois & Prof. C.W.H. de Loore, *UFO's en andere vreemde natuurverschijnselen*, Thieme, Zutphen, 1979, pages 65-67, 74-75 and front cover. Frans van Loo, personal communications to Wim van Utrecht between November 2002 and July 2003. Wim van Utrecht, meeting with Guy Jacobs of FINA/TOTAL, November 26, 2001.)

Date: summer 1975

Location: Jemelle (Namur)

Time: ~13:00 (deduced from lighting conditions in the picture)

Duration: not applicable

Special Features: unseen by photographer

Assessment: development flaw

On June 25 or 26, 1975—the exact date could not be not remembered—, as Mrs. B. walked from her backyard to the front of her house, she suddenly saw a huge fiery red trail in the evening sky moving with a terrific speed from South to North. Thinking it was a plane about to crash, she alerted her husband and children. It was too late, though. By the time she reached the back of the house, the phenomenon had already disappeared. The phenomenon was visible for only 2 or 3 seconds.

That summer, GESAG correspondent Maurice Mélot carried out an on-site inquiry. In a letter of November 30, 1975 addressed to GESAG, Mélot writes: "I took several pictures from the spot where Mrs. B. saw the 'plane' fly by. You can imagine my surprise when I noticed a blurred oval-shaped patch in the top right corner of one of them. I am submitting the film to *Lumières Dans La Nuit* for analysis."

The negative film ended up with Michel Monnerie, then photo consultant for the above-mentioned French UFO journal. In December 1975 Monnerie sent Mélot the following brief reply: "The patch that troubles you is caused by light having accidentally entered your camera, be it into the camera itself or into the cassette. You can see for yourself that the patches continue in the margins and in the next shot. It is also possible that this accident happened during transport or in the developing lab."



Fig. 283. Summer of 1975, Jemelle. Photo by Maurice Mélot.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

Light leaks do not normally create opaque, oval-shaped dark patches on resulting prints. Usually they produce light-colored translucent streaks (see also our discussion of the photo taken at Korbeek-Lo on May 7, 1980). Dark patches on positive prints are usually due to the film being incorrectly loaded onto the developing reel. The usual cause is two loops of film that have stuck together in the spool during development. When this occurs, developing solution is prevented from reaching the film emulsion at the points of contact, creating blank, unprocessed areas on the negative film that will show up dark in prints. Whatever the exact cause, the mere fact that nothing unusual was seen when the picture was taken, plus the fact that the dark patch lacks three-dimensional perspective, clearly point to a developing fault.



Fig. 284. Similar round patches appeared in this hastily developed photo of a car wash in New Jersey, U.S.A. Image borrowed from <https://cameralegend.com/tag/ricoh/>

Just for the sake of completeness: the shadows that can be seen in the picture (and in particular those that are cast by the upper window frames close to the left edge of the picture) suggest that the Sun was high up in the sky. A virtual visit to Jemelle using Google Earth's Street View app, tells us that the photo was taken from the Rue du Maurlet with the camera pointing towards the Northeast (azimuth circa 55-60°). With the houses on the right being in the shadow, and those in front and to the left of the camera bathing in the Sun, this would place the Sun in the South. Time of day would then have been close to 1 p.m.

As for the "fiery red trail" that was observed by Mrs. B. in June, there is nothing in the investigator's report that excludes the passage of a bright meteor.

(References: Maurice Mélot, *Bulletin du GESAG*, No. 43, March 1976, pages 6-7.)

Date: before 1977
Location: Wallonia
Time: unknown
Duration: unknown
Assessment: development flaws

In 1977, Belgian UFO student Marc Hallet received a roll of 24x36 negatives from a local correspondent of the French group Ouranos. The negatives were littered with dark spots, which members of the group had attributed to a luminous UFO that had been photographed multiple times against a black sky. An unnamed photo expert who examined the film was of another opinion and informed Hallet that the document was nothing but an unexposed film that had been developed using dirty developer liquid (hence the spots or stains.) The mere fact that Hallet had found no evidence of deliberate tampering when he had looked at the film through a microscope, led his correspondent to label the pictures as "authentic".

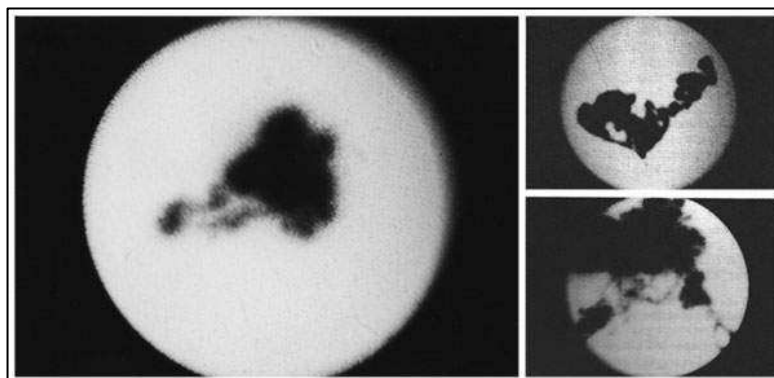


Fig. 285. Before 1977, Belgium. The supposed UFOs imaged through a microscope.
Photos by Marc Hallet.

Hallet examined the film further and viewed it under oblique light. This resulted in the photograph below. It shows a light-colored ring delimitating one of the dark shapes that the French ufologists had labeled a UFO. The ring denotes the area of expansion of a foreign liquid substance (like a water-soluble agent) on or within the gelatin. In short, the photos of the alleged UFO show nothing but stains on the negative caused by crystalline impurities in the developer bath deposited and scattered over the gelatin.

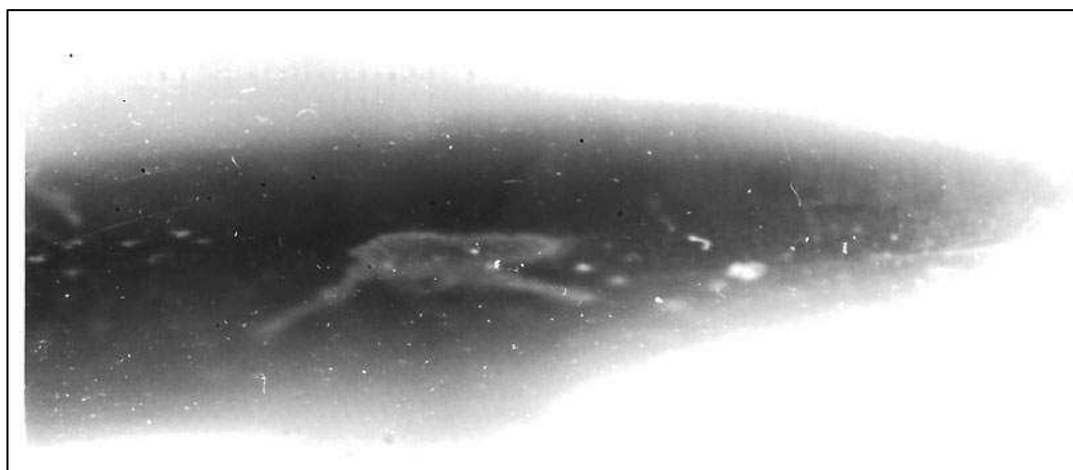


Fig. 286. Macro photograph of one of the UFO/stains. Photo by Marc Hallet.

(References: *L'Inconnu*, No.40, June 1979, cited by Marc Hallet in *L'Inconnu*, No.52, June 1980, pages 81-82. Marc Hallet to Wim van Utrecht, January 2014.)

Date: 1977 (no exact date known)

Location: Borsbeek (Antwerp)

Time: daytime

Duration: unknown

Assessment: fake

We found the following photographs in an unknown Flemish newspaper, presumably from 1977. Below is the caption that accompanied the pictures:

“Look, a UFO”, wrote Walter Senten from Borsbeek, and he sent us a picture with a nice and very clear UFO. The negatives—which were enclosed—were clearly not tampered with. But because Walter Senten is an honest man he placed the UFO in the envelope as well. A plastic cap. Which proves, once again, that UFOs do exist.

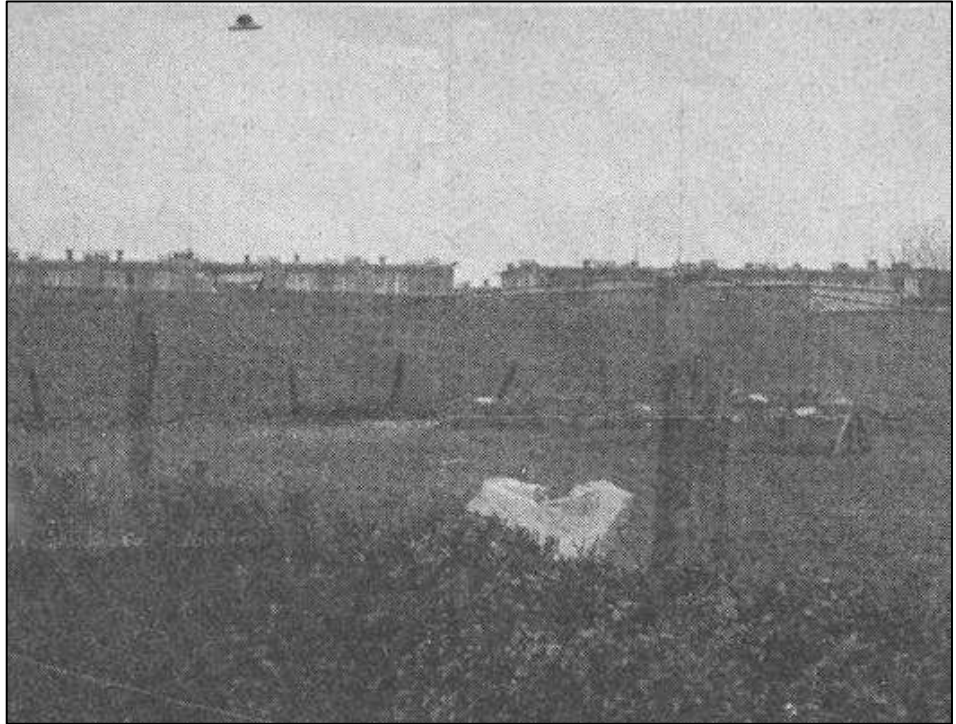


Fig. 287. 1977,
Borsbeek. Photo
by Walter Senten.

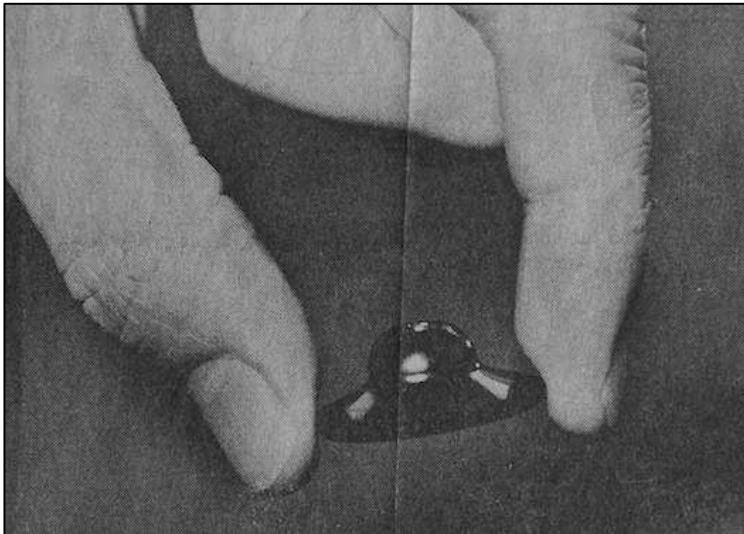


Fig. 288. The plastic cap.that
was used to make the UFO
shot.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Tuesday, February 1, 1977
Location: Châtelineau (Hainaut)
Time: 14:05
Duration: unknown
Assessment: fake

The incident subject of this entry was investigated by SOBEPS' chief of investigations Jean-Luc Vertongen. His findings were published, by himself, in the group's bulletin *Inforespace*.

On February 22, 1977, a Charleroi newspaper carried a cover story about 21-year-old Michel Gelep from Châtelineau, who claimed to have photographed a low-flying UFO over his village in broad daylight. His brothers Lionel (17) and Jean-Michel (12) were with him when he used the family's 2000 *Polaroid* camera to capture what the group described as a "grey saucer with a big red lamp underneath."

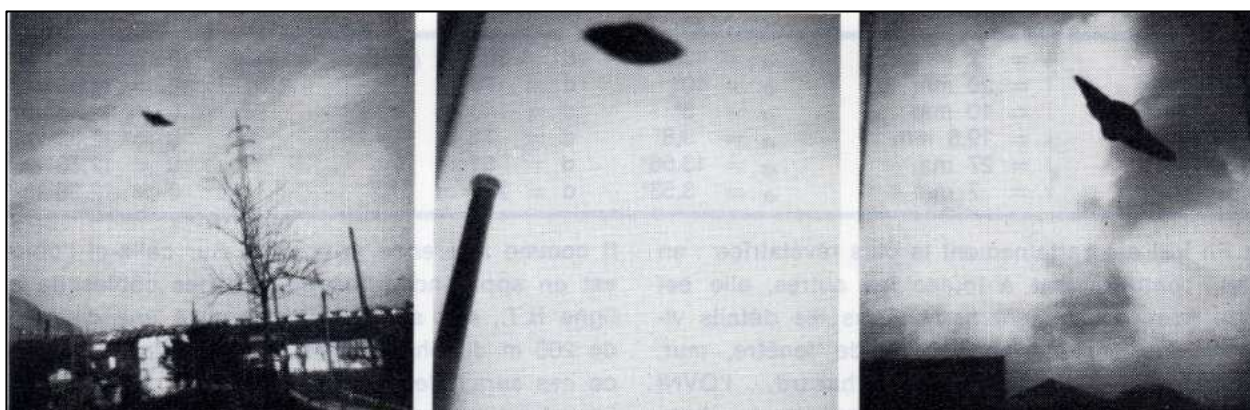


Fig. 289. February 1, 1977, Châtelineau. Three of the photos taken by Michel Gelep as published in *Inforespace*.

An on-site inquiry was immediately carried out. Gelep confirmed what he had related to the press, but doubts remained as to the veracity of his claims. A second interview was scheduled to take place 15 days later. It was only on this occasion that the photographer disclosed that not three but nine pictures had been taken.

The three pictures we publish above—which are also the ones that were printed in the newspaper—are the 2nd, 5th and 7th of the series. Photos 1 and 6 failed. Gelep claimed that he had destroyed them. It was Patrick Ferryn, SOBEPS' photo expert, who examined the remaining polaroids numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8. (Photo # 9 did not show any UFO, just a landscape.) Among other things, the following anomalies were detected in the color photographs:

(1) In picture #7 (Fig. 289, extreme right) the object appears uniformly black and without relief, as if it were backlit. Picture #2 (extreme left), too, is devoid of any color gradation, whereas buildings and trees below the object are not in a backlighting situation. If the object in picture #2 was airborne, it should have been illuminated by the Sun like the other features in the photos.

(2) The same applies to picture #5 (Fig. 289, center). The object is fully black, whilst the chimney on the left—less lighted by the sun, because in the shadow of a house—still shows some detail on its upper part.

(3) The specifications of the camera indicate that the focus was set from 90cm to infinite, therefore everything closer than 90cm will be fuzzy. In picture #2, all objects, be they in the foreground, in the background or in between, display relatively sharp edges. The UFO, however, appears fuzzy (according to Gelep, it was flying at level with the pylon that can be seen to its right). Could the blur have been caused by movement? It is hard to say, but what strikes the eye is that the only other element in the picture with blurred edges is the upper window frame (not visible, alas, in any of the reproductions above). On-site verifications revealed that the window is very small. To make a picture through this window with only the upper frame showing up, one needs to get very close to it, definitely closer than 90cm. The fact that both the UFO and the frame are out of focus, suggests that they are in the same plane at equal distances to the camera.

(4) This also applies to picture #5, where the UFO blur is even more marked and also affects the left-hand and lower window frames, which are obviously closer than 90cm, but not to the upper frame, which is further away and shows up quite sharp (lower and upper frames are outside the camera's field of view in the images that we obtained).



Fig. 290. Photo #2 in color.



Fig. 291. Photo #5



Fig. 292. Photo #7. All three photos courtesy of Patrick Ferryn and carrying the handwritten note "photo truquée" on the back.

Ferryn's verifications pointed to a montage with cut-out paper or cardboard silhouettes of a UFO pasted on the windowpane, a not uncommon type of trickery in the first decades of UFO photography (see, for instance, our entry for May 7, 1980). During a third interview with Gelep, the latter admitted that, contrary to his earlier claims, the photographs had, indeed, been shot with the window closed, the required situation for this kind of hoax.

Another SOBEPS expert, Emile Têcheur, performed a mathematical analysis that confirmed the hoax hypothesis. According to the witness, the UFO was flying at a constant height and its real size never changed. Taking picture #2 as key evidence, and assuming that the object is over the high voltage line some 200m away, the calculated diameter of the disc would have been 12.33m. By keeping this value constant, the following estimates were derived for three new parameters (the image size of the UFO on the picture, the viewing angle subtended by the object, and the distance to the object):

<u>Picture</u>	<u>Image size</u>	<u>Angle subtended</u>	<u>Distance</u>
#2	7.00mm	3.53°	200m
#3	20.00mm	10.00°	70m
#4	10.00mm	5.00°	140m
#5	19.50mm	9.80°	71m
#7	27.00mm	13.56°	51m
#8	7.00mm	3.53°	200m

This, and other complementary analyses, demonstrated that:

- (a) The sequence of photographs as reported by the witness/photographer is not compatible with the straight trajectory described in his testimony.
- (b) The calculated height (constant, as per the witness) is different in every photo.
- (c) The actual size of the object, if real, is dissimilar in the various snapshots (in fact, the object's size in picture #7 is more than threefold that of its size in picture #2).

In an interview with Alain Bonivert, collaborator of the Bruges UFO group GESAG, Gelep stated that he had already spotted UFO's in 1974 and 1976. Bonivert also reported that none of the local residents he spoke to had noticed anything unusual that afternoon.

The conclusion is clear: these are not authentic photographs of a true event.

By way of comparison, we publish another *Polaroid* photo, created in the late 1960s by researcher and writer Marc Hallet, then living in Seraing, Liège.

This photo, that was nothing more than a personal experiment, shows how one can create a typical flying saucer photo by simply pasting a paper cutting on a windowpane.



Fig. 293. Early experimental trick shot using the same method.
Photo by Marc Hallet.

(References: Daniel Lienard, *La Nouvelle Gazette de Charleroi*, February 22, 1977. Jacques Bonabot, *UFO INFO (Bulletin du GESAG)*, Vol. 12, No. 47, March 1977, pages 10-11. Jean-Luc Vertongen, *Inforespace*, No.33, May 1977, pages 14-16. Rudy De Groote, *UFO INFO (SPW Tijdschrift)*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1977, pages 3-6. A. Lommelen, *EXO*, No. 3, May-June 1977.)

Date: Wednesday, March 30, 1977 (approximate date)

Location: Herentals (Antwerp)

Time: 18:00

Duration: unknown

Special feature: ground level

Assessment: journalistic fake (April Fool's Day)

The only existing information regarding the photograph below was published on April 1, 1977 in the advertising weekly *De Streekkrant* (and in particular in a local edition that was freely distributed in the Flemish town of Herentals and surrounding villages.) We quote:

Now that things have quieted down again after the UFOs caused a stir in the area of Leuven, this week it was our own De Kempen [a plateau region of Northeast Belgium] made the headlines. A man, who, for security reasons, wants to remain anonymous, entered the newspaper's office this week with a statement that he had seen a flying saucer. Nonsense we thought, but the man promptly pulled a picture from his inside pocket that represented the strange craft. During a walk, he suddenly heard a massive buzzing sound, looked up and saw a strange shiny contraption descending from space with great speed. Automatically our informant turned his camera in its direction and pressed the shutter. The celestial body looked like one big disc, covered with aluminum plates. At the bottom, there was a big hatch and on top there was a single antenna pointing straight up. No sign of any windows, doors or portholes. As if paralyzed, our man kept watching the celestial body.

The craft hovered motionless at an altitude of about twenty meters and then shot off straight up in the sky at high speed. Shortly after six o'clock, everything turned back to normal and our hiker recovered from the emotion. There is no doubt that other observers or drivers saw the strange phenomenon too. We are expecting people to send us similar reports.



Fig. 294. March 30, 1977, Herentals. Borrowed from *De Streekkrant*.

Obviously, the story is nothing but an April fool's prank concocted by the editorial team of the weekly. In fact, the UFO in the picture is a water tower, situated in the industrial zone just south of Herentals city, as can be seen in the photo below right.



Fig. 295. LEFT: the article in *De Streekkrant*. RIGHT: photo of the Herentals water cistern as captured by Google Earth's Street View car in 2017.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Wednesday, July 20, 1977
Location: Sint-Maria-Latem (East Flanders)
Time: daytime
Duration: unknown
Special feature: ground level
Assessment: fake

A not very convincing UFO photograph was published in the August 5, 1977 edition of the Flemish newspaper *Het Volk*. The caption that accompanied it read:

Luc Helleputte from St.-Maria-Latem reports the happy news that, on July 20, he spotted and photographed this 'flying saucer' over the soccer field of his community. Luc, my dear boy, we don't want to spoil the fun, but this saucer looks suspiciously like the spinning

top we used to play with when we were young. And what about the four wires above the craft? Or is this a 'suspended saucer'?

The photo is an obvious fake that was treated by the journal's editor in a sympathetic but down-to-earth manner. Flemish investigator Rudy de Groote of SPW had the opportunity to view a direct color print of the photo and made these sobering comments in a 1977 article: "Perhaps it's not clear from the [black and white] reproduction of the color photo, but on the original you can clearly see the four wires that were used to suspend the *saucer*. Whether it really shows a spinning top, we cannot say: it could equally well be a dinner plate with a red light bulb glued to it."



Fig. 296. July 20, 1977, Sint-Maria-Latem. Photo by Luc Helleputte. Borrowed from Rudy De Groote, *UFO INFO-SPW Tijdschrift*, Vol. 1, No. 3, September 1977, page 11.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Monday, September 5, 1977
Location: Zillebeke (West Flanders)
Time: ~04:00
Duration: 7 minutes
Assessment: fake

The setting for this case is the Castle of Bellewaerde, located in the rural community of Zillebeke, just Southeast of the city of Ypres. The castle, currently known as the "Kasteel de Plaisance", is at the main entrance of the

country's oldest theme park. From its opening in 1954 to the early 1980's the Bellewaerde domain was exploited as a recreational zoo and safari park. In the first half of September 1977, two Flemish newspapers published the story of a UFO picture that had been taken from the roof of the dance hall adjacent to the castle. The photographer and only witness to the reported UFO event was Pierre de Vinck, a young commercial artist of 22. Pierre is the son of Baron Jacques de Vinck, then owner of the castle, subscriber to various UFO journals, and protagonist of a UFO event himself in 1954. [1]

Following up on the published stories, the Bruges-based UFO group GESAG contacted Pierre de Vinck by letter on September 18, 1977. A reply, signed by Jacques de Vinck, was returned on September 25. It was accompanied by a short report compiled not by the son but by himself. The report contained two nearly identical sketches that depict the circumstances of the sighting, one presumably executed by Pierre the other "improved sketch" by his father. A map and two prints of the picture were also joined. On October 22, GESAG collaborator Paul Carissimo visited the castle and interviewed the witness.

Basing himself on the news stories, the September 25 report and the data collected during Carissimo's fieldwork, Rudy de Groote of SPW, former sister organization of GESAG, wrote up a summary of the events for the December 1978 issue of *UFO INFO*. Below is a slightly edited version of this text.

The witness had not slept much that Sunday night. It must have been around 4 a.m. when he gazed out of the window and noticed a blinding light in between the trees in the eastern sky, West of the planet Venus. Initially he thought it was something of a transient nature or the Northern Lights. Seeing that the phenomenon remained in the same position, he jumped out of bed to get his camera.

It was a very luminous object, motionless, oval-shaped and in a slanted position. At arm's length it was circa 5cm wide and 2cm high [The in situ investigation revealed that the actual width was closer to 15mm at arm's length]. The witness decided to quickly set up his camera and tripod on the roof terrace of Dance Hall Bellewaerde. He took a picture with an exposure time of about 3 minutes. The total sighting was estimated to have lasted 7 minutes and ended when a cloudbank coming in from the East covered the still motionless luminous phenomenon (some of these clouds are visible in the lower part of the photograph.) Before that, the weather had been clear with moonshine.

It was a lenticular object with fuzzy contours. The light was of a broken white and its intensity never changed. No luminous trail and no sound whatsoever were observed. With the naked eye, the witness noticed that the extremities of the apparition looked pointed.



Fig. 297. September 5, 1977, Zillebeke. Cropped version of a print presumably made directly from the original (compare with the newspaper version further down the text).
Photo by Pierre de Vinck. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

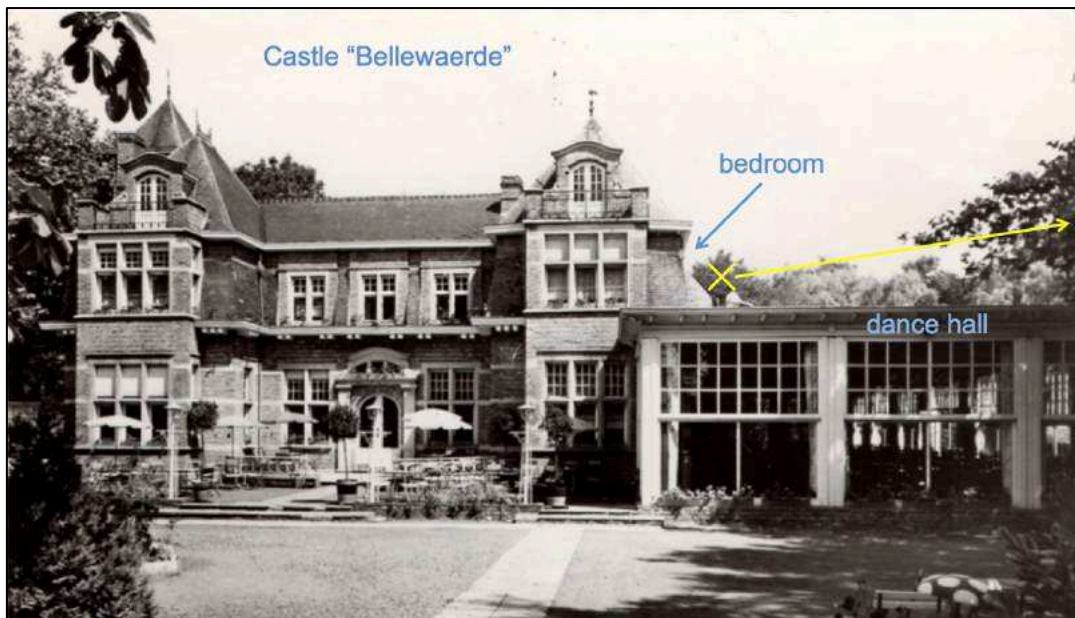


Fig. 298. Old (undated) postcard of Castle Bellewaerde. The dance hall with its flat roof is on the right, by the bedroom. The yellow cross and arrow mark the position of the camera and the direction in which the phenomenon was observed.
Borrowed from <http://www.bellewaerdefun.be/media/postkaarten>

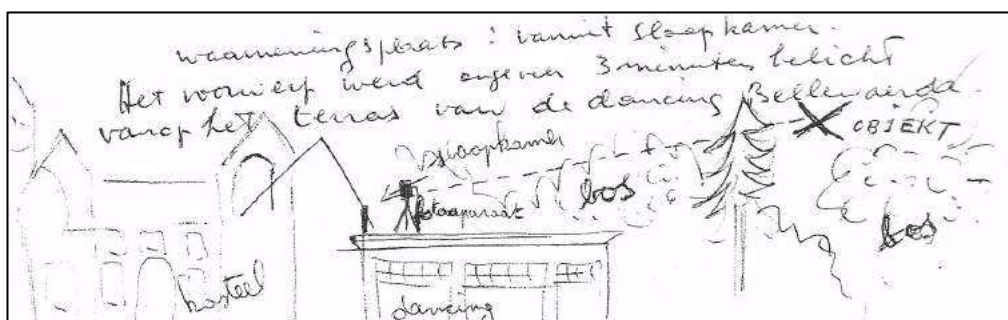


Fig. 299. Sketch of the situation executed by Pierre de Vinck. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

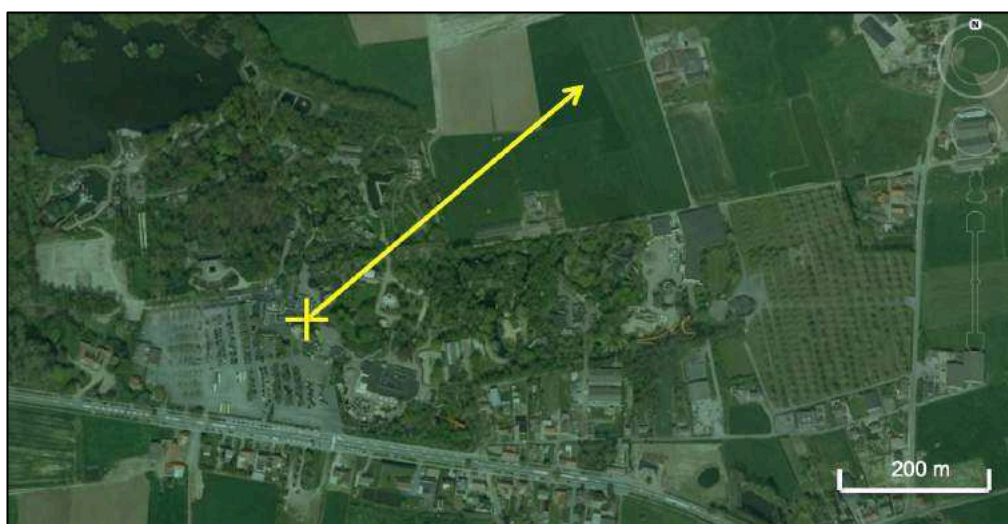


Fig. 300. Google Earth photo of the sighting location with yellow cross and arrow marking the camera position and the direction in which the phenomenon was spotted according to the compass reading obtained during the on-site investigation.



Fig. 301. Newspaper photograph showing Pierre de Vinck pointing towards the open space in between the trees where he claims to have seen the strange light. Borrowed from *Het Wekelijks Nieuws Ieper*, September 9, 1977. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

We pick up where we left De Groote's report:

With the help of a compass, the azimuth of the phenomenon was found to be 50°; the height above the horizon could be fixed at about 30°. According to the witness, the Moon was visible in the South. It was rather chilly, 5 to 8° C, with a light breeze from the East. With all due reservations, the witness estimated the altitude of the phenomenon at about 500m.

From the roof terrace, one can see a pine tree on the left at a distance of 15m; to the right there is a weeping willow, 25m away. Pierre de Vinck saw the phenomenon in between these trees; the planet Venus was close to the crown of the willow tree.

*Pierre de Vinck compared what he had seen to what was photographed on January 14, 1969 in Elsthorpe, New Zealand. A photo he found on page 278 of *UFO's boven het Oostblok* published by Julien Weverbergh."* [2]

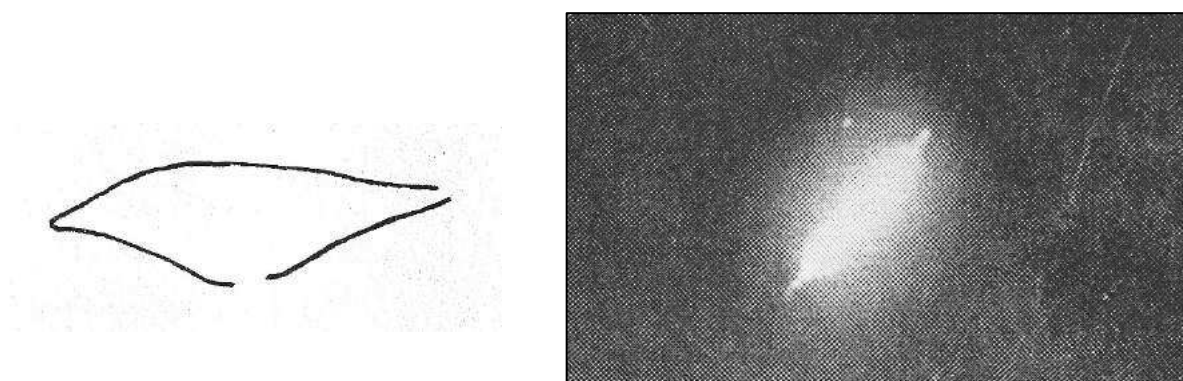


Fig. 302. LEFT: witness sketch of the phenomenon. Borrowed from *UFO INFO*. RIGHT: photo by Michael Bennett. Elsthorpe, New Zealand, 1969. Borrowed from *UFO's boven het Oostblok*.

Weverbergh borrowed the New Zealand picture from an article published in *Flying Saucer Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4, July-August 1969, page 32. Calculations by Spanish researcher Manuel Borraz showed that it almost certainly concerns a time exposure of Jupiter (the photo represents an extreme blow-up of what is merely a tiny streak on the original.) Below is a better print (also greatly enlarged and cropped) that appeared in Michael Hervey's *UFOs Over the Southern Hemisphere* (Robert Hale, London, 1975, plate next to page 161).

Fig. 303. A darker version of the New Zealand photo.



Rudy de Groote's article continues:

There is no doubt that Pierre de Vinck got very interested by what he photographed. This becomes clear from the fact that he tried to obtain a clearer image of the object by making multiple prints on different photo papers. Despite the fact that he read Weverbergh's book, the witness does not seem to have much interest in the UFO phenomenon.

According to the *UFO INFO* article, the photograph (negative?) was examined under the microscope. No scratches, defects or any evidence of manipulation were found. The grain density appeared normal.

The camera used was a *Fujica 701* single lens reflex camera loaded with a 35mm film and equipped with a 55mm changeable lens. Diaphragm was set at 1.8. The tripod was a lightweight *Topman 5R4*. A cable release was used to make the 3 minutes exposure.

Problems first arose when the investigators attempted to identify the bright round light just left of the willow tree. Astronomical data revealed that, if the photo was taken on September 5 at 4:00 a.m., it could not have been Venus. At that time, the planet, though at the right azimuth (namely 60°, i.e. some 10° to the right of the unknown light), had only just appeared on the horizon. Because the photo shows the light at a much more elevated position, the investigators believed that Capella would be a better candidate. We disagree: at 4:00 a.m., Capella, with magnitude 0.05 and azimuth 72°, was at an elevation of 50°. Considering that a 55mm camera lens subtends a vertical viewing angle of only 24.6°, we are looking at a light with an elevation not exceeding 15°. Jupiter (with magnitude -1.75, azimuth 85° and altitude 27°) might have been a better candidate, but still too high and in the East, not

Northeast. Below is a sky map of the eastern sky that shows the situation at 4:00 a.m.:

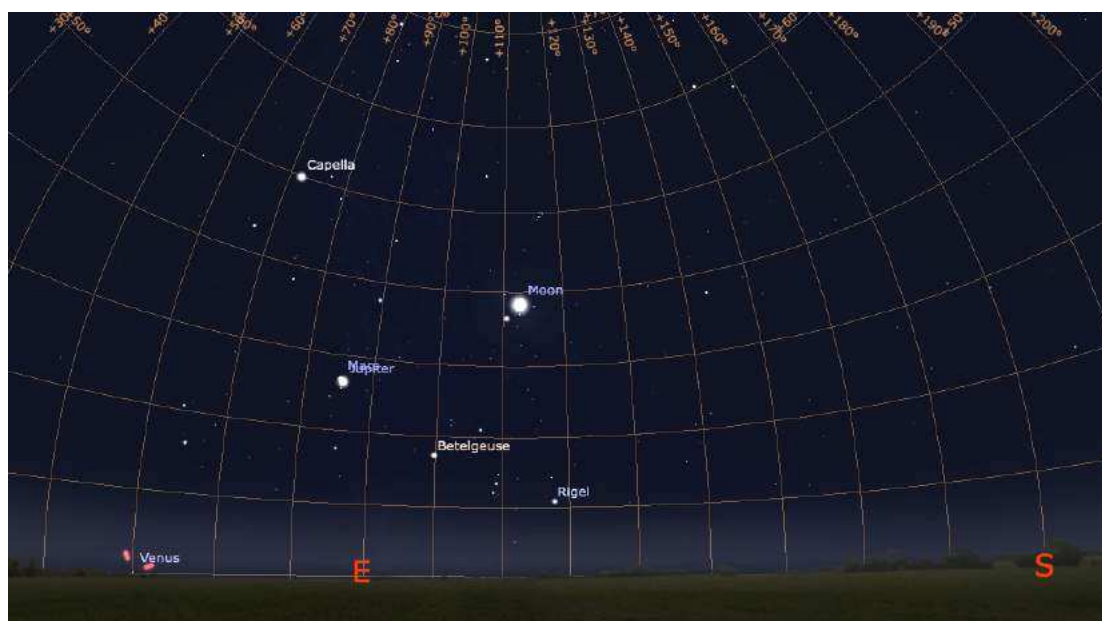


Fig. 304. *Stellarium* screen capture of the eastern sky for Ypres on September 5, 1977 at 4:00 a.m.

Note that at 4:00 a.m. the Moon was in the East-Southeast, not in the South as De Groote wrote. Venus, with magnitude -3.42 and therefore the only astronomical body to match the brightness of the round light, is visible near the horizon on the bottom left of the map. The planet would only have reached an altitude comparable to that of the round light in the De Vinck's photo at or after 5:30 a.m. With Pierre de Vinck claiming that the clouds seen in the picture were in the East and the Moon was in the South, these statements, too, would be easier to reconcile with a photo taken two hours after the purported time of the incident. In this same regard, SPW correspondent Jean-Marie Gantois, a physics teacher and co-author of a skeptic book on UFOs, pointed out that there appears to be too much skylight near the horizon for a picture taken at 4:00 a.m. (local inquiries confirmed that there are no industrial sites or highways in that direction that can account for this luminosity in the bottom half of the picture.) This too suggests that the photo was taken much later, presumably closer to 6:00 a.m. (sunrise was at 7:08 a.m., civil twilight at 6:34.)

A later time would also imply a different azimuth for Venus and the unknown light. At 6:00 a.m. for instance, Venus would have been at 82° azimuth, which would place the unknown light closer to 75° instead of 50° . Erroneous compass readings are common in UFO investigations, but the position of the willow tree (which can still be seen in Google Earth images from 2007) seems to confirm a 50° rather than a 75° azimuth. Not knowing the exact

spot where the tripod was set up on this 10x35 m wide roof, we can conclude that the picture **may** have been taken between 5:30 and 6:00 a.m. on September 5, but definitely not around 4:00 a.m.

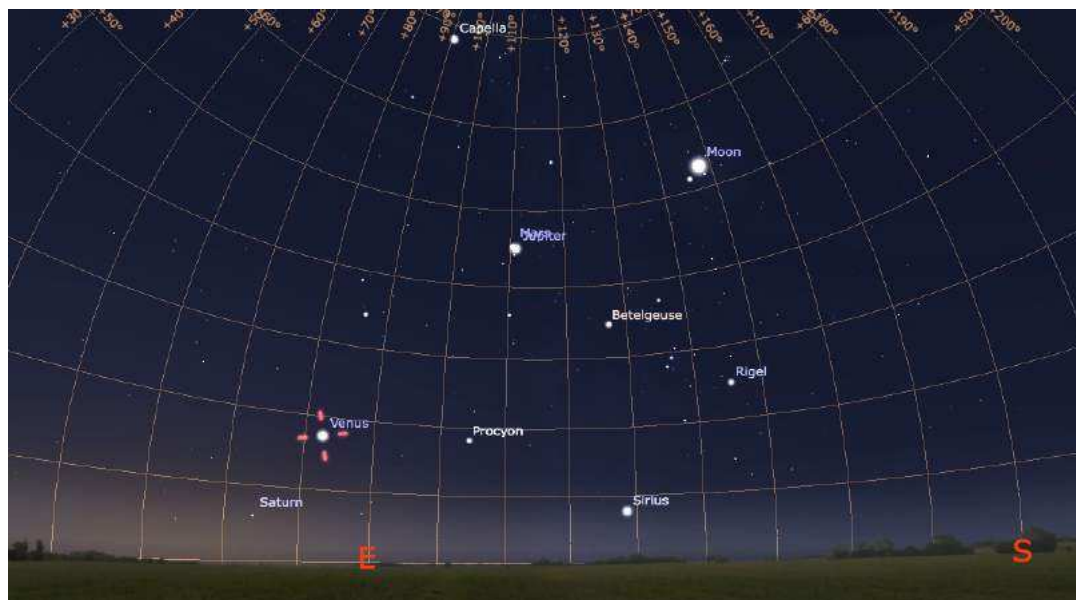


Fig. 305. *Stellarium* screen capture of the eastern sky for Ypres on September 5, 1977 at 6:00 a.m.

Identifying other celestial bodies on the photo would have solved the riddle, but an attempt to do so proved too ambiguous because the image we have is littered with dust particles (appearing as white dots on the print and making it impossible to tell which is a star and which is dust).

A related problem is the fact that the image of the round light shows no displacement. With an exposure time of 3 minutes and a 55mm lens, Venus should have produced a small but distinct trail on the film. According to Jean-Marie Gantois, this is a strong argument against a 3-minute exposure.

Gantois further notes that the image of what is believed to be Venus is diffuse while the trees appear to be in focus. Studying the round light with a magnifying loupe, he found that the light has the shape of a regular pentagon (invisible on the low-quality print reproduced here). This would suggest that the objective was not set at infinite, producing an out of focus image that takes the shape of the camera's aperture. [3] The "UFO" however appears more sharply delineated. Gantois wonders if the De Vinck may not have photographed a background scene through a window with a light source in his back reflecting in the windowpane (note that the witness' bedroom opens out on the roof terrace.) A picture taken under these circumstances would produce an image in which objects close to the lens (like the trees and the hypothetical light inside the room) are in focus while distant objects (like stars and planets) are out of focus.

There is another element that does not fit with the story, something we noticed when we took a closer look at this less cropped photo published in the local weekly *Het Wekelijks Nieuws leper*.



Fig. 306. An overlay of two images: the larger one is a reproduction taken from the local weekly that was the first to publish the story, the smaller one is the print the authors obtained via Jacques Bonabot of GESAG.

Strangely, the unidentified light in the photo published in the weekly (marked with an arrow by its editors) appears in a different position, more to the right and lower than what the print provided to the investigators shows. Yet, the positions of the trees and the round light match pretty well in this overlay (though they are slightly off too). This find implies that more than one picture was taken.

One explanation would be that the photographer made a double exposure or used a double print technique by combining a photograph of the trees and Venus with a photograph of a fake UFO (like an illuminated desk lamp or a reflection thereof on a shiny surface.) Separate trials would produce images with identical backgrounds but displaced UFOs. An interesting detail in this regard is the mention that De Vinck tried to make several prints on different photo papers. It tells us that the witness had a dark room at his disposal and was acquainted with photographic techniques. As someone who just finished his studies in commercial arts, we can assume that he knew how to create false images.

This, together with the inconsistencies noted above and the absence of independent eyewitnesses (if truly a distant phenomenon, the unknown light

would have had a size and brilliance comparable to two moons), make us lean towards a hoax. The inspiration is not difficult to guess. It may have been his reading of Weverbergh's UFO book coupled to the fact that the weekly that first published the picture had already reported on another local UFO sighting in its previous edition. Besides that, there is also the circumstance that the witness' father entertained an interest in UFOs after having seen strange lights on two occasions himself. Perhaps Pierre de Vinck wanted to play a prank on his dad, a prank that got out of hand when the latter contacted the press. It is a scenario the authors have encountered more than once.

In January 2015, one of the authors (WVU) sent a letter to Pierre de Vinck asking him about his present views on the almost 30-year-old events. The letter yielded no response.

[1] This 1954 incident occurred on October 18, when Mr. De Vinck Sr. spotted a round, yellow object from the watchtower of Bellewaerde Castle, first at 11:50 p.m., a second time at 1:00 a.m. The incident received coverage in the October 20 edition of the Flemish newspaper *Het Volk*.

[2] Actually: *UFO's in Oost en West - deel II, UFO's boven het Oostblok*, written by Julien Weverbergh and Ion Hobana and published by Ankh-Hermes, Deventer in 1972.

[3] Gantois may have been in error here since the Fujica ST 701 did not have a five-bladed aperture. It had a cloth focal-plane shutter (i.e. two curtains moving immediately in front of the photographic film). Another possibility is that the camera used was of another type.

(References: *Het Wekelijks Nieuws Ieper*, September 9, 1977, page 5 + cover. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, September 10-11, 1977. Jacques & Pierre de Vinck, letter with short account to GESAG, September 25, 1977. Jacques Bonabot, *UFO INFO* (GESAG) Vol. 13, No. 51, March 1978 & Vol. 13, No. 53, September 1978, pages. 4-5 and back cover. Rudy de Groote, *UFO INFO* (SPW) Vol. 2, No. 8, December 1978, pages 21-25. Others, as noted.)

Date: Thursday, December 15, 1977

Location: Sint-Niklaas (East Flanders)

Time: ~20:00

Duration: ~10 min

Special Features: unseen by photographer

Assessment: Moon (mirror ghosting)

In its February 8, 1979 edition, the Dutch advertising weekly *Zeeuws Vlaams Advertentieblad* (ZVA) printed a picture of an "unknown flying object." The editorial staff had received the photo from a small group of ufologists (UWZV) with headquarters in Clinge, a municipality just North of the Belgian border.

In the article that accompanied the photograph, it is explained that on December 27, 1978 an inhabitant of the Belgian village of Sint-Pauwels had witnessed "a strange, slowly moving object in the sky that travelled from the South in a northerly direction." "Upon seeing the phenomenon," the weekly continues, "the man ran into his house to fetch his camera, took it outside,

mounted it on a tripod and took three pictures, one of which failed completely.” It was an article about the Clinge ufologists in an earlier edition of ZVA had prompted the witness/photographer to contact the group.



Fig. 307. Sint-Niklaas. One of the photos as published in *Zeeuws Vlaams Advertentieblad*.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot

In 1981, a young passionate of UFOs and the paranormal wrote a report on the photos. It threw a different light on what had happened. The author, Eric de Loos, claimed that the photo published in 1979 was actually taken in December 1977 in the city of Sint-Niklaas. “I know this”, he wrote, “because I am the author of the shots.” De Loos further revealed that the strange luminous shape was also visible on four other pictures that were taken that night and that “**nothing out of the ordinary**” had been observed when the shutter was pressed. The young man gathered that his friends of the newly established UWZV might benefit from what he now admitted was a “false story”. The year before, De Loos had formed a group of his own and, being the only member, had appointed himself as its coordinator. He dubbed his initiative “Galaxy”. Problems with his conscience prompted him to reveal that he had lied about the date, the location, and the circumstances in which the pictures were taken. A detailed report on the sighting that never was seemed like a good way to come clean. In the report, the circumstances in which the photos were taken are described, in the third person, as follows:

It was December 15, 1977. The Moon, close to first quarter, was in the southwestern sky. In a suburb of the Belgian town of Sint-Niklaas, a young man of 18 was testing his new camera. He took pictures of the Moon with different exposure times, at the same time keeping his eye on the various planets that were visible. As

an amateur astronomer, he was very interested in that. Ten shots were made, all with a different exposure time. Nothing special was observed. After development by the local photo shop there appeared to be a weird spot on two shots. At first, the photographer did not pay any attention to this and the negatives and prints disappeared in the drawer of his desk. End 1978, after a talk about UFOs with a friend, they were taken out again. The friend gave the negatives to the then just founded UWZV. Only two negatives and prints were submitted (negatives 29 and 30.) It was only later that it was discovered that the three preceding shots had the same object on them.

The camera was a brand new *Revueflex TL 300* (lens: 55mm, f/2.8) loaded with a 36 exposures *Revue 50 ASA*, color film.

Another Dutch UFO group that had already examined the pictures, namely the Middelburg-based USMZ, had found that the “UFO”, when compared to the fixed objects in the photos, was not in the same spot in each shot. From this, they concluded that the object had executed a loop of some sort. The discovered “flight path” was sketched as follows on a print of negative #30:

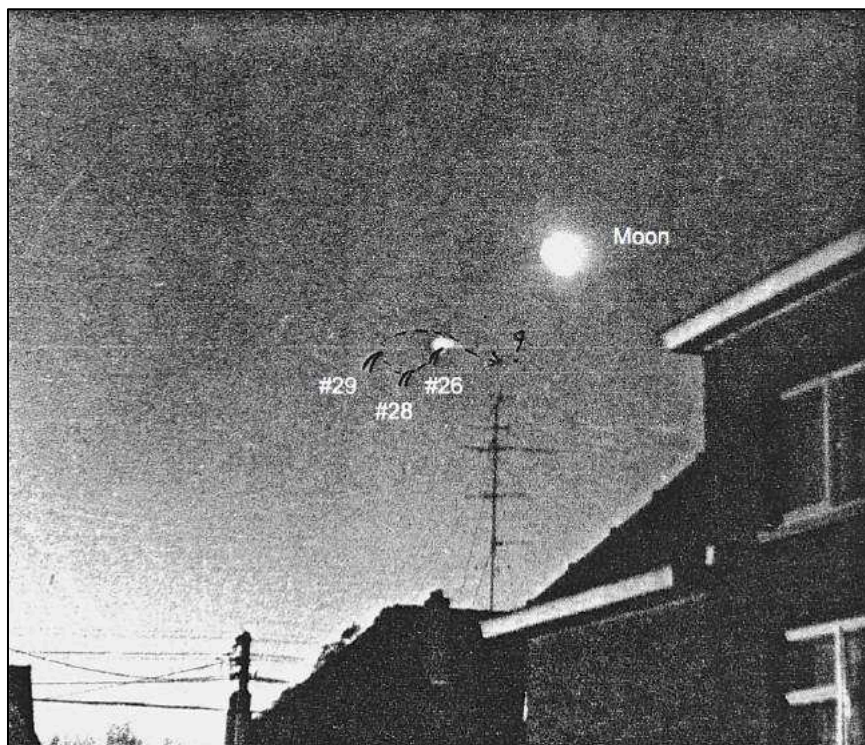


Fig. 308. December 15, 1977, Sint-Niklaas. Best available, cropped print of negative #30. Because of the long exposure time (2 minutes), the crescent Moon (33% illuminated) is over-exposed and appears as a spherical light. Sketched-in are the positions of the crescent-shaped light that showed up in pictures #26, #28 and #29 (numbers were added by the authors.) Because picture #27 turned out “too dark”, the position of the “UFO” for this shot is not included. The dotted line, drawn by De Loos and based on a biased interpretation by his friends at USMZ, imagines a circular flight path. Photo by Eric De Loos.

In his 22-page report, De Loos attempted to find a down-to-earth explanation for the strange light that had appeared on his four-year-old Moon shots. Because the shape of the mystery lights reminded him of a picture he had taken of the crescent Moon on another occasion, he believed that the Earth's satellite was somehow involved.

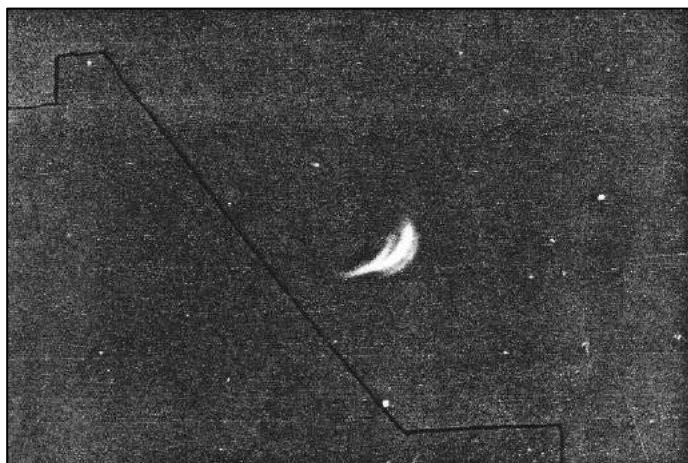


Fig. 309. Waxing crescent Moon photographed by Eric de Loos under similar conditions but at another date (the dark line marks the contours of a house that is faintly visible on the original). Due to camera shake, the photo shows not one but three distinct images of the crescent Moon. Photo by Eric de Loos.

Fig. 310. By way of comparison: two more examples of multiple Moon images resulting from an unsteady camera and a slow shutter speed. LEFT: photo by Wim van Utrecht. RIGHT: photo by Roger Paquay.

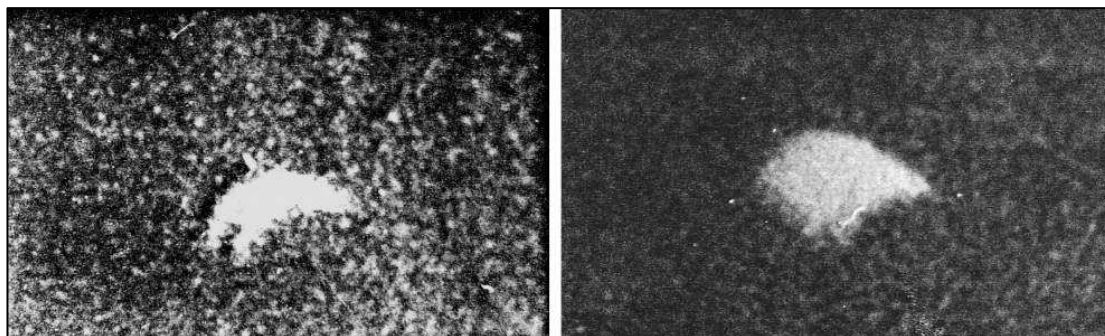


Fig. 311. Close-ups of the unidentified light on pictures #29 (LEFT) and #30 (RIGHT) show that the luminous shapes are composed of multiple crescents.

De Loos had also found that the size of the strange object on the pictures was the same as that of the Moon. Sketches made by the UWZV team showing the relative positions of the unknown object with regard to the Moon, further revealed that the shape and orientation of the object appears to be that of a mirrored image of the crescent Moon:

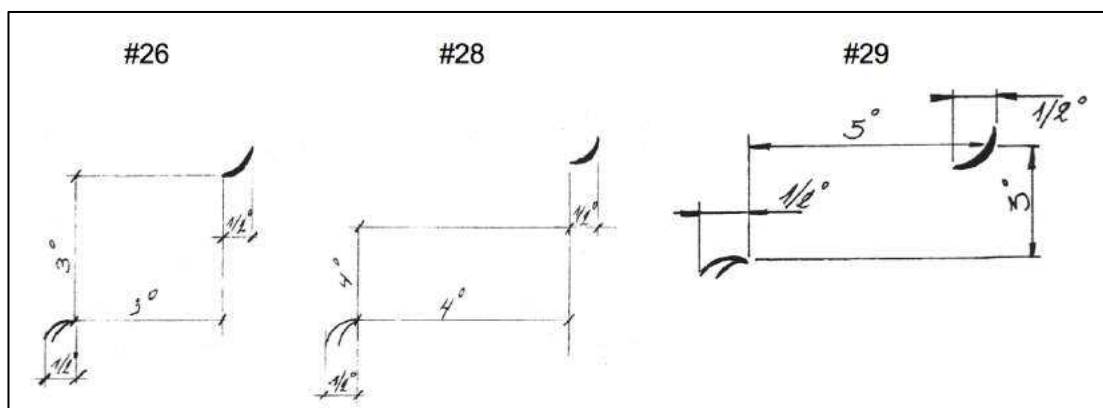


Fig. 312. Sketches from the Galaxy report showing the position and aspect of the unknown phenomenon in relation to the Moon for shots #26, #28 and #29.

These findings led him to conclude that the light was most likely a deformed image of the crescent Moon produced by a complex series of reflections, first in a window next to him, then reflecting a second time in a window in front of him and then a third time straight into the camera lens. The photographer constructed a curious diagram to illustrate how this could have occurred:

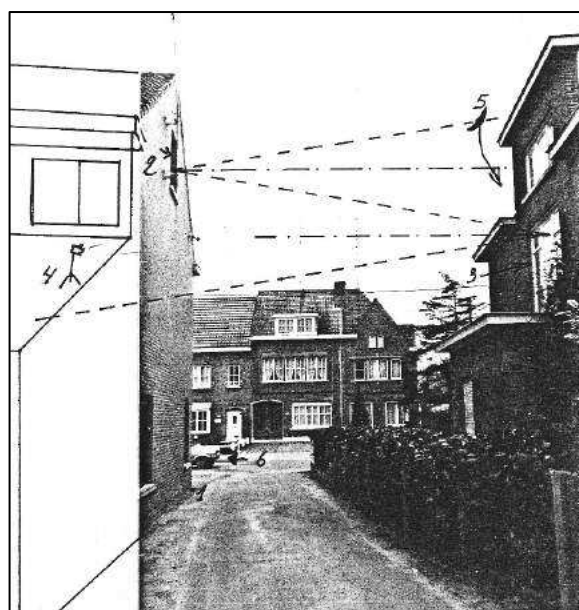


Fig. 313. Wide-angle view of the sighting location with the Moon (top right) and a complex set of reflection paths sketched in by De Loos. The camera and tripod are on the sketched-in roof to the left of the photo (marked with number 4). Diagram by Eric de Loos.

A particularly far-fetched theory, considering that the photographer was taking pictures of the Moon and would have had the camera aligned with this major light source in the night sky.

With the unknown light in the photos resembling a mirrored image of the Moon, it isn't too difficult to figure out what really happened: the photos undoubtedly are an example of *mirror ghosting*, by which a bright light source is reflected in the lens system of the camera, creating a less bright mirrored image in the opposite part of the picture. (For a more extensive discussion of *Moon ghosting*, see our entry for the Wondelgem, October 19, 1972 case.)



Fig. 314. Example of mirror ghosting in a picture of a last quarter Moon. The weaker “Moon” on the left is the reflection. Borrowed from <http://www.ephotozine.com/forums/topic/tamron-70-210mm---shows-double-reflection-of-moon--ghosting---pls-advise--102645>

A contact print from the negative film, published on the final page of the “Galaxy” report, confirms that this is indeed what happened. As expected, it turns out that the images presented in the press and in De Loos’ report were severely cropped. Below is a full frame version of picture #30 with indications showing that the ghost image appears where it should appear, namely mirrored on the opposite side of the full photographic image.



Fig. 315. Enlarged positive contact print from the negative film showing the full, uncropped image (yellow frame). The red X marks the center of the picture. The Moon is highlighted in blue; its ghost image (reversed and on the opposite side of the image's center) is denoted in white with a blue contour. The sizes of the Moon and its reflected image in this diagram have been exaggerated for clarity.

(References: meeting between Eric de Loos and Wim van Utrecht at the CURIOS congress, held in Bruges on September 27, 1981. Others, as noted.)

Date: early December 1979

Location: Watermaal-Bosvoorde, Brussels (Brussels Capital Region)

Time: daytime

Duration: unknown

Special Features: unseen by photographer

Assessment: fake

The information we have for this case is limited to the contents of a letter sent to veteran ufologist Jacques Bonabot, head of the Bruges-based UFO group GESAG. The letter, signed by a Mr. Eric Finné and dated December 23, 1979, was accompanied by two photographic prints. Here is what Mr. Finné wrote about these prints:

This photo was taken by myself in Brussels, at the beginning of this month. It was with great amazement that I noticed the appearance of this UFO on my print because I didn't see this vehicle through my lens. This vehicle was totally invisible to the naked eye and I suspect that the very long wavelength of my special film explains why it got "fixed" on my negative. I leave it to you to judge.

The film I used was a Kodack [sic] 3 "high contrast" for macro photography, used with 12 or 64 ASA. Sensibility was 64 ASA. What's more, I took the shot with an orange 0-56 filter in front of my Sigma 24mm lens.

I possess another photo of a UFO, but the quality of the image is far less good. In any case this must have been a very important vehicle. That other photo was taken in the same circumstances as the one I just mentioned. This vehicle too was invisible to the naked eye. I am putting my negatives at your disposal to give you an opportunity to make other enlargements.

Below are the two photographs that were enclosed with the letter:



Fig. 316. September 1979, Brussels. Picture #1.
Photo by Eric Finn   Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot



Fig. 317. September 1979, Brussels. Picture #2.
Photo by Eric Finné. Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

There is obviously something very wrong with these images. First of all, one may ask why someone would take pictures of an uninteresting part of the sky if nothing out of the ordinary was seen in that direction. The situation is even more bizarre if we know that a film was used that was developed specially for macro photography. Secondly, while the tree in the foreground appears backlit and totally black, the “saucer” is frontally illuminated. Thirdly, apart from their being framed slightly differently, the two images Finné presents are identical, up to the tiny white specks that surround the “craft” and every little wisp of cloud that can be discerned. Yet, there is one remarkable difference: while the tree is in focus and the “UFO” out of focus in picture #1, this situation is reversed in picture #2 (see Fig. 318 on the next page).

The logical explanation for the shift in focus from one subject to another would be that the photographs were taken shortly after one another with different settings and an ensuing different depth of field. In other words, the UFO and the landscape elements are not in the same plane. They are at different distances from the camera. One possible scenario is that Finné photographed the trees and clouds through a windowpane with the “saucer” pasted or painted on the glass. A first picture would have been made with the focus on the background, a second with the focus on the “UFO” (or vice versa since the order of the shots cannot be established with any degree of

certainty). What look like scratches and dust particles would then be smears and stains on the glass. The difference in lighting may have been due to the trees being backlit by the bright sky and the object being illuminated by lights in the room where he took the pictures from or by a camera flash. A variant of that theory would be that Finné placed a glass plate with a fake saucer on top of a photograph with a cloudy sky.

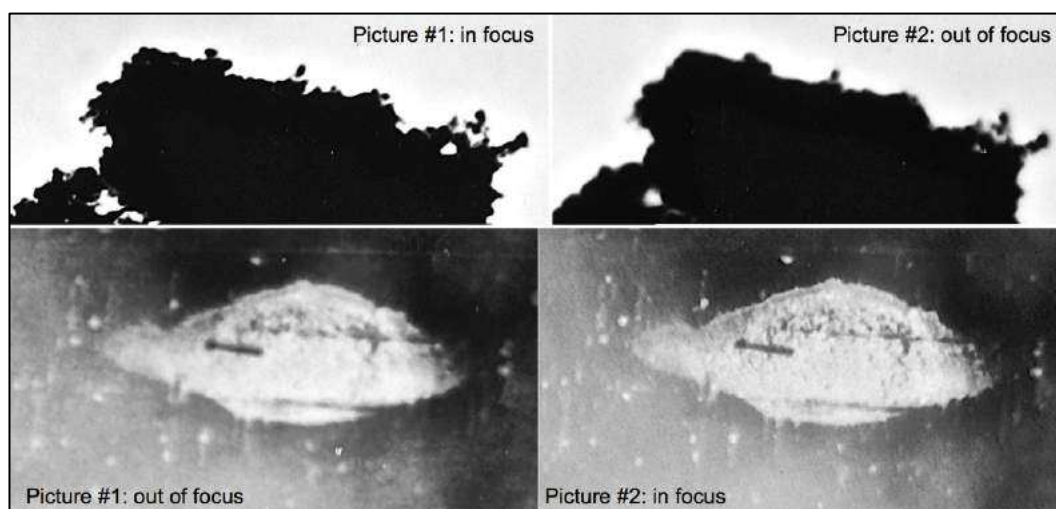
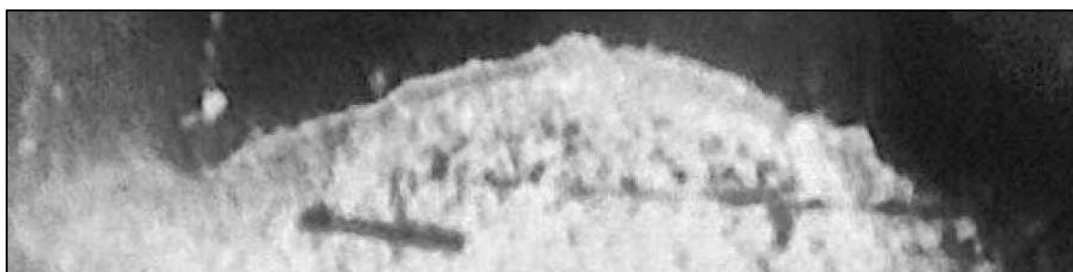


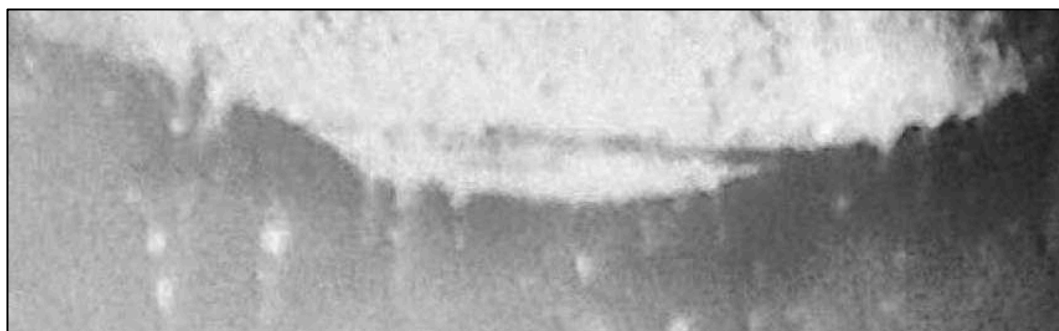
Fig. 318. LEFT: two close-ups from picture #1. RIGHT: the same close-ups now taken from picture #2. Note the reversed sharpness in what appear to be identical photos.

One way to create an organic-looking flying saucer like this would be to pour a small quantity of a sticky, granular substance like half dried-up white filler paste, onto the glass and then “mold” it into the desired shape. Note how the upper part of the “saucer” in our pictures has a light-colored outer rim flanked immediately by a darker one below. This is typical of a paste-like substance that piled up near the edge (like when you would try to “draw” a smooth edge by taking away some of the paste-like substance with your finger). What looks like an upper dome at first glance, appears to have no three-dimensional aspect:



Likewise, the dark, nearly horizontal line in the center part of the “craft” may have been a clumsy attempt to draw a “window” by pressing a pointed or cylindrical object in the paste and then moving it to another side. More

(vertical) smearing or dripping effects can be seen at the bottom of the “saucer”:



These dripping effects, in combination with the crater-like appearance of the “saucer” and the randomly dispersed bright specks suggest that the saucer is, indeed, made of some sort of half-solid, half-liquid substance. Together with its asymmetric shape and lumpy appearance, these are properties that one would not expect from any high-tech flying machine.

The strangest thing, perhaps, is that—apart from the different focus settings—the photos are not just similar, they are identical. Even if the photos were taken within seconds of one another, one would expect to see some changes in the smaller cloud wisps. In a mail to the authors, Chilean photo expert Andrés Duarte suggested another possible *modus operandi*. Duarte first points out that the images show all the typical characteristics of double exposures (“the way the object is illuminated is inconsistent with the rest of the scene, it is equally bright or brighter than the background and its darkest parts are of almost the same brightness as the background”.) “However”, Duarte states, “the presence of identical scratch marks and dust particles in both pictures, makes it more likely that the trick was performed by using *combination printing*”, a darkroom technique that consists of composing a final image with the use of two (or more) separate negatives (in this case a negative with the trees and clouds plus a negative with the “saucer”) and exposing only a section of the print at a time.

The 24mm *Sigma* lens that was reportedly used is a wide-angle lens with a horizontal angle of view subtending 74°. If this were a true flying object, it would be gigantic and no reasonable theory will explain why it showed up on film but remained invisible to the naked eye. Similarly, a 24mm lens would not normally be identified with a photograph that shows little more than the crowns of one or two trees and only a small part of the sky. A wide-angle lens is intended for panoramic shots. This might be an indication that what we are looking at is actually only part of a larger picture photographed from close by (which is where the *Kodak 3* “high contrast” film for macro photography may have come in handy). Unfortunately, GESAG never asked the witness to hand over the negatives, presumably because it was felt at the time that the photos were a hoax inspired by the media attention that surrounded the abduction story of Franck Fontaine. [1]

Nearly one year after GESAG received the photos, one of the authors (WVU) sent a letter to Mr. Finné requesting him to lend us the two negatives for examination. Not surprisingly, the witness/photographer never responded.

[1] The story in question centered around a young man from the Paris suburb of Cergy-Pontoise who claimed to have been kidnapped by a UFO on November 26, to set foot on French soil again one week later. Fontaine later admitted that he invented the story.

(References: Jacques Bonabot, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, November 15, 1980. Wim van Utrecht, 1980. Andrés Duarte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, March 8, 2015.)

Date: Thursday, December 13, 1979
Location: Annevoie-Rouillon, Anhée (Namur)
Time: daytime
Duration: ~4 minutes
Assessment: hang gliders

We quote from a questionnaire filled out shortly after the incident by the witnesses and sent to Marc Broux, head of the then popular Flemish group UFO 21:

We were driving towards Maredsous [on the road from Namur to Dinant] and suddenly my girlfriend said that she had seen a flying object in the distance. I stopped at the first parking space. Because we intended to take a couple of pictures of each other, I had my photo camera with me and quickly made several shots of the spectacle. Unfortunately, only one turned out.

In the distance, high in the sky, we saw two flying objects that always kept the same distance apart and were flying passed each other. Several minutes went by and suddenly they sailed away behind the hill above which they had been floating all that time.

The original black and white print that accompanied the questionnaire could not be found. Possibly it was returned to the witnesses shortly after receipt. All we have is the following low-quality photocopy made on thermal paper by one of us (WVU) in 1982 (see Fig. 319 on the next page). It shows the ridge of the hill, with a big antenna-like structure on the right and a dark crescent shape in the center.

The witnesses to this incident were Jan vande Gaer (27) and Elisabeth Wellekens (18). From the answers given in the questionnaire it appears that a total of 5 pictures were taken. Each of the two objects, only one of which is visible in the photo, is reported to have had the size of a car, triangular in shape, showing dull light and dark colors, and carrying something that looked like a “ball” underneath. Still according to the witnesses, other people on the

road and on the parking space were watching the objects too. In the envelope they sent to Broux, there was also a sketch of the scene made by Mr. Vande Gaer (Fig. 320 below). A caption explains that the objects “circled around the high-tension pole on the hill and passed each other at X [highlighted in red by the authors], but always one in front and the other behind the pole.”



Fig. 319. December 13, 1979, Annevoie-Rouillon. Cleaned up photocopy.
Photo by Jan vande Gaer. Courtesy of Marc Broux.

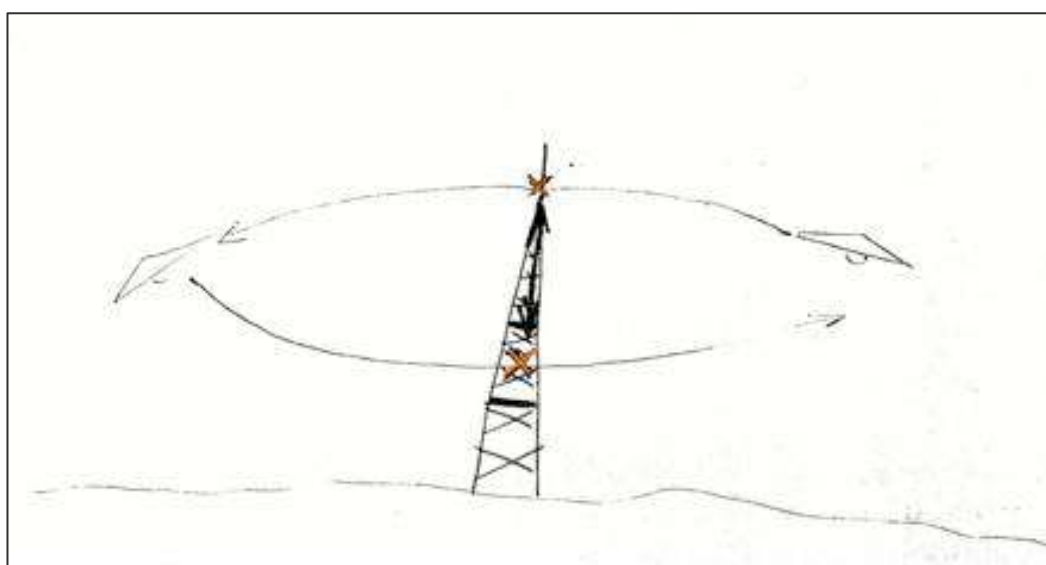


Fig. 320. Sketch of the objects by Mr. Vande Gaer. Courtesy of Marc Broux.

The authors identified the “high-tension pole” as a 163m high TV relay tower located on a hill near a place called “Les 7 Meuses” in the municipality of Annevoie-Rouillon, 3km South-Southwest of the city of Profondeville.

The site was and still is used as a popular launch point for hang gliders. Presumably, a flight of two such craft is what took this couple by surprise. On an instruction website for paragliding, we found a diagram that shows the Obligatory Flight Path, which pilots have to follow when descending into the valley from “Les 7 Meuses”. We inserted this flight path into the Google Earth image below. Note how the repeated 360-degree turns North of the river Meuse coincide nicely with the oval-shaped movements reported by the witnesses.



Fig. 321. Google Earth map of the sighting location. The yellow dashed line denotes the trajectory followed by the witnesses. The yellow cross marks the spot from where the picture was taken with straight lines indicating the presumed picture angle for a standard 50mm lens. Orange lines denote the Obligatory Flight Path for paragliders starting their flight from the launch site at “Les 7 Meuses” (based on a sketch found at <http://www.parapentebelge.be>).

The “parapentebelge” site also has this telling picture taken by a paraglider pilot sailing over “Les 7 Meuses”. It shows the TV relay tower and a dozen or so other paragliders:



Fig. 322. Paragliding over the river Meuse.

Paragliders shaped like those in Fig. 322 only became popular in Europe in the late 1980s, but another familiar type of hang-gliders was already around since the late 1960s. The latter model has an aluminum frame inside a shaped sail that typically has a pointed nose. In essence it is a delta wing with the pilot hanging below in a harness that resembles a body bag (see Fig. 323). This not only compares well with what the photo and the sketch made by Mr. Vande Gaer show, it is also compatible with the description of a triangle-shaped object with a “ball” underneath. We think we can safely assume that the flight of two paragliders solves the riddle of these two circling UFOs.



Fig. 323. Delta-shaped hang-glider.

Borrowed from <https://pixabay.com/nl/delta-vliegen-paragliding-281698/>

(References: Wim van Utrecht, *SVL Tijdschrift* Vol. 2, No. 5, January 1983, pages 9-10. Others, as noted.)

Date: Sunday, December 16, 1979

Location: Ghent (East Flanders)

Time: ~16:30

Duration: several seconds

Assessment: fake

In December 1979, the freely distributed magazine *Family Express* published a list of five questions about UFOs. Readers were invited to react to this mini-poll and send their responses to *UFO 21*, a one-man organization run by ufologist Marc Broux. One of the respondents was Frank Vandeputte, from Gentbrugge, a sub-municipality of Ghent. Regarding the fifth question, "Did you ever see anything out of the ordinary yourself?", Vandeputte replied:

I will give no opinion on this: however please find enclosed a picture made by a friend of mine. It would like to receive your comments about this.

On the back of the picture, there was a handwritten note which read (we quote literally):

UFO? GHENT 16-12-79 ± 16h30. This photo was taken on Sunday 16 December. This object (slightly enlarged) remained in view of the lens for a couple of seconds and then disappeared from the field of view. He was taking pictures in the garden. The three pale lines are scratches on the objective [sic].

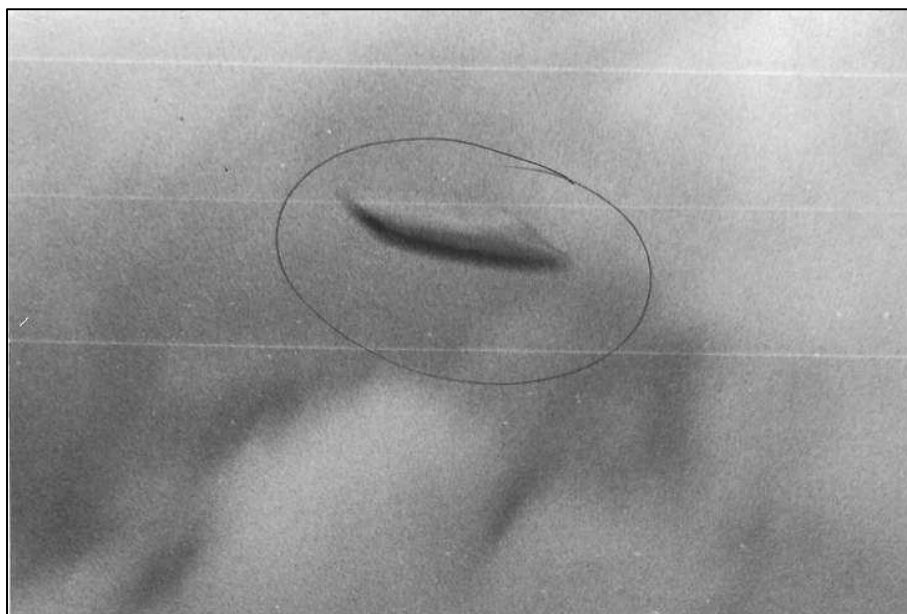


Fig. 324. December 16, 1979, Ghent. Cropped close-up. Photo by Frank Vandeputte.

A standard UFO questionnaire was sent to Vandeputte but was never returned. Suspecting a hoax, Broux sent a personal letter to Vandeputte calling the photographer's attention to the odd asymmetrical shape of the object. Vandeputte replied on January 23, 1980 that this was due to the object having flown at the speed of light, causing it to deform. Obviously, Vandeputte was having a go at Broux because this statement was in sharp contrast with what he had replied to the other questions in the mini-poll published in *Family Express*, namely that: "Extra-terrestrial spaceships, even if they do exist, would never be able to reach our planet" and that "UFO sightings are all optical illusions or inventions by hoaxers who were trying to get their name in the papers."

Attached to this letter were several other enlargements of the UFO shot, which were intended to "prove that the photo he had sent was not a hoax and had not been tampered with."



Fig. 325. December 16, 1979, Ghent. Full view. Photo by Frank Vandeputte.

The three horizontal white lines in the upper part of the photo are indeed scratch marks, evidently not "on the objective", but on the negative. They are caused by tiny, sharp objects that were stuck between the film and the film-support plate on the inside back of the camera, and damage the film during winding.

As to the unidentified object, the overall impression is that it was added to the scenery afterwards. Its aspect resembles the effect one gets when applying pressure with a blunt object to a still undeveloped *Polaroid* photo. In this way, it is possible to draw extra shapes into an unset image. Possibly a *Polaroid* photo manipulated in this way was re-photographed with another camera afterwards. Particularly suspicious is the contrast between the sharp contours of the object and the blurred aspect of the rest of the picture. In fact, the roofs, the street lantern, the wire and the clouds all display clear evidence of vertical motion blur, whereas the object itself is totally unaffected by the camera shake.

Further incriminating points are:

- (1) The absence of a detailed description of the event (all that is told is that there was an object in the air just long enough to take a picture; no other details are given).
- (2) The claim that it was an anonymous "friend" who took the picture".
- (3) The sharp contrast between Vandeputte's very negative opinion about UFOs being spaceships and his claim that the object on the photo is deformed because it travelled at the speed of light.

In consequence, there are sufficient elements in this report to conclude that the picture is a deliberate hoax, presumably aimed at fooling a popular Belgian ufologist.

(References: *Family Express*, 1979, exact date unknown. Letters by Frank Vandeputte to Marc Broux dated December 21, 1979 and January 23, 1980. Marc Broux, letter to Wim van Utrecht, January 1980.)

Date: Tuesday, January 1, 1980

Location: Flanders

Time: 00:00

Duration: not applicable

Special Features: unseen by photographer / negative lost

Assessment: camera flash reflection off environmental medium?

On January 7, 1983, one of the authors (WVU) received the following poor-quality Xerox copy from Belgian ufologist Marc Broux. A brief explanation accompanied the photo:

On December 31, 1979, at 12 o'clock in the evening, a bonfire was lit in the garden. Several pictures were taken. After development, there appeared to be a small oval light on one of these pics. Yet there was nothing that could have caused this phenomenon. As far as the eye can see, there are only fields and pastures. Film:

*Kodak, 36 exposures, 21 Din, photographs. Photo: flash (11m).
Camera: miniature camera, Minolta, reflex 35. Negative: gone.*

We assume that the unidentified light is the small dot just above the center of the photo. Probably the camera flash lit up a small object, like an insect or ashes lifted by the hot air from the bonfire.



Fig. 326. January 1, 1980, Flanders. Precise location and photographer unknown.
Courtesy of Marc Broux.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Thursday, April 17, 1980
Location: Bree (Limburg)
Time: ~23:00
Duration: unknown
Special feature: ground level
Assessment: fake

On April 23, 1980, the Dutch-language newspaper *Het Belang van Limburg* reported that on the evening of the 16th, a 32-year-old woman living in Genk had sighted two luminous discs flying past her house. On April 24, the same newspaper claimed that others had seen UFOs too. Among the witnesses were two men from Bree, a suburb of Tongerlo. According to the news

article, the two men had showed a photograph of “the landed craft” to the paper’s photojournalist Jos Gijssels. Baker Mathieu Creemers (48) recounts:

Thursday, April 17, at around 11 o’ clock in the evening, I was in my garden having a chat with my neighbor Tony Geldermans. At a given moment, a light approached from the distance. It looked just like a star, but violetish. It kept coming closer and got bigger, and suddenly this weird thing descended past the church tower. My neighbor Geldermans went for a flashlight and together we set out to look for the strange object. We found it quite quickly. Geldermans, who got there first, claimed it was still warm.

Below is the photo of the landed mini disc that was published alongside the story.



Fig. 327. April 17, 1980, Bree. Photo by Jos Gijssels.
Borrowed from *Het Belang van Limburg*.

We cannot help noticing that the shiny object on the ground bears a striking resemblance to an inverted aluminum dinner-plate with a baking mold on top. For a baker by trade like Mathieu Creemers, it should not have been too difficult to find a prop like that. Obviously, the story is a hoax concocted by the photographer and the two men in the picture.

(References: as noted)

Date: Wednesday, May 7, 1980
Location: Korbeek-Lo (Flemish Brabant)
Time: ~07:00
Duration: several minutes
Assessment: fake

On December 28, 1980 an inhabitant of Korbeek-Lo, a rural village just Southeast of Brussels, addressed the following letter to the Bruges-based UFO group GESAG:

Dear Sir: With this letter, I would like to report an observation of a UFO. I was the observer. In case it would interest you, I made a drawing of the circumstances in which this observation occurred. In the envelope, you can also find a negative of a picture I was able to make. I assume you would like to have a bit more information about date, time, place, etc..., so I will tell you my story now.

It was Wednesday morning, May 7, 1980. I woke up at 6:45 a.m. and went to get a book in the guestroom next to my bedroom. When I entered the room in question, I heard a strong humming sound. When I looked outside, I saw a saucer-shaped object approaching from the South. Because I am interested in space travel, I immediately thought about a UFO. I quickly went to get my photo camera, ran outside and was able to take one picture. After that, the craft suddenly departed at high speed towards the North.

You will find more data about the camera, weather conditions, etc. on a separate note. Perhaps it would be possible for you and your working team to find a possible explanation for my sighting. If not, could you then at least send me a reply?

The letter was signed "Emmanuel de Corte".

The joined camera and film specifications tell us that a 1975 *Agfamatic* 2008 tele pocket sensor camera was used. It had a fixed *Color Agnar* 26mm (f11.0) lens with an accessory built-in telephoto lens of 43mm. Shutter

speeds for this camera model were either 1/50 sec ("cloudy") or 1/100 sec ("sunny"). The film was a *Kodacolor-II* 110mm cartridge film of 24 exposures. It was processed by the photo services of a shopping mall in Korbeek-Lo.

On the same separate note, De Corte wrote that there were few clouds in the sky that morning and almost no wind. He has no idea where the bright yellow light on the photo came from, but asserts that the Sun was "not up yet". There were no other witnesses to the event.

Contrary to what De Corte wrote, no negative was joined with his letter, just this print:



Fig. 328. May 7, 1980, Korbeek-Lo. Photo by Emmanuel de Corte.
Courtesy of Jacques Bonabot.

Two detailed sketches were also included. They are supposed to show the circumstances in which the photograph was taken.

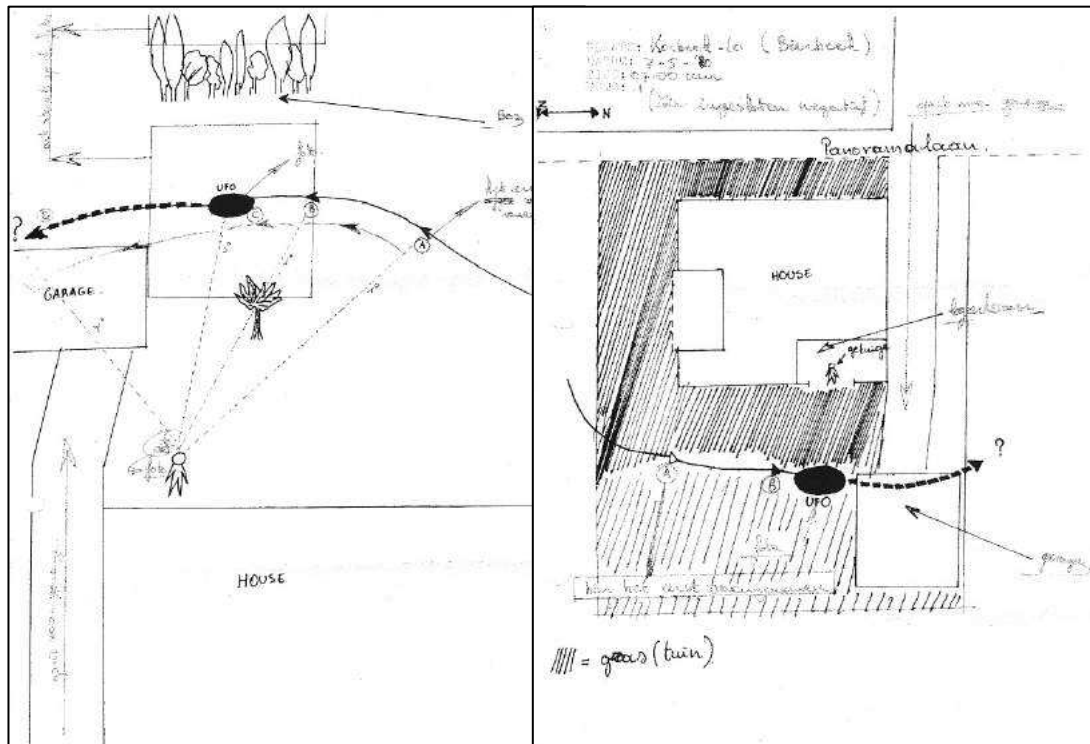


Fig. 329. Situational sketches executed by the witness/photographer.

The sketch on the left compare well with the situation as depicted in Google Earth satellite images from 2013:



Fig. 330. Google Earth aerial view of the sighting location with yellow cross marking the position of the camera and yellow arrow showing the direction in which the photograph was taken. The white arrows indicate the incident sunlight (as we will see further down, the Sun was already up when the photo was taken.)

A quick examination of the photograph tells us that the object's edges are sharply outlined whereas the trees in the bottom half of the picture—and in particular the more distant tree in the bottom left corner—appear to be out of focus. We also notice that the object lacks aerial perspective. It is completely black and shows no relief. These two elements are indications that the object is close to the camera. It seems obvious to us that the photo is a hoax executed by pasting a cutout UFO on the glass pane of a window. This paper or cardboard UFO is then photographed through the glass with trees and clouds forming a suitable background. The same cheap trick was also used to create the Châtelineau photos of February 1, 1977. GESAG Director Jacques Bonabot reached the same conclusion and informed De Corte about this in a reply he sent him on January 3, 1981. Not surprisingly, the letter produced no further response.

As for the yellow-orange veil, this effect is typical of a light leak caused by sunlight entering the body of the camera through a hole or a gap and exposing the film with extra light. (Over time, the strips of sealing foam around the hinge or hatches of a camera can loosen or degrade and create small gaps.) De Corte is wrong about the Sun not being up yet at the time he took the picture. Sunrise was around 6:10 a.m. on May 7 and at 7:00 a.m. the Sun was already 7.6° above the horizon. Moreover, it was in the East-Northeast (azimuth 72°), i.e. exactly in the direction the camera was (supposedly) pointed at, a situation that greatly enhances the chances of light entering the inside of the camera. Probably the Sun was shining through a gap in the clouds just underneath the bottom edge of the picture. As for the clouds themselves, the image is packed with them. This is definitely not a sky with “few clouds”, as the witness wrote on the note that accompanied his letter.



Fig. 331. Two pictures with yellow-orange veils caused by light leaks.

LEFT: photo by Lea Bolvig, borrowed from <http://blog.leabolvig.dk/?cat=109>.

RIGHT: photographer unknown, borrowed from <https://filtergrade.com/light-leaks-photography-inspiration/>

(References: as noted.)

Date: Wednesday, October 29, 1980
Location: Otegem (West Flanders)
Time: ~05:10 (astronomical deduction)
Duration: over 10 minutes
Assessment: Venus and Jupiter conjunction

The following quote is from an article that appeared in the December 21, 1980 issue of the popular Flemish Sunday paper *Zondagsblad*:

Mysterious balls over Otegem

On the night from October 28 to 29, 1980, shortly after three a.m., the wife of electro technician Marijn T'Joens, 37, got out of bed to go to the bathroom. She had just opened the back door when she hurried back upstairs. Totally upset, she shook her husband awake. Marijn recalls: "I thought there was a dog or a burglar outside the house that scared my wife. But no, she stuttered that there was something very weird hanging up there in the sky. Perhaps flying saucers ..."

Marijn calmly put on his clothes and went downstairs into the garden. There he saw with his own eyes that his wife had not turned delusional. "That early Thursday morning of October 29, at ten past three I saw a phenomenon over Otegem, towards the East, that I can best describe as two moons, two balls one on top of the other. They were very bright and did not move. I estimate they were at an elevation of approximately 35 degrees in the heavens. The real Moon was due South. Those two spheres looked much more yellow than the Moon." The night itself was as quite as a mouse.

"I was afraid that the phenomenon would disappear any moment", says Marijn T'Joens. "I was a little excited, but definitely not in a panic. Calmly I went back in again, took my photo camera and began to photograph the two moons. First on a color negative film, taken free-hand, and when that was used up I put a color slide film in the camera. Because the phenomenon kept dead still, I decided to screw the camera onto a tripod to capture the strange aerial scene with a long aperture time. My camera was a 35mm reflex camera with a standard 50mm lens. The slide film I used was an 18 DIN film. For the first picture, I left the lens open for 9 seconds. For the second ten, the third eleven, and so on. I made a total of seven shots. The next day I took the film rolls to the lab for processing. A couple of days later I got them back. On the negative film, which I had taken free-hand, there was nothing at

all. On the slide film, however, I had several images that clearly showed the foreground, the sky and the stars, and the 'two moons'."

Below is a photo of the phenomenon that accompanied the article in *Zondagsblad*. (Unfortunately, all we have is a low-quality photocopy of the photo in question.) The white arrow points at the two luminous balls, the upper one being larger in size than the other.

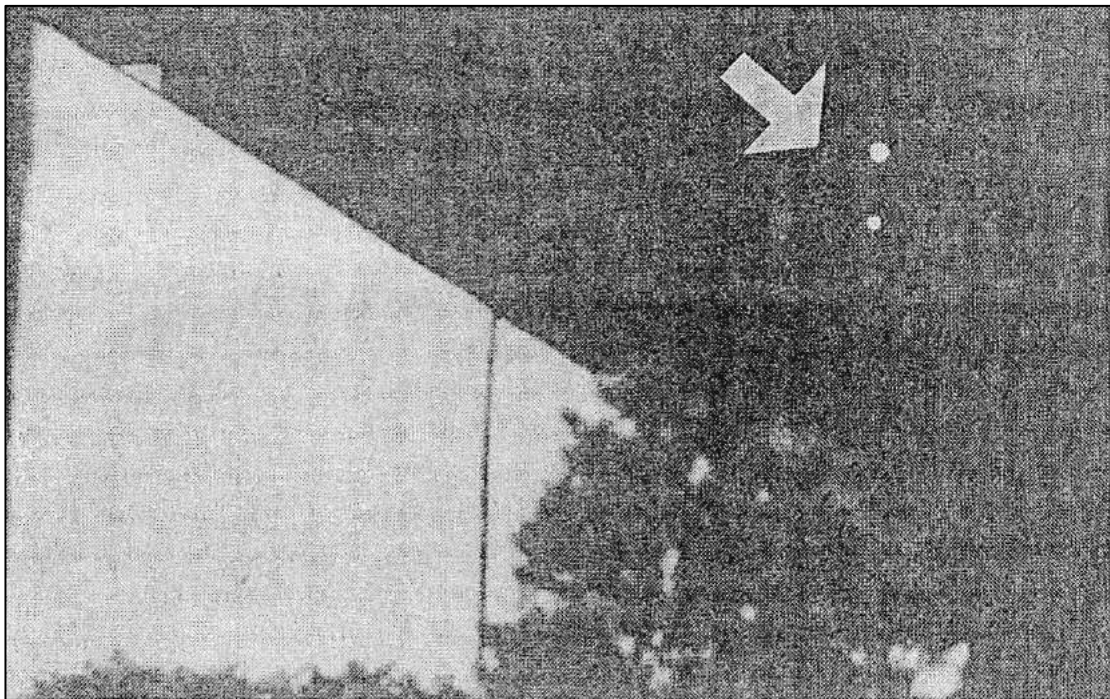


Fig. 332. October 29, 1980, Otegem. Photo by Marijn T'Joens.

The article further reports that a call for additional witnesses on a popular national radio show prompted 26 people to respond. Most of the incoming calls were from other people who claimed to have seen "the same lights" but from other places and at different times.

At 3:10 a.m. on October 29, 1980, the Moon was not due South as Mr. T'Joens stated, it was in the Southeast. It would be in the South only two hours later. This suggests that it was already shortly after five when the successful pictures were taken. Interestingly, at that time (5:10 a.m.), there were two bright objects close together and prominently visible in the eastern sky, namely the planets Venus (magnitude -3.53 , azimuth 99.9° , altitude 10.4°) and Jupiter (magnitude -1.29 , azimuth 99.4° , altitude 8.6°).

The sky map below shows a part of the eastern local sky as generated by the software *Stellarium* for 5:10 a.m. It reveals the two planets in a configuration that matches that of the luminous balls in T'Joens' picture: a bright Venus on

top of a slightly less bright Jupiter, only 1.8 degrees apart. The match with this unusual conjunction leaves little doubt that these two planets were responsible for the sighting, and that either the witness or the writer of the article got the time wrong. The fact that other people from other locations in the country reported seeing similar lights that night is another element that points to an astronomical cause.

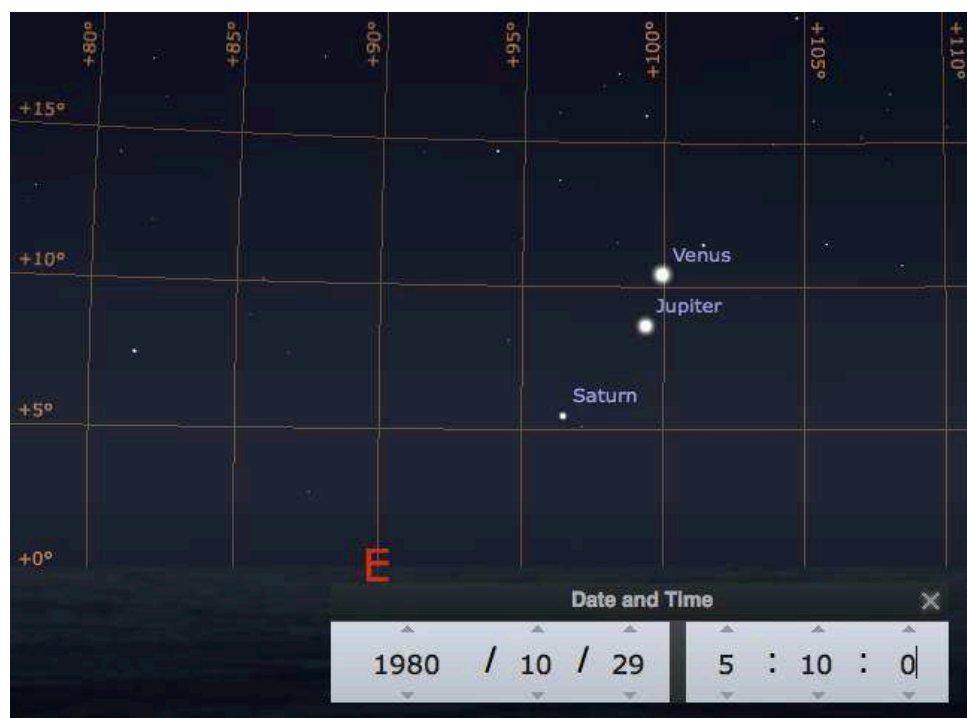


Fig. 333. Stellarium rendering of the eastern sky at 5:10 a.m. on October 29, 1980.

Most people are not familiar with astronomical bodies and are often amazed by the size of stars and planets. Also, their angle above the horizon is almost always overestimated by a factor of 2 to 3. Just two days after the Belgian sightings, in Sevilla, Spain, José María Monge, too, saw two mysterious objects over the city's sky. The objects were in the Southeast and moved very slowly. Local time was 6:45 a.m. [1] The newspaper *Nueva Andalucía* published a pair of photographs that show the inclined path which the two luminous objects had traced on the night sky. Spanish researcher Juan Carlos Victorio studied this Spanish sighting. After checking the astronomical situation for the reported time and location, he found that Venus and Jupiter were visible in the East-Southeast, aligned in the same position as the lights in the pictures. The planets (positioned side by side that day) rose at 4:46 and were slowly climbing in altitude over the horizon. They remained visible until sunrise. As in the Belgian case, numerous people called the media to report the phenomenon.

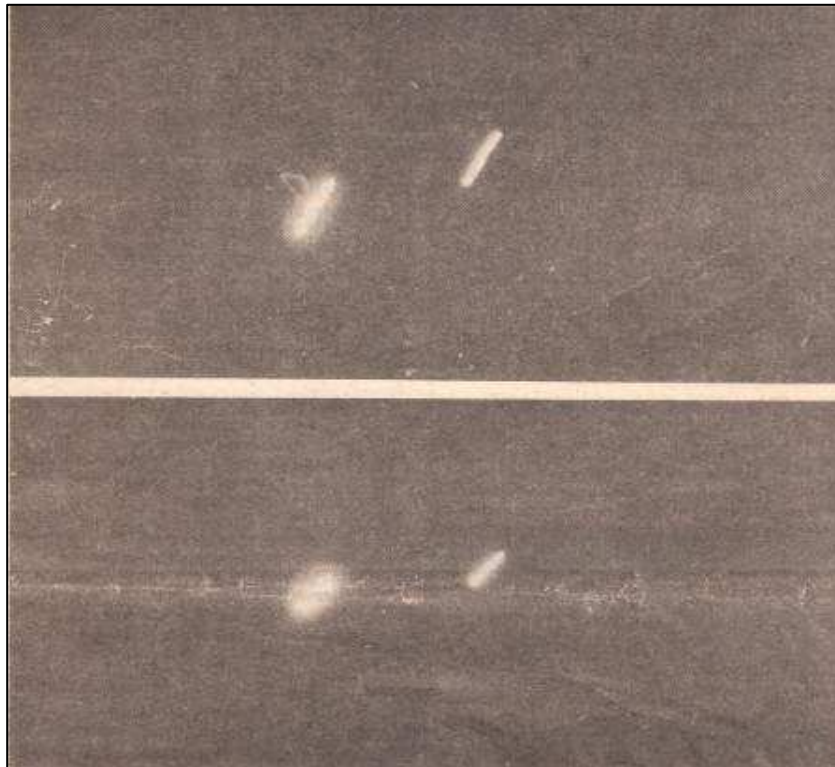


Fig. 334. October 31, 1980, Sevilla (Spain). Photo by José María Monge.
The elongated shapes of Venus (on the left) and Jupiter are due to the apparent movement of the planets during the 40 sec exposure time.

[1] Sevilla is in the same time zone as Belgium.

(References: Hugo Merckx, "Geheimzinnige bollen boven Otegem", *Zondagsblad*, No. 1661, December 21, 1980. Juan Carlos Victorio Uranga, <http://misteriosdelaire.blogspot.com.es/2011/07/cuando-los-planetas-se-disfrazan-de.html>)

Chapter 3

1981-1988

Calm Before the Storm

Despite the work accomplished by ufologists and UFO groups, and notwithstanding a continuous stream of books, TV documentaries and movies devoted to the subject, the percentage of cases fell back to 1.25 per year (only 8 cases for the total period of 10 years). As it would turn out, the silence was just the calm before the storm.

Date: Sunday, May 24, 1981

Location: Uccle, Brussels (Brussels Capital Region)

Time: ~18:15

Duration: unknown

Assessment: journalistic fake

The Brussels newspaper *Le Soir* of Tuesday May 26, 1981 carried the news that a reader from Uccle, going by the initials “G. V.d.W.”, had provided them the negative of a “flying saucer” photograph. Reportedly, the photo had been taken shortly after 6 p.m. on Sunday, not far from the train stop “Vivier d’Oie”. Coincidentally, another reader, designated as “J.L.”, and residing just a few kilometers North-Northwest of Uccle in Sint-Agatha-Berchem, had also called in to report the passage of a “circular-shaped” object. This second unnamed witness had noticed the object while driving home from a weekend at the coast. The newspaper admitted that the eyewitness descriptions “differed slightly”, but at the same time found it strange that they both related to an object “that moved at a great speed along an Southeast-Northeast axis over Uccle, St-Gilles, Molenbeek and Ganshoren.”

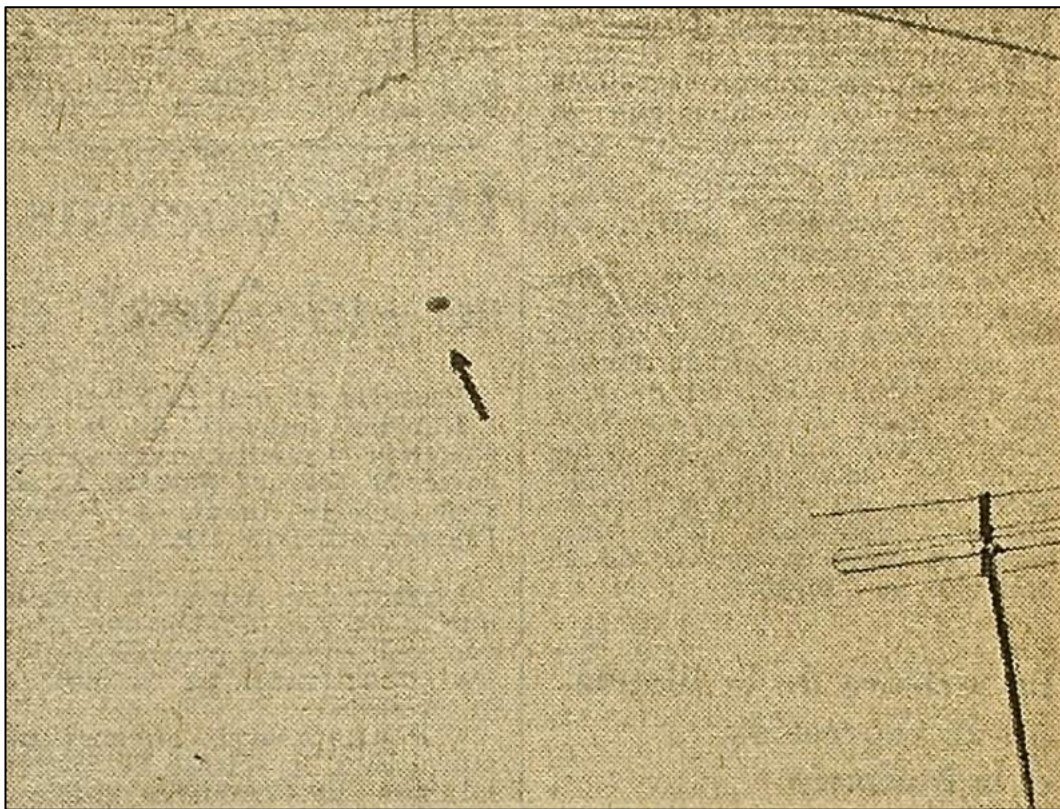


Fig. 335. May 24, 1981, Uccle. Photo by “G. W.d.W.” as published in *Le Soir*

The news story goes on to inform that, according to Mr. V.d.W., the object was dark-colored, silent and did not fly at a very high altitude. According to Mr. J.L., the UFO moved “with a varying speed”, accelerating during the few seconds it was observed. He claimed to know enough about aviation to be able to tell whether it was an airplane or not. *Le Soir* included its editorial address and requested readers to write if they had any information that could help explain the phenomenon or could add something that was not already reported in the article.

Two weeks later, in its edition of June 10, *Le Soir* confessed:

We cheated . . . we fabricated our unidentified flying object ourselves. Mr. V.d.W. from Uccle, who sent us a negative showing “a spot of light” [sic] near a TV antenna does not exist: it was a fake picture.

In the paper’s own words: “It was the intention to see if a false report could elicit a wave of sightings.” In fact, *Le Soir* received about a dozen letters and half a dozen phone calls. “Only” two readers claimed to have seen the fake UFO; the rest described unconnected incidents. The newspaper does not specify how the fakery was done.

(References: as noted.)

Date: Sunday, June 7, 1981
Location: Andenne (Namur)
Time: 23:55
Duration: 30+ seconds
Special Features: repeater witness
Assessment: non-event (frame from movie)

On October 26, 1998, Wim van Utrecht, second author of the present study, was attending a Space & UFO Congress in Koksijde, Belgium, when an elderly man handed him a photograph. The print showed a dark background with in the upper left corner a row of bright spots. According to the mystery man, who identified himself as a friend of the witness/photographer, the lights belonged to a craft from outer space. The picture, he asserted, had been taken from a car near the village of Florée, Namur, on June 7, 1981. No additional information was provided, except that the photographer had spotted UFOs more than once and had taken a second, more detailed photo of the craft. A print of this much more spectacular picture was also shown, but was not handed to WVU.

On the next page is the print that was obtained in this unusual way.



Fig. 336. June 7, 1981, “somewhere near Florée.” Full version of the photo that was handed to one of the authors.

Years later, when reading an Italian book on UFOs, first author Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos came across a chapter's section entitled “The case of Mr. G.B.”. It described an event that was said to have occurred on June 7, 1981 near the Walloon village of Andenne, 8km North of Florée. At 23:30 hours Mr. G.B., a Belgian citizen residing at Brussels, had visited some friends at Florée when, on his way home, he realized he had taken a wrong road. “At about 24 hours”, while trying to find the right route, he was stupefied to see “a huge object” to his left, flashing a powerful beam that illuminated the road before him. He pulled over the car, left the engine running and turned on the flashing emergency lights. Mr. G.B. then grabbed his camera and shot six pictures in about 30 seconds. It was a very hot night (23°), and the sky was hazy. A loud buzzing sound caused pain in his ears. When at a certain point the object was no longer visible from inside the car, he stepped out and looked up. G.B.: “I never saw it again and I realized at that moment that the car's engine, which I had left running, was now off”. Several Internet sources give the photographer's name as Guy Baecke.

Two photos of the UFO (Figs. 337 and 338) were published alongside the case summary. One is supposed to show the UFO in the distance, the other from close by. We will not elaborate further on the shoddy photographic “analysis” in the book performed by a certain Davide Moro (In fact, Moro concluded that the photographs were genuine because no wires or other artifacts were visible in the simple *Photoshop* bas-relief filter he had applied to one of them).

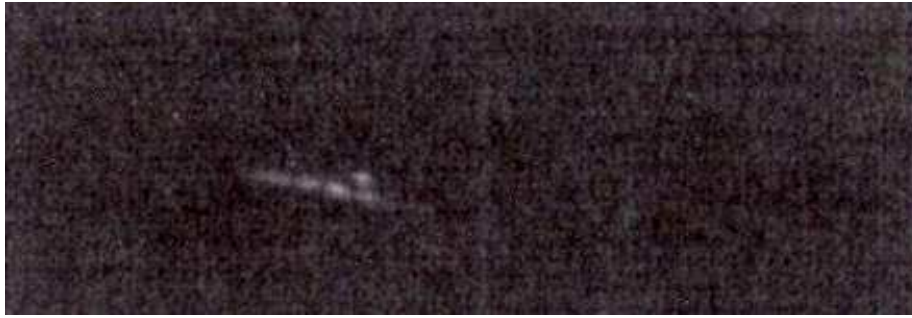


Fig. 337. The UFO in the distance as printed in the Italian book.
Photo attributed to Guy Baecke. Courtesy of Antonio Chiumiento



Fig. 338. June 7, 1981, Andenne. UFO at close range.
Photo attributed to Guy Baecke. Courtesy of Antonio Chiumiento.

It was during the preparations for this catalog, that the information collected separately by the authors came together: the photo in the Italian book that is purported to show “a UFO at great distance” (Fig. 337) is, in effect, a cropped version of the picture handed to WVU in the margins of the 1998 congress (Fig. 336), while the photo that depicts “the UFO from close by” (Fig. 338) was the more detailed picture that was shown only briefly to WVU. Especially the latter photo is atypical. It differs from the average UFO shot in that it shows an illuminated object from very close by. Convinced that he had seen this complex lighting configuration somewhere before, WVU delved into his archives and found that the lights were, indeed, those of a flying saucer. Not a saucer that was photographed over Belgium, though, but a prop from a French film. In fact, it turned out that both photos were borrowed from the movie classic *Le gendarme et les extra-terrestres*, directed by Jean Girault and featuring renowned French comedians Louis de Funès and Michel Galabru. The film makers used a real size model in combination with scale models and drawn animation to create the UFO landing scenes around which

most of the action revolves. The film was released in 1979, only two years before Mr. G.B. made up his UFO encounter.

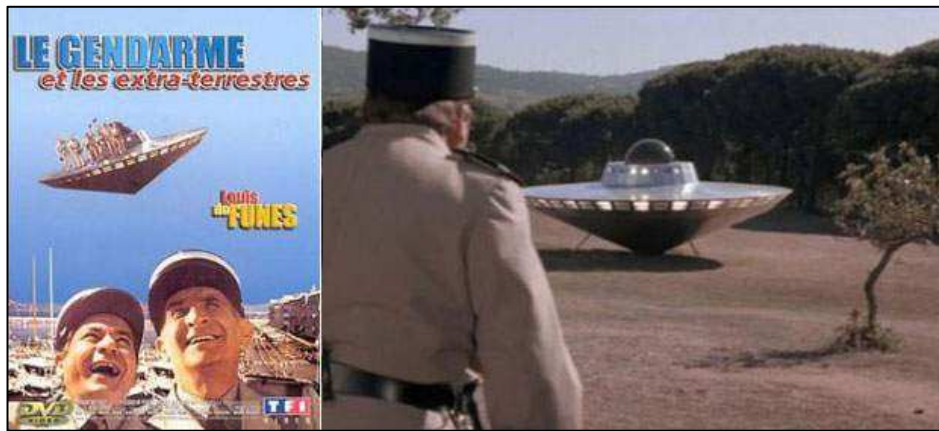


Fig. 339. LEFT: movie poster released in 1979. RIGHT: daylight scene with real-size landed saucer from “Le gendarme et les extra-terrestres.”

Below are two stills from another sequence of Girault’s film. It are these (animated) images that were photographed from a TV or film screen and then presented as the real thing.

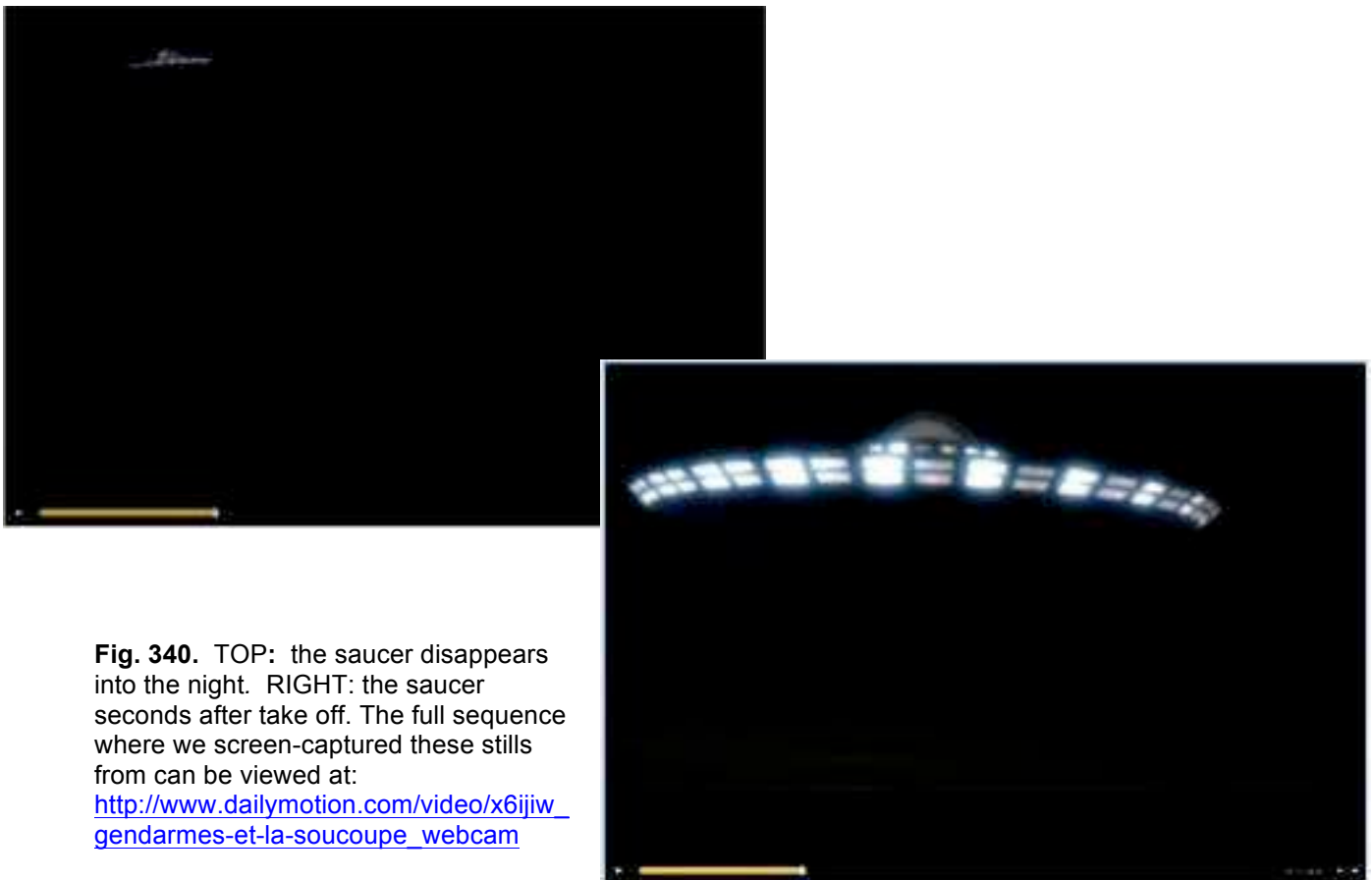


Fig. 340. TOP: the saucer disappears into the night. RIGHT: the saucer seconds after take off. The full sequence where we screen-captured these stills from can be viewed at:
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6ijiw_gendarmes-et-la-soucoupe_webcam

(References: Antonio Chiumiento, *Apri Gli Occhi*, Programma (Padua), 2010, pages 96-97.
<http://ovni-belgique.xooit.be/t2231-Photo-etrange-de-Guy-B.htm> /
<http://ovni-terre.fr/index.php?/topic/232-l-etrange-photographie-de-guy-baecke> /
<http://areps.org/rosberg.pdf> Others, as noted.)

Date: Monday, June 8, 1981
Location: Drongen, Ghent (East Flanders)
Time: ~21:30
Duration: unknown
Assessment: fake

A first reference to this photo was found in the June 1983 issue of *IGAP-België Nieuwsbrief*, a Dutch-language newsletter published by IGAP, one of many now-defunct publications dedicated to the claims of contactee George Adamski. In the editorial of the first page of the newsletter, Roel Franken writes:

Some time ago, Mr. Werbroeck from Merendree (near Ghent) wrote me that he had photographed a strange luminous phenomenon. The photograph was joined. Here is a drawing I made that is an approximate rendering of the picture (the objects are not outlined, they are white-pinkish in color.) He told me he first saw a single ball ($\pm 15\text{m}$ in diameter), which then split up into several much brighter but smaller balls (each $\pm 3\text{m}$ in diameter) that began to spin. The phenomenon occurred just before sunset on June 8, '81 [sunset was at 21:53 on that day], on the territory of Drongen close to the highway Brussels-Ostend.

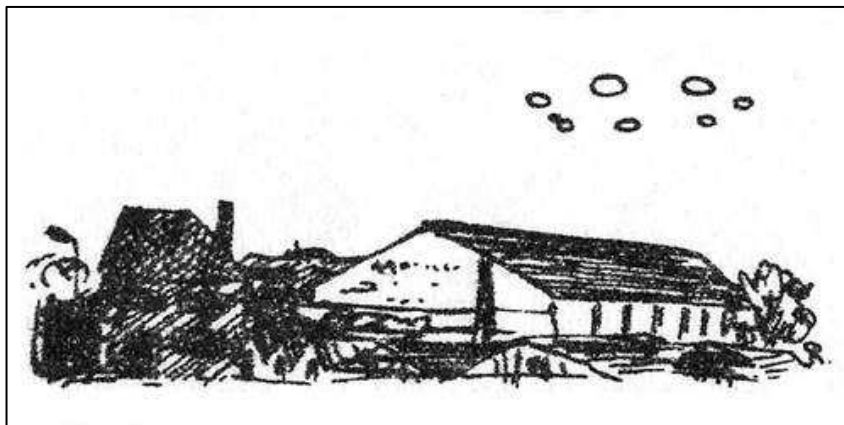


Fig. 341. Traced sketch from the photo executed by Roel Franken.

On March 16-17, 1985, the newspaper *Het Volk* published a cropped version of the photograph. The accompanying story ran as follows:

“Look”, says Michel Werbrouck, “they always told me I have a clear head on my shoulders, but if you start talking about what you’ve seen and captured on photo, even when you can name witnesses, then they put their finger to their temple. It’s not fair.” Michel Werbrouck is twenty-one and lives in the Veldstraat in Merendree. It was an evening in May 1980. The family was about to end a solemn communion celebration. Outside, it was a beautiful lukewarm spring day. Then, all of a sudden, there is this luminous object coming in from high in the sky over the E-5 in Drongen. Michel: “We couldn’t believe our eyes. My sister and I ran outside and saw that this ‘thing’ split up in seven fragments. I immediately took a picture. Every time we showed it to someone, they said it was fake. Well, perhaps professional photographers can make luminous balls appear from their lenses and pass them off for so-called UFOs afterwards, but I certainly can’t.”

The newspaper goes on to inform how the photographer approached several “renowned ufologists” and that none of them could tell him what he had photographed that day. It should be noted here that the name of the witness is spelled differently in the two sources we have at our disposal. Also, the newspaper gives another date for the event. Because the time lapse between the event and its publication is shorter for the letter cited by Roel Franken, we assume the first-mentioned date to be the correct one.

Below is the cropped photo the way it was published in *Het Volk*. The lights have sharp rugged edges in this halftone version and do not seem to be part of the actual image. Possibly, they were highlighted with white paint by the graphic staff of the newspaper. Another possibility is that the lights are sharply in focus while the roof of the building below is not.

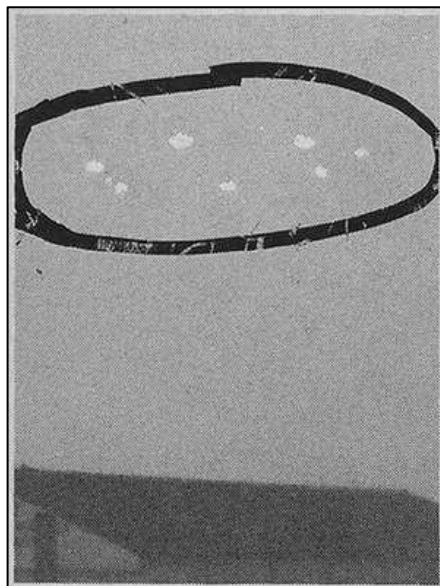


Fig. 342. June 8, 1981, Drongen. Photo by Michel Werbrouck.

The first impression we get from this picture is that it shows the reflection of a chandelier in a windowpane. The rugged edges—which look a bit like the cutting side of a tooth saw—may be a crisp image of a tulip or lily-shaped ornament that houses each bulb. The two smaller white specks (one of which is visible in between the two lights on the extreme left, the other in between the upper two lights) could be reflections of the lights on polished parts of the chandelier. A letter sent by one of the authors (WVU) to Mr. Werbrouck on March 22, 1985 yielded no response. In consequence, an on-site investigation was never conducted and the possibility of a reflection never verified. In July 1988, during a meeting with WVU, Roel Franken said he remembered the picture well and that he too had wondered at the time if this was not simply a chandelier mirrored in a windowpane.

For the seven lights to be part of a classic-shaped seven-armed chandelier, we need these to be arranged in such a way that they are more or less positioned on the corners of a heptagon. We checked this in creating a drawing of a heptagon viewed under a small angle. Overlaying this drawing with the photographed lights gave a good match. Only two lights were slightly off, but old chandeliers tend to be a bit asymmetrical.

The effect we are proposing is demonstrated in the following two examples of chandelier lights reflecting in windowpanes.



Fig. 343. Reflection photographed from the interior of a dining room in Westfield, North Carolina, U.S.A. Photo by Chris Anthemum. Borrowed from <http://www.wunderground.com/wximage/...slideanchor>
 INSET: Photo of a classic-shaped seven-armed chandelier. Borrowed from <http://www.stevesmithers.com/lighting.htm>



Fig. 344. Reflection of a restaurant's ceiling lights. Photo by Massimo Teodorani. Borrowed from http://fierycelt.tripod.com/xposeufotruth/needknow_vs_needbelieve.html

(References: as noted.)

Date: Sunday, June 5, 1983

Location: Moorslede (West Flanders)

Time: 01:00

Duration: not applicable

Special Features: unseen by photographer / repeater witness

Assessment: developing flaw

In June 1985, one of the authors (WVU) received a letter from P.V., a 30-years old SETI researcher and expert on stereo photography. The letter contained information about two unusual pictures P.V. had supposedly received from an acquaintance of his nine months earlier. According to P.V., the author of the pictures had no interest whatsoever in UFOs. His integrity was not to be questioned and total anonymity was requested.

From P.V.'s letter it transpired that, on June 5, 1983, his friend had been taking pictures of lightning activity in the rural village of Moorslede. His aim was to find out to what degree the light reflected off the clouds was polarized [1]. An *Asahi Pentax K1000* with a *SMC Pentax-M 1:2,50mm* lens was used in combination with a polarizing filter and a piece of transparent aluminum foil (the latter in an attempt to create different colors dependent upon the vibration angle at which the polarized light waves impact the polarizer). The film was an *Agfachrome 200* slide film. Maximum aperture was 2 with the lens focused at infinity and an aperture time of several seconds (bulb mode). The photographer had set up his tripod in a field some 50m from his house. The camera was pointing to the southern part of the sky. Suddenly, he got an unclear impression that the distant lightning flashes were reflecting off "something" in the sky below the inky-black cloud-deck. Two pictures were taken (it would later turn out that they showed nothing unusual). Because of a wrong move, the tripod fell to the ground and the camera and tripod had to

be re-installed. Next, two more photos were made, focusing again on the area in the sky where the cameraman thought he had spotted the strange reflections. This time nothing out of the ordinary was observed but, **after processing**, the latter two photos showed a peculiar light-colored bowling-pin shape. The time lapse between the two shots was estimated to have been 10 seconds.



Fig. 345. June 5, 1983, Moorslede. Frame #28-29. Courtesy of P.V.



Fig. 346. June 5, 1983, Moorslede. Frame #30-31. Courtesy of P.V.

The anomalous shapes in the pictures have a flat, two-dimensional appearance. This in itself is suggestive of a camera or film artifact rather than a three-dimensional object maneuvering through the sky. Lens flares are thought to be unlikely because of the absence of a light source in the camera's field of view (if the anomalies were a reflection in a lens or filter, one would expect the axes of the elongated shapes to point in the direction of a bright light source in another part of the image). The photographer himself had also expressed strong doubts about the shapes being lens flares because extensive experiments at the same location, using the same equipment and under similar circumstances (a flashlight was used to imitate the lightning flashes) failed to produce anything similar. The sharp outline of the bowling-pin shapes is also atypical of water drops or dust that may have got stuck to the lens or filter after the camera had landed on the grass. Damage to the lens system was ruled out too, because in that case one would expect the anomalies to have shown up on later photos as well. Insects, pollen or small birds passing in front of the camera lens are not an option either because no flash was used.

The following diagram, traced from several of the slides that were taken on the night in question, shows the consecutive positions of the two anomalies.

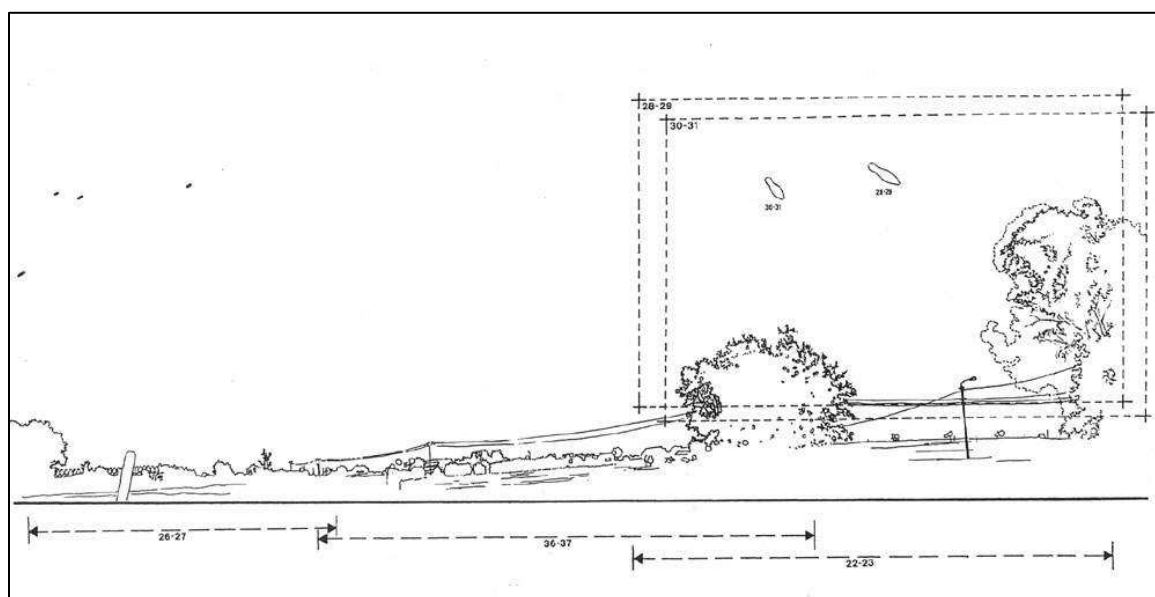


Fig. 347. Line drawing executed by Wim van Utrecht in 1985.

We decided to consult Andrés Duarte, a qualified photo analyst from Chile who regularly collaborates with the FOTOCAT project. He responded as follows:

I think these are development stains, specifically this looks like the typical stains caused by drops of developer fluid falling on the film before development.

Duarte's diagnosis put us on the right track. A search of the specialized literature (P. Heyse, 1981) revealed that stains like these appear on slides when fixer fluid is accidentally sprayed on the film **after** development. Nearly identical fixer spots were also found in a photograph taken in December 1992 in Wommelgem. Below is a detail of that image. The case itself is discussed in Volume 2 of the present study.

Fig. 348. December 1992, Wommelgem. Detail of a photo showing similar bowling pin-shaped stains. Photo by Rudi Smits.



In 1985, attempts to find out the identity of the photographer failed, but several points in the description of the events suggested that reporter and photographer were actually the same person. Today, *Google Earth* provides an online tool that allows street view imaging. The following image is from a point some 20 to 50m East of the spot where the slides were made: a field located behind the house where P.V. lived in the 1980s.



Fig. 349. Google Street View image of the sighting location.

The tree line and the houses in this Street View image match well with landscape details in the drawing above. Also, the streetlight in the foreground is identical in shape to the streetlight that can be seen in the first photo (Fig. 345). This, too, reinforces early suspicions that the photographer was, indeed, P.V. himself.

[1] A check of the weather data confirmed that there was a depression over the area that night.

(References: Correspondence between P.V. and Wim van Utrecht between June 28, 1985 and June 5, 1986. Transcript from an interview with the anonymous photographer (in Dutch) sent to Wim van Utrecht on October 1, 1985. P. Heyse (Ed.), *Foto- en Filmencyclopedie*, Focus Elsevier, Amsterdam/Brussels, 1981, page 293. Andrés Duarte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, June 12, 2013.)

Date: Monday, October 24, 1983

Location: Anderlecht (Brussels Capital Region)

Time: ~20:00

Duration: 2 minutes

Special Features: repeater witnesses

Assessment: aircraft

The main source of information for this entry is the SOBEPS publication *Infospace*. The journal reports that, at around 6:30 p.m. on October 13, 1983, Mr. and Mrs. R. were in the *rue de l'Agronome* when they saw a bright, stationary light like a “big star”, orange in color. The light extinguished after four minutes, then reappeared a bit higher to the left, remained there for one or two seconds, disappeared again and reappeared a second time to move further upward but now to the right, changing color from red-orange to white. Apparently, the object was coming closer, but very slow. It now had the shape of a lens with two dazzling lights. When the object silently flew over them, they saw two more red, and three more white lights underneath. It disappeared from sight, when a wall blocked their view. The sighting lasted some 15 minutes.

A few days later, the same couple had several more sightings, this time from the terrace of their apartment, which is on the 15th floor and faces West. When the weather is clear, it is possible to see the airplanes take off and land at Brussels Airport, 13km Northeast of their position. Specifically, they saw “strange” lights in the sky no less than four times in 24 hours. At 11:15 p.m. on October 23, they spotted an orange-colored light travelling through the sky, first in a straight line, then changing direction and coming towards them (eastbound). One hour later, they observed a luminous red dot following and overtaking an airplane. Immediately thereafter, Mrs. R. saw three white luminous points arranged in a triangle heading towards them. Apparently, the lights turned round before Mrs. R. could grab a camera.

At about 7:15 the following evening, Mr. and Mrs. R. observed a dull, elliptical object with two spotlights and a little light on its lower part. The witnesses decided to go to the nearby park where they would have a wider view. Only when they went back to the apartment, they noticed the same elongated shape flying over their building. Around 8:30 p.m. [1] they saw an airplane with all the typical noise and position lights. Behind it were two luminous dots: one stationary and the other moving in the same direction as the aircraft. Both sightings lasted about 2 minutes each.

In the course of this last *soirée d'observations*, Mr. R. managed to take several photographs with a *Canon A1 Reflex* camera loaded with *Kodak Tri-X* film of 400 ASA pushed to 800 ASA (a first time during the exposure, a second during the development). The photos, all taken with an exposure time of 3 seconds with the camera resting on a balustrade, show irregular luminous trails. The photographer was unable to tell during which episodes of the October 24 sightings the pictures had been taken. Yet, he was relatively sure they were from around 8 p.m. Michel Bougard, author of the article in *Inforespace*, writes: "From the first four shots it is possible to follow the evolution of the phenomenon, which progressively moves away to the witnesses' left, i.e. from the West to the South." Three photos are published:



Fig. 350. October 24, 1983, Anderlecht. Cropped version of photo #1 as published in *Inforespace*. Photo by Monsieur R.



Fig. 351. October 24, 1983, Anderlecht. Cropped version of photo #2.



Fig. 352. October 24, 1983, Anderlecht. Cropped version of photo #3.

The third photograph in the series shows the typical trail of an aircraft's landing light. A single light blinking on and off four times during the 3-second exposure caused the four evenly spaced dots beneath the trail. There are also two dots on top of the trail. These are from another blinking light, one that produced only two flashes in three seconds. In summary: in this shot we have two lights with flashing rates of 80 and 40 flashes per minute, respectively. Aviation authorities confirmed to SOBEPS investigator Michel vander Elst that these frequencies fall within the normal range of 40 to 100 flashes per minute for aircraft navigation lights.

The other two photos are no different from how the landing lights of an aircraft look when it is photographed without a tripod and using a long exposure time. Next to motion blur, clouds and haze (best visible in photos #1 and #2) also determine the way in which aircraft lights show up in a photograph.



Fig. 353. LEFT: aircraft headlights in a shaky picture from the 1970s. Photo by Hans van Kampen. Borrowed from *Aarde & Kosmos*, March 1977. RIGHT: a steady, long exposure shot of an airplane taken by Senior Chicago Astronomer Tom Lee. Borrowed from <http://astronomer.proboards.com/thread/3770>

There is no doubt that the majority (if not all) of the sightings reported by Mr. and Mrs. R. were caused by airplanes taking off or preparing to land at Brussels airport. In fact, the approach and take-off procedures at the airport are such that they take a good deal of the aircraft very close to where the witnesses live. The image below shows the aircraft flight paths over the Brussels Capital Region on February 24, 2013. It was obtained by layering radar data over a map of the region. The number of flights would have been much lower in 1983, but the overall pattern would have been similar.

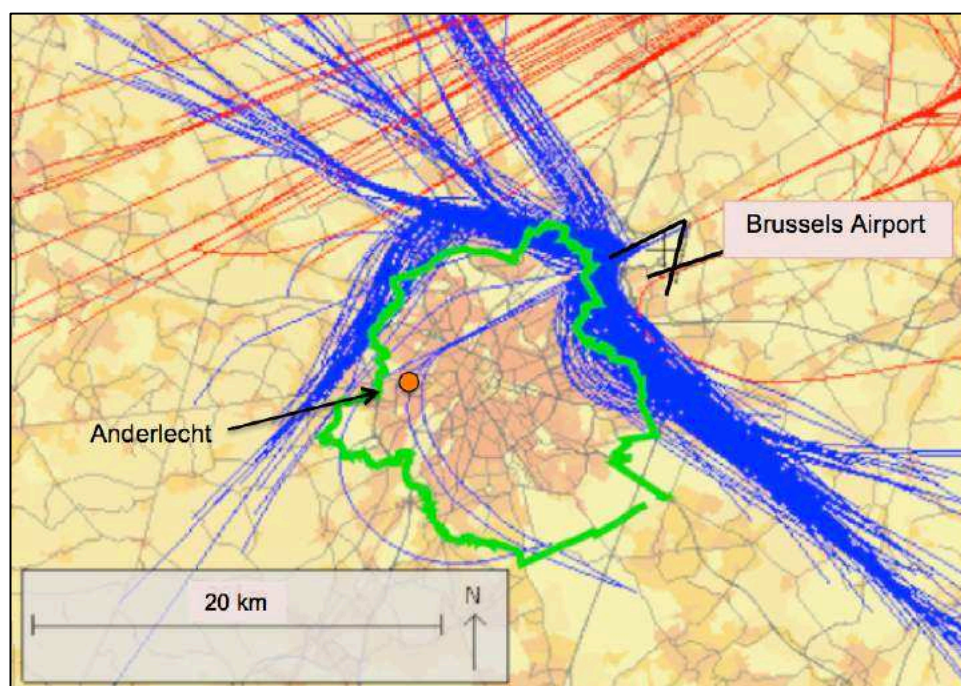


Fig. 354. Flight patterns over Brussels for one single day.
Borrowed from <http://www.pasquestion.be/en/moment-truth>

[1] "8:50" according to a list of sighting reports for 1983 compiled by Michel vander Elst, the SOBEPS investigator who interviewed Mr. and Mrs. R.

(References: Michel Bougard, *Inforespace*, No.72, April 1987, pages 25-28. Michel vander Elst, *Inforespace Bulletin d'Informations* No.1, February 1985, page 2. Franck Boitte, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, April 17, 2015. Jacques Bonabot, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, April 17, 2015.

Date: Sunday, February 19, 1984
Location: Zaventem (Brussels Capital Region)
Time: 13:00
Duration: unknown
Special Features: repeater witness
Assessment: fake

On February 19, a boy of 15 named Kristof Gorens forwarded the following *Polaroid* photo to Flemish ufologist Marc Broux, then head of UFO21. Broux, in turn, handed it to one of the authors (WVU) for evaluation. The teenager claimed he had photographed this “UFO” from his parents’ house and that the “craft” had “circled the house three times before it sped off like lightning.”



Fig. 355. February 19, 1984, Zaventem. Photo by Kristof Gorens.

One day later, Kristof notified Broux that he had had another opportunity to capture pictures of “the UFO” (see Fig. 356 in our next entry). That new episode torpedoed the reliability of his claims. The saucer he photographed was, in fact, a paper cutting pasted on the windowpane.

Date: Monday, February 20, 1984

Location: Zaventem (Brussels Capital Region)

Time: evening

Duration: unknown

Special Features: repeater witness

Assessment: fake

15-year old Kristof Gorens (see previous entry) also submitted three night-shots—*Polaroids* as well—of another UFO than the one he had photographed on February 19. In a letter that accompanied the pictures, Kristof claimed that the new photos were taken when he was outdoors, yet one of the snapshots clearly shows the upper part of a window frame (not to mention the reflection of the camera's flashlight in the windowpane that is visible in all four shots.)



Fig. 356. February 20, 1984, Zaventem. Three more unconvincing UFO shots submitted by Kristof Gorens.

Young Kristof also included a colorful drawing of one of the spaceships he supposedly encountered:

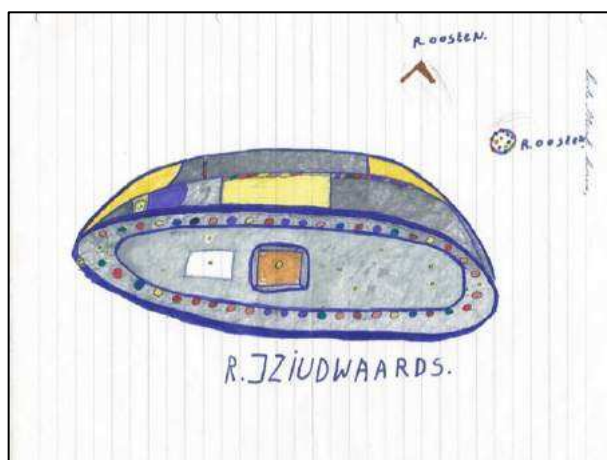


Fig. 357. Kristof's impossibly-detailed drawing of the one of the UFO's

The photos are obvious fakes. The sharp edges and the flat appearance of the objects clearly point to paper-cut models pasted on a windowpane. The amount of detail in the drawing is evidently the work of a boy with a vivid imagination.

(References: Letters from Kristof Gorens to Marc Broux received respectively on February 20 and 21, 1984. Wim van Utrecht, "Recente meldingen", *SVL Tijdschrift*, No.3/10, April 1984, page 23.)

Date: Friday, December 28, 1984

Location: Dessel (Antwerp)

Time: 17:45

Duration: several minutes

Assessment: advertising plane

On February 27, 1985, during a live broadcast of a popular radio show called "Service Telefoon", the program's host Martin de Jonghe received an unusual telephone call from a certain Mr. S. Two months earlier, from his home in Dessel, S. and his family had witnessed a strange contraption flying over the atomic center of Mol. Since that day, he had been searching for an explanation. S. described the object as a flat disc that radiated a bright light. From time to time it seemed to move in a jerky fashion and at a one point it even appeared to remain motionless. After having observed the craft for several minutes, it disappeared into the distance. "There was plenty of time to take pictures," S. told the radio reporter, "but when these came back from the lab they showed little more than a blurred luminous shape." The program released a phone number in case someone else had witnessed something similar or had an idea of what this flying object might have been.

On March 2, 1985, in a telephone interview with one of the authors (WVU), wife of S. explained that the family had received several calls in connection with the broadcast. One came from a man who had spotted a similar object that same evening over Arendonk, less than 9km North-Northeast of Dessel. Mrs. S. further mentioned that her husband had contacted the military airbase at Kleine Brogel, 26km to their East-Southeast. The base had informed him that their radar had picked up an unknown return of "something at 2km altitude that travelled much slower than an airplane."

With the evidence slowly building into what looked like a solid UFO case, there was one call the family had received that ended the mystery for good. It came from none other than the owner of the flying object. In fact, what the witnesses had seen was a *CESSNA-172*. Not an ordinary night flight, though: this aircraft carried a network of ropes underneath with several hundreds of bicycle lights attached to it. A punched tape reader in the cockpit that was connected to each light allowed the pilot to display a series of messages. The ingenious airborne running-message system was designed in the U.S. It was called the *Skycaster*. In the late afternoon of December 28, the *CESSNA* had taken off from Deurne (Antwerp Airport) to circle the eastern part of the province. Two years earlier, the advertising plane had already been the source of some commotion in the same area and on December 1, the plane caused a veritable mini UFO wave in Amsterdam. Well-informed UFO investigators are well aware that ad planes and blimps with electronic billboards regularly cause spectacular UFO reports. (See also Allan Hendry's *The UFO Handbook*, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1979, pages 31-35 and 91-92, and an article by the same author in *International UFO Reporter* Vol. 3, No. 6, June 1978, pages 6-7.)

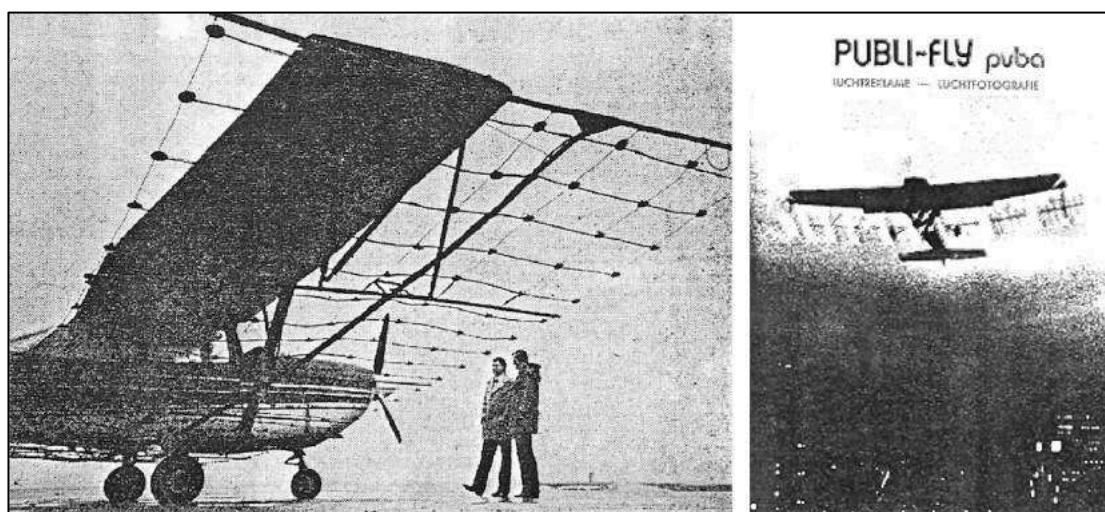


Fig. 358. LEFT: the CESSNA 172 with the *Skycaster* underneath, as published in the January 27, 1982 edition of *Gazet van Antwerpen*. RIGHT: a promotional photo distributed by the firm that owned the ad plane in 1982. Both images are part of a publicity folder that Jan Cocheret, the pilot who caused the mini wave of UFO sightings over Amsterdam in 1984, handed to Wim van Utrecht.

After their conversation with the owner of the plane, Mr. and Mrs. S. readily admitted that the jerky motions and the apparent stop were probably due to some optical effect. No attempts were made at the time to obtain prints of the photographs and the authors never viewed them.

As for the unidentified radar returns, knowing that the plane's cruising altitude was only about 350m whereas the radar recorded a moving target at an altitude of around 2,000m, it can be concluded that these were either unrelated or that the altitudes given over the phone were misunderstood.

(References: Patrick Vantuynne, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, February 27, 1985. Yves Daper, personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, February 28, 1985. Wim van Utrecht, interview to pilots Jan Cocheret and Thierry Leroy on May 24, 1987 and June 20, 1987, respectively. Wim van Utrecht, *SVL Tijdschrift* Vol. 4, No. 14, April 1985, pages 18-19. Others, as noted.)

Date: Thursday, April 23, 1987

Location: Moorslede (West Flanders)

Phase One

Time: 23:40

Duration: 10 minutes

Special Features: repeater witness

Assessment: aircraft?

In August 1987, the then 34-year old P.V.—see also our entry for June 5, 1983—notified one of the authors (WVU) that two more slides of unusual sky phenomena had been taken in his rural home village of Moorslede. Copies of both slides were mailed to WVU in May 1988, together with a 4-page report that detailed the circumstances in which they were shot. According to P.V., the photographer was a friend of his whose identity could not be revealed. (Note that P.V. had already made a similar claim when commenting on the 1983 photos in spite of strong indications that, in both instances, the photos were made by P.V. himself.)

In his report, P.V. explains that, on April 23, 1987, “his friend” was contemplating the sky when around 11:40 p.m. he spotted a bright point of light in the East moving slowly towards the Northeast (i.e. from right to left.)

As soon as he spotted the light, he set up his tripod, mounted his *Pentax K1000* camera equipped with a standard *SMC Pentax-M 1:2/50mm* lens on it, and took a picture. The film used was an *Agfa CT 100* slide film. Exposure time was approximately 5 min. Because the light had almost faded out by the time the shutter-release button was pressed, the photographer was unsure as to whether he had captured the unknown light or not. Since the camera was pointed upward to the sky, and just in case the light would show up in the picture, he immediately took a second shot, with a similar exposure time,

now focusing on a lower segment of the sky and making sure the scenery would partly overlap the field of view of the first shot. The idea was to have useful points of references to work with later on.

After development, it turned out that the first photo (printed below as Fig. 359) showed not one but three light trails. Apparently, the “bright point of light” that was observed with the naked eye had created a reddish trail in the bottom half of the picture. (In the picture below, which is a scan of a print made directly from the slide P.V. had sent to WVU, only this trail is visible.)

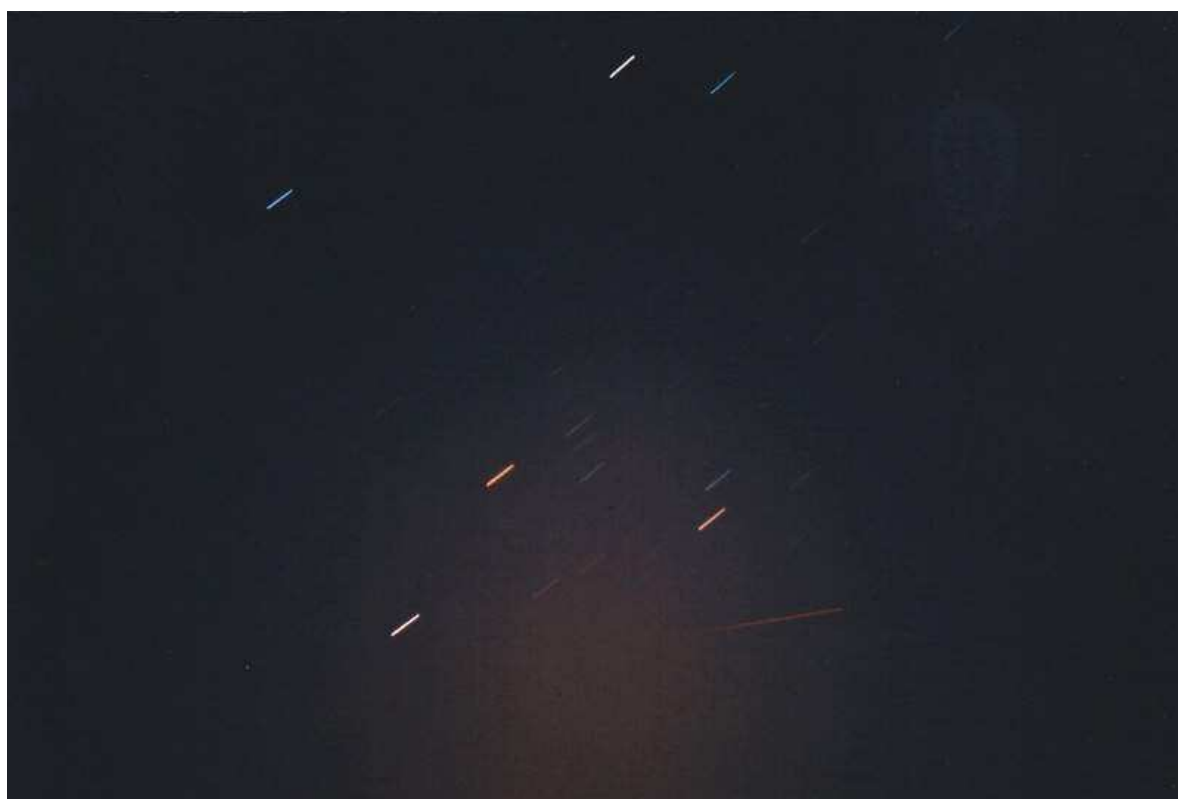


Fig. 359. April 23, 1987, 23:40, Moorslede.

Included with P.V.'s report was an explanatory sketch traced from the projected original (Fig. 360). Besides the red trail (marked as “1”), the sketch also shows the positions of the two other trails that can only be distinguished by viewing the original slide (marked “2” and “3”). P.V. reckons that the dotted trail (marked “3”) is the continuation of trail “1” and can be attributed to the same light. The “4” in the diagram marks a wiggle in trail “1”, possibly it was caused by camera shake. Trail “2” (bottom right) appears to have been caused by a separate light source. This may have been a meteor that flashed by during the time exposure.

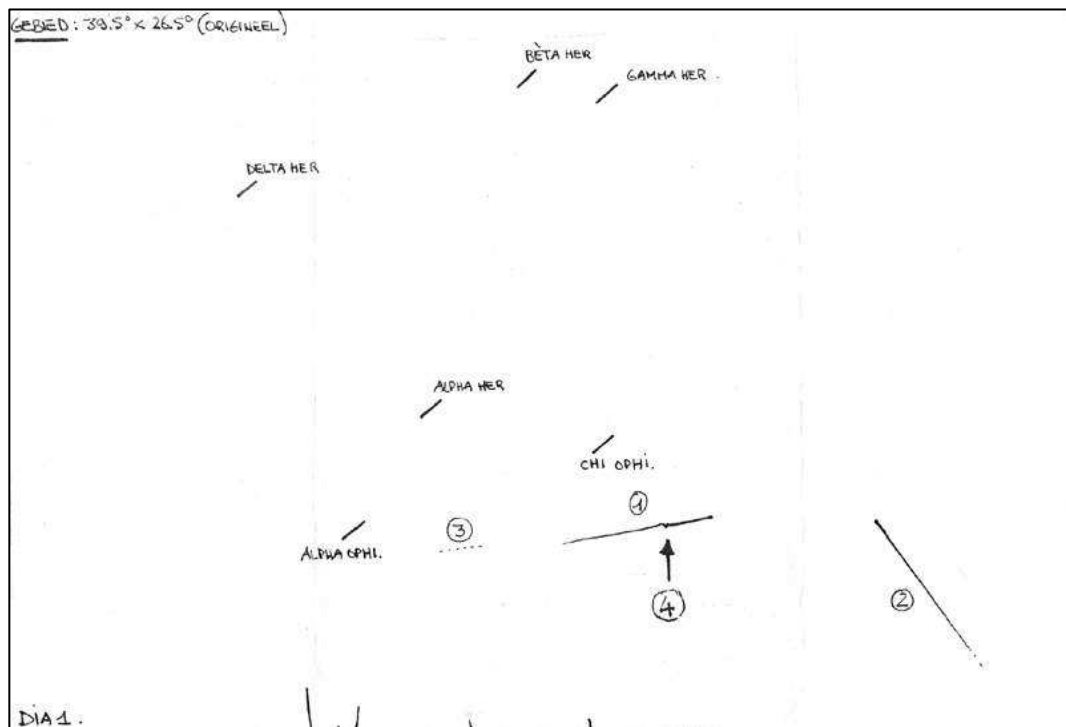


Fig. 360. Explanatory sketch executed by P.V. The shorter light trails that run parallel to each other are stars. The bright star to the left of the major streak is *Alpha Ophiuchus* (elevation 15°; azimuth 88.5°, magnitude 2.05) and the one above the streak is *Chi Ophiuchus* (elevation 18.5°, azimuth 98°, magnitude 3.15).

Trails like these regularly appear in night shots of the sky. There is no reason to believe that the principal trail in the slide shows anything other than a distant aircraft. Because of the low strangeness of both sighting and photographic capture, the case is considered uninteresting.

Phase Two

Time: 23:50

Duration: unknown

Special Features: unseen by photographer / repeater witness

Assessment: insect pillar?

The second photograph, the control shot, taken when the red point of light had already faded out, presented another surprise: a vertical, smoke-like, pink-colored column near the center of the photo:



Fig. 361. April 23, 1987, 23:50, Moorslede. Photo taken from the same spot and in the same direction as the one in Fig. 359, now also showing a pinkish column of smoke-like substance. In the foreground are some twigs and two T-shaped poles of a clothesline. The tree crowns in the background are approximately 240m away from the camera.

The aerial view below tells us how to interpret the different features in the picture:

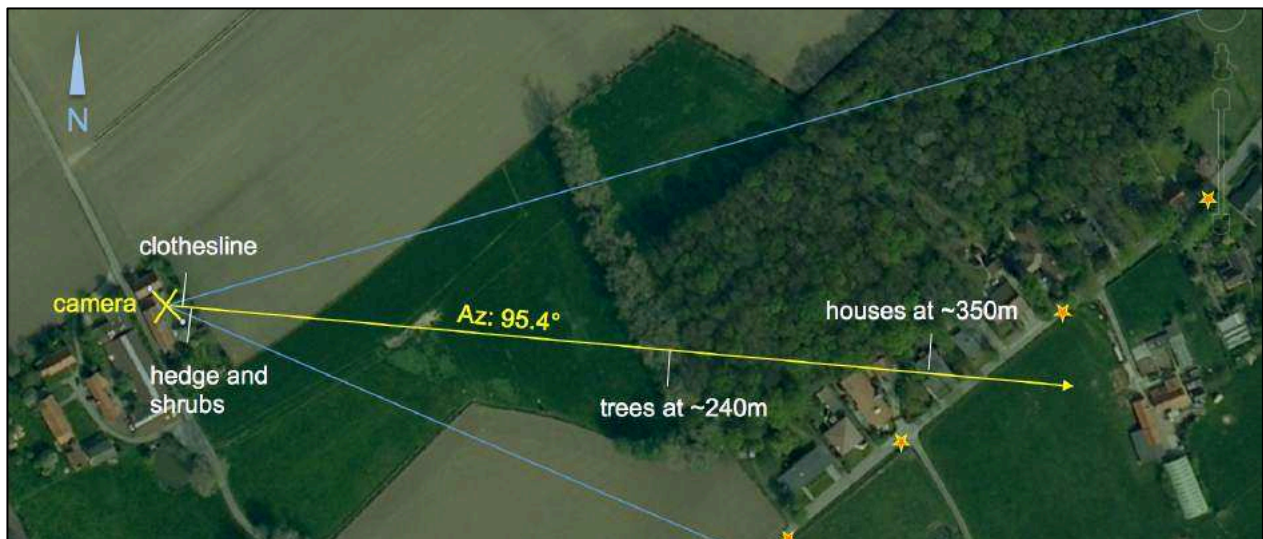


Fig. 362. 2007 Google Earth image of the site. The yellow cross marks the backyard from where the picture was taken. Blue lines denote the camera's viewing angle as derived from the star positions in the photo, while a yellow arrow indicates the direction in which the pink column was photographed. The arrow crosses a row of trees at ~240m and a series of houses at ~350m. The yellow-orange stars are streetlights shining towards the houses on the opposite side of the street. Possibly these lights were responsible for the pinkish/orange background glow in the picture.

We first attempted to find out if the pink plume is situated in front of or behind the distant trees and the upward-pointing twigs of the hedge that separates the photographer's backyard from the field behind his house. Since our own examination of the two available copies of the slide did not provide an answer to this question, we contacted Antoine Cousyn (photographic analyst at IPACO (<http://www.ipaco.fr/page24.html>) and Marc D'Antonio (astronomer and chief photo analyst for MUFON (<http://www.mufon.com>)). Unfortunately, their expert opinions didn't clear up the matter either.

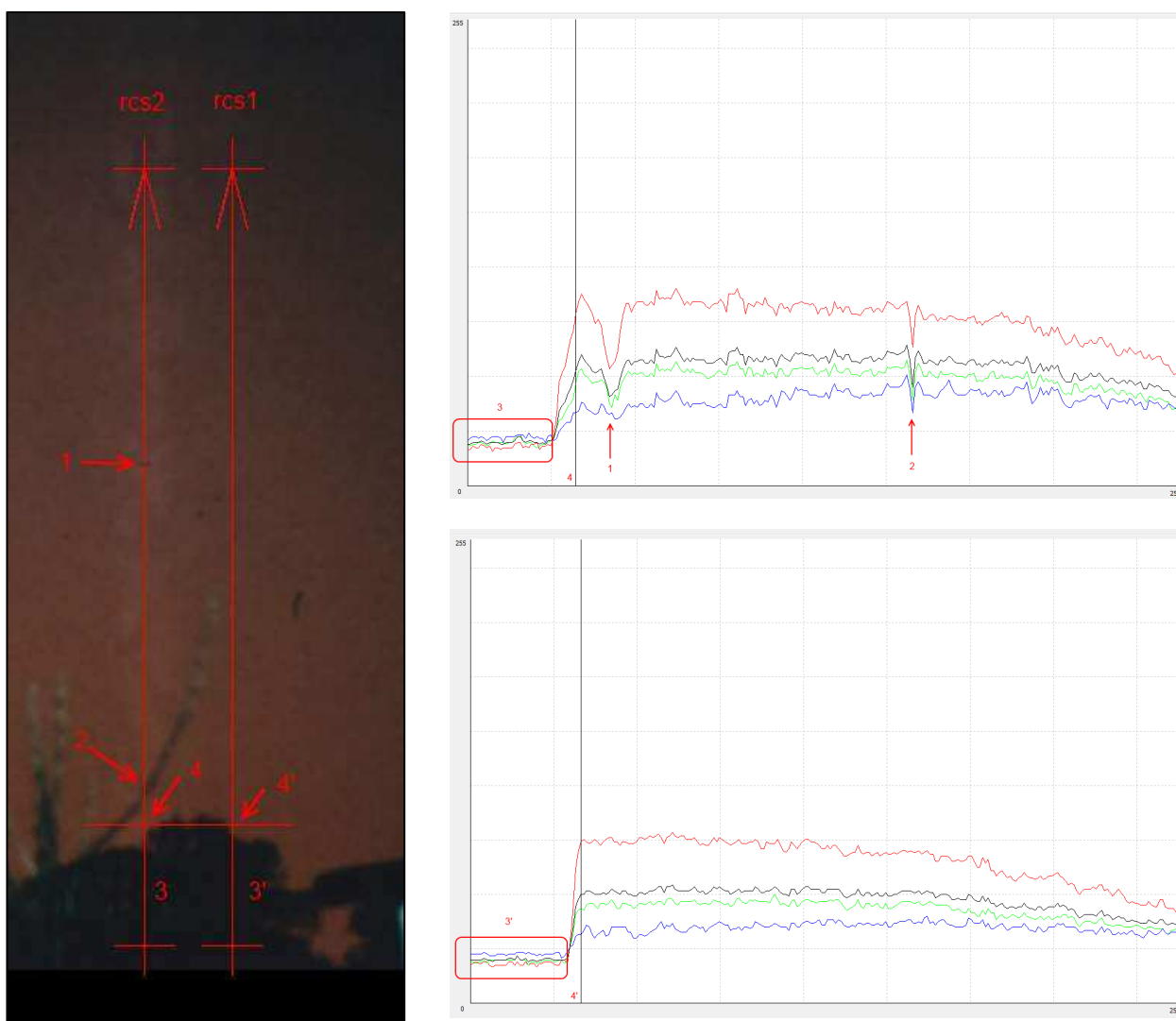


Fig. 363. Radiometric cross-sections of the slide from an analysis conducted by Antoine Cousyn. The resulting graphs were inconclusive in determining whether the luminous column was in front of or behind the trees.

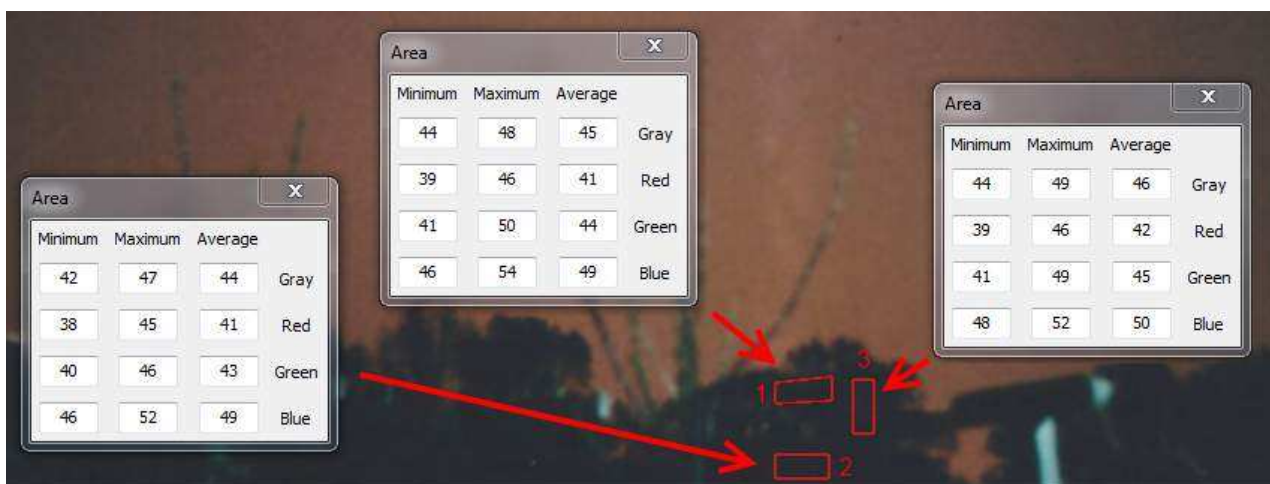


Fig. 364. Another figure from Antoine Cousyn's analysis showing radiometric measurements of selected parts of the photo, again with no definite conclusion as to the column being behind or in front of the trees.

Since the copy of the slide does not contain enough information to determine the distance between the camera and the pink column, we tried to identify its nature and origin by process of elimination.

We first assumed that the column was behind the background trees. If that was the case, we can theorize that it was created by light from the streetlights behind the little forest reflecting off smoke that escaped from one of the chimneys of the houses on the eastside of the street. Interestingly, there appears to be less sky illumination in the photo taken 10 minutes earlier with the same exposure time. Perhaps an approaching vehicle on one of the nearby country roads caused the extra illumination, or perhaps a security floodlight came on, temporarily illuminating smoke from a chimney. But there is a problem with that theory: knowing that the angular distance between *Alpha Ophiuchus* and *Chi Ophiuchus* (see Fig. 360) is 10° , we find that the visible part of the column subtends a vertical angle of 18° (note that the full length of the column cannot be distinguished in the images we present here). This implies that a smoke plume coming from a spot behind the 240m distant trees would have been at least 110m tall! A search on Google Earth revealed that there is no industrial site in the camera's line of sight with a chimney that could have produced a smoke plume of this caliber.

We should also not forget that, for any smoke plume to form such a straight column, a dead calm weather situation is required. Weather stations within a radius of 40km around Moorslede recorded a light breeze that night (approximately 4 knots) blowing from the Northeast. Alas, wind data for Moorslede are not available, but the slightest breeze from a direction almost perpendicular to the camera's line of sight would have produced a very different image if this column were formed by small dust and soot particles.

Also, one would expect a smoke plume of this size to be markedly broader on top than near its point of origin.

A sun- or moonlit contrail is to be ruled out as well. With the Sun already 22° below the horizon in the North-Northwest, its rays would only have illuminated objects outside the earth's atmosphere. As for the Moon having illuminated a hypothetical contrail, this is not an option either because our natural satellite was not visible that night.

Having eliminated a contrail and a smoke plume from a chimney, we started to suspect that the pinkish column was not behind the distant trees but ~~much~~ closer to the camera. Could it have been smoke from a small fire in the field adjacent to the backyard? A campfire, perhaps, or someone burning waste? Highly unlikely, too, because in that case the photographer would certainly have noticed such a fire. There is nothing between his garden and the trees that obstructs the view. In fact, the field slopes slightly upward away from the garden so that every activity taking place between the hedge and the trees would have struck the eye immediately. There's also the aspect of the column: wispy-looking yet not widening on top and nicely vertical. Like we pointed out already, this is not in line with how smoke behaves outdoors, which is also why we feel that all other smoke-producing objects, like a burning cigarette placed on a table in front of the photographer, should be ruled out as well. With the focus set at infinity, a smoke plume close to the camera would have produced a less defined image.

But there's one other option that ordinarily does not appear on the IFO menu: a mosquito pillar. Between April and October, mosquitoes—midges, mostly—have a strange habit of gathering over marked landscape features such as treetops, church steeples and puddles. In daylight, the result is something that looks like a plume of black smoke, usually in the shape of a narrow, vertical column some 2 to 5m high and 20 to 40cm wide. The reason why these tiny critters gather by the thousands in pillar- or funnel-shaped formations is to enhance their chances of meeting a partner. Usually, insect clouds form just before darkness sets in, when the warm air that collected underneath the tree crowns during the day is forced upward by the colder surrounding air. At night, when illuminated by a spotlight or by the Moon, the taller pillars look like self-luminous plumes of smoke. On a moonlit night in the late 1970s, one of the authors (WVU) encountered such a nocturnal pillar over a muddy pool in a field in Vorselaar, province of Antwerp. Surprised of seeing a tall bluish-grey beam shine up from the ground, it required close inspection to realize that the "beam" was formed by thousands of midges spiraling upwards.

On the next page we present a couple of rare daylight shots of this little-known biological oddity.



Fig. 365. LEFT: five faintly visible mosquito pillars over treetops photographed in Vilvoorde, Belgium, at 9:30 p.m. on April 21, 2011. Photo by Werner Poets. © CAELESTIA
RIGHT: two photos of mosquito pillars published in *Science* in 1966.

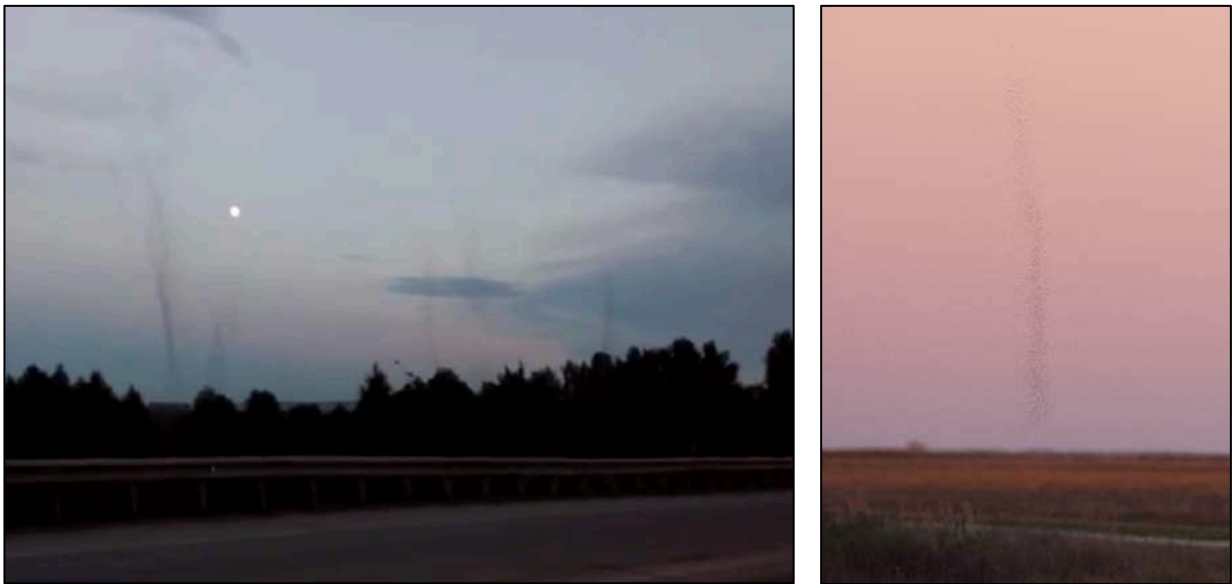


Fig. 366. More mosquito pillars: LEFT: still from a video taken at Yekaterinburg, Russia, in the summer of 2016 showing multiple mosquito tornadoes at sunset. The white blob in the sky is the Moon. RIGHT: a singular pillar over a field at the San Bernard National Wildlife Resort in Texas, U.S.A., photographed by Phillip Jones in February 2016. Borrowed from:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/visual-universe/24734768179>

The authors suspect that an insect pillar like the ones in the above images may have formed over a nearby puddle in the field adjacent to the photographer's backyard. The illumination would then have come from the same light source to the right of the photographer that illuminated the upward-pointing twigs and the T-shaped poles of the clothesline visible near the bottom edge of the picture frame.

In the absence of a better theory, and after having eliminated all the other usual suspects, we think an illuminated mosquito pillar might offer a plausible identification for the anomalous trail in the picture.

(References: P.V., personal communication to Wim van Utrecht, August 24, 1987. *Sky Map* data provided by Dr. Ronny Blomme of the Belgian Royal Observatory, November 1987. Report drafted by P.V., May 1988. Report drafted by Wim van Utrecht, May 1988. Marc D'Antonio, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, August 28, 2013. Antoine Cousyn, personal communications to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos and Wim van Utrecht, September 8 and 23, 2013, and August 4, 2017. Geoff Quick, personal communication to Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos, August 3, 2017. Wiersma, J.H., "Convection Plumes and Insects" in *Science*, Vol. 152, Issue 3720, April 15, 1966, page 387, <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/152/3720/387.1>)

PART 2

REVIEWING THE DATA

Having brought together and examined each and every photographically substantiated UFO report that lingered in the catacombs of the Belgian UFO archives, this second part will present a review of the data collected for the 1950-1988 period.

Main features are visualized in graphs and the resulting output is discussed.

Chapter 4

1950-1988

Statistics and Conclusions

Flying saucers, Unidentified Flying Objects... ever since 1947, when those terms were first used to name alleged sightings of unconventional flying machines, the phenomenon has expanded across the globe. The audiovisual media, the publishing business and the cinema industry have helped the subject to take root as an established theme in our popular culture.

From early on, it was believed that the saucers were piloted by interplanetary visitors (Keyhoe, 1950), but critical voices saw no need for exotic theories and suggested ordinary sources and processes (Menzel, 1953; Jung, 1959). The debate is unfinished, and opposite opinions prevail until this day. In recent years, scholars from various countries have profusely documented the folklore-like features of the UFO reporting phenomenon and many researchers now consider UFOs to represent a myth-in-the-making (Abrassart, 2016; Bartholomew and Howard, 1998; Clarke, 2015; Denzler, 2001; Evans and Bartholomew, 2009; Gauthier, 2017; Kerr, 2015; Pinvidic, 1993; Reis and Rodrigues, 2009; Reis, 2011; Sharples, 2016; Zúñiga, 2003).

The specific interest of the present authors centers on the examination of one type of physical evidence: photographs and videos. In other words: the capture on film of those elusive

objects and lights that populate our skies and appear strange to their observers. The authors have combined forces to study all such cases reported from Belgium. Given the small size of the country (albeit with a rich history and a population density that ranks among the highest in Europe), it was expected that the limited number of well-organized UFO groups combined with a not-too-scattered media landscape, would make it possible to embrace a sample of cases practically equal to the actual number of events.

Over seven decades of ufology, many of our colleagues have advocated the importance of investigating photos or films of supposed UFO phenomena and have laid out advanced methods and techniques to accomplish this (Adams, 1961; Baker, 1968; Digby, 1976; Hynek, 1968; Klinn, 1976; Rutledge, 1981; Louange, 1981; Louange, 1982; Louange et al, 2014; Page, 1968; Poher, 1977; Sainio, 2002; Schneider, 1977; Schneider, 1981; Spaulding and Adrian, 1982).

In spite of that—or perhaps thanks to that—the consensus over the value of UFO images is extremely negative. Throughout the lifetime of ufology even proponents of exotic theories have expressed their doubts about the value of UFO photography (Bowen, 1972; Caidin, 1953; Hall, 1964; Herb & Hynek, 1980; Hynek, 1977; Lorenzen, 1961; Nixon, 1974; Rankow, 1964; Teodorani, 2009; Vallée, 1990).

We have applied some preliminary statistics to the cases discussed in the present volume, hoping the output will tell us if such a skepticism is justified for the first 40 years of Belgian UFO reporting.

Brief Statistical Overview

1. Yearly distribution

The UFO reporting phenomenon is not constant in time. When plotted on a graph, it shows an irregular sawtooth pattern due to the irregular emergence of so-called “waves”: the sudden increase in reports of supposed anomalous phenomena in our skies. There exists an abundant literature about this particularity (Ballester Olmos, 2015).

We have 84 reports from 1950 to 1988. As the following graph shows, in 1972 there was a sudden, strong upsurge of reports with a peak in 1973. In 1974 the number dropped back to the 1972 level, to return to slightly over average in 1975. These four years (1972-1975) make up 55% of the total number of reports collected for 39 years! Our interpretation is that, when the media give much publicity to a particular UFO report—or to a series of reports—it produces a feedback that elevates popular attention (thus generating more reports until the attention dissipates). Four years appears to be a fairly typical lifespan of such waves (López & Ares de Blas, 1973; López & Ares de Blas, 1980). From the point on when the public has been exposed to the subject, and newspapers, TV channels and publishers have understood that its exploitation can be profitable, the theme reverberates over time and remains installed in society.

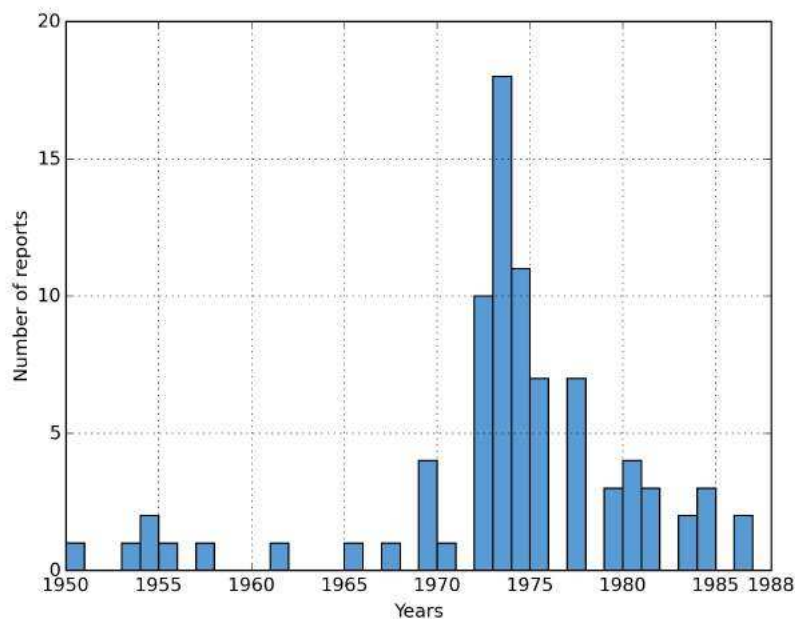


Fig. I. Distribution of 84 reports by year (1950-1988). Courtesy of Julio Plaza del Olmo.

2. Month

77 of the collected reports (92%) contain the month-of-the-year information. The resulting graph corresponds well to an average distribution, except for a peak for June and, to a lesser extent, October. The effect is due to serial reporting during 1973 and 1972, respectively. It is not to be interpreted as a systematic trend.

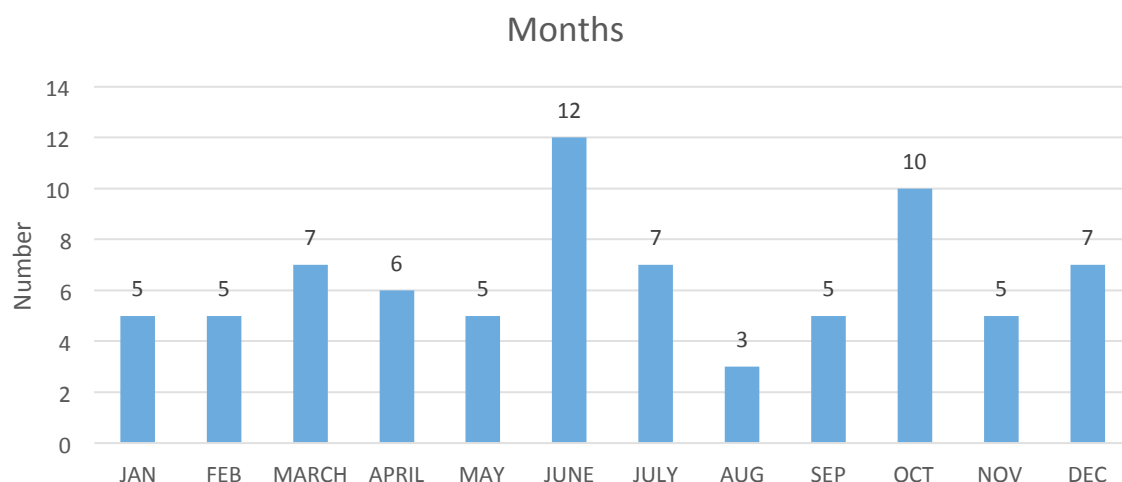


Fig. II. Case distribution by month.

3. Day of the Week

73 of the cases (87%) mention the day of the week. Their distribution only deviates from the average for Thursday. Yet, a chi-square test (χ^2) provides a 0.33 value, which is not statistically significant and suggests a chance effect.

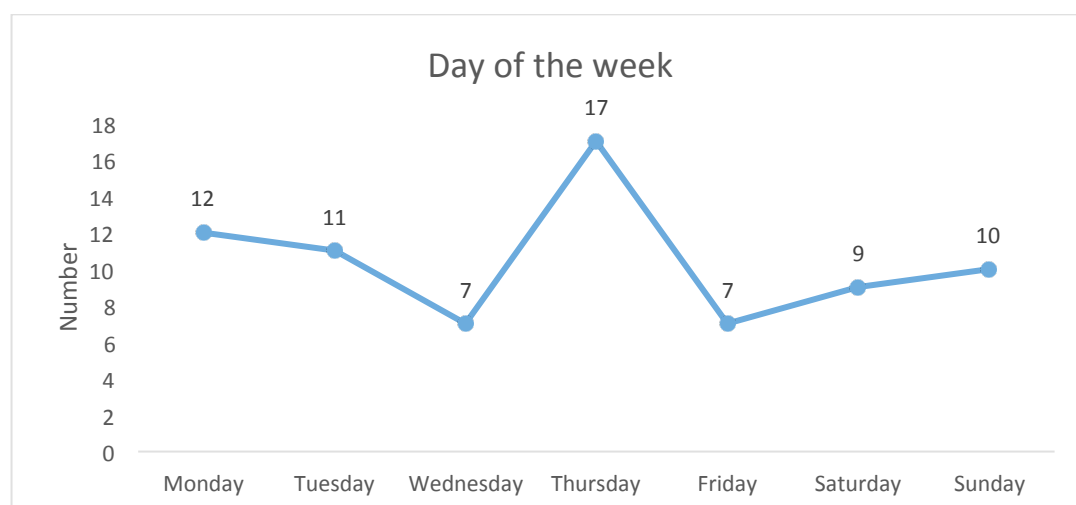


Fig. III. Case distribution by day of the week.

4. Time of day

The data confirm what was found in earlier statistical studies, namely that UFO sightings follow a double signature: one reflecting the probability of a phenomenon attracting someone's attention, the other reflecting the social availability of potential witnesses to observe a sky phenomenon (Plaza del Olmo, 2015). What was initially thought by some to represent an internal magnitude of the phenomenon related to its intelligent behavior (Vallée, 1966) is presently viewed as a statistical artifact that can be attributed to the facts that luminous objects are more visible during nighttime (the graph peaks at 10 p.m.) and that few observations occur during hours when most people are asleep. The Belgian cases logically adhere to this sociological model.

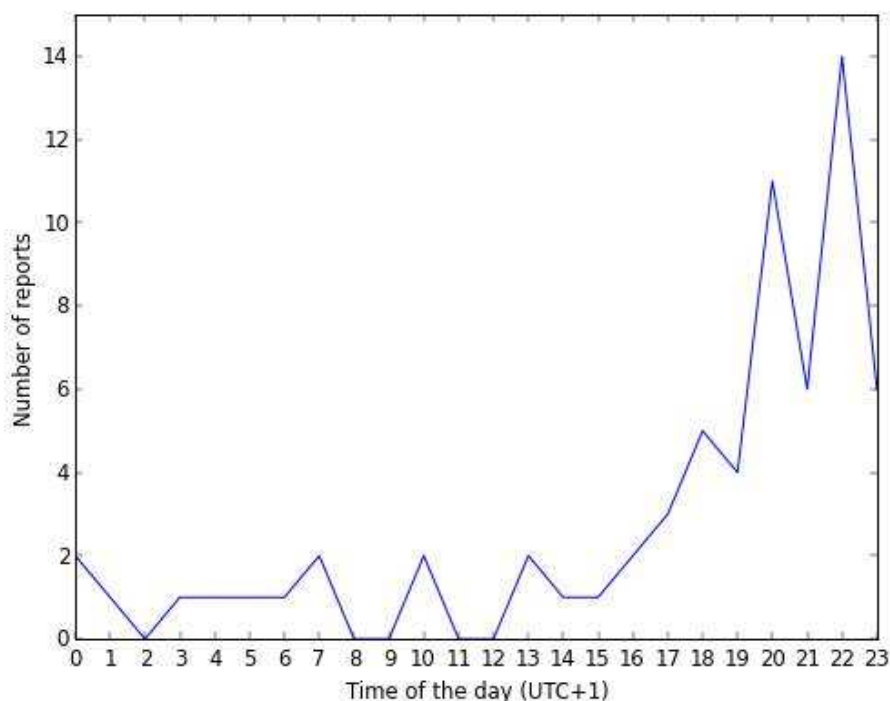


Fig. IV. Case distribution by time of day. Courtesy of Julio Plaza del Olmo.

5. Duration of sightings

We will demonstrate further down this overview that about half of the handled reports do not concern real events. Therefore, if half relate to a claimant's invention and the other half to actual data, these metrics can hardly be regarded as a physical quantity. However, the distribution of 50 cases for which the duration is known (59.5%) shows that the majority of reports fall in the interval of 0 to 1,000 seconds. In other words, and not surprisingly, most witnesses reported a sighting that lasted between 1 second and 18 minutes.

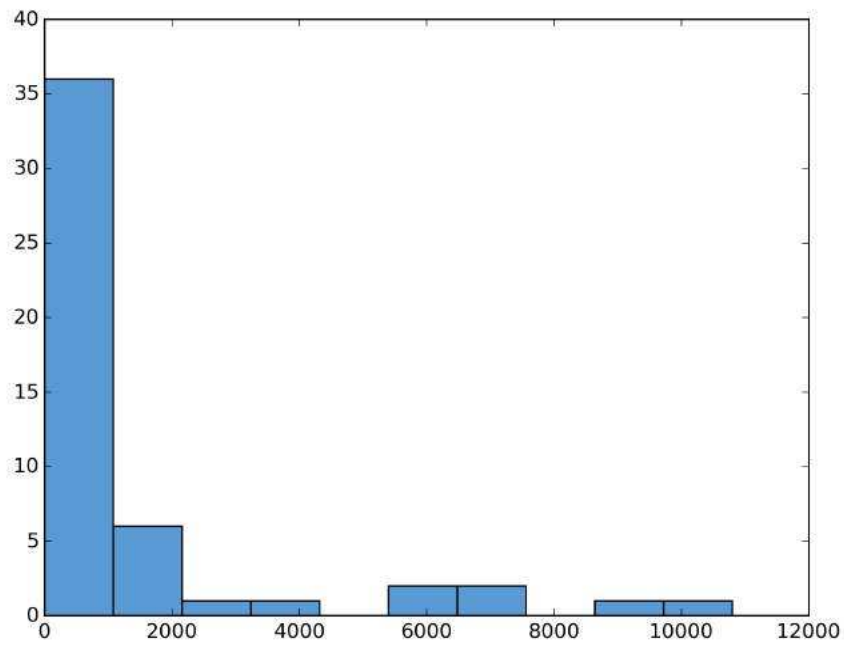


Fig. V. Duration by constant 1000-seconds intervals. Courtesy of Julio Plaza del Olmo.

A plot by increasing duration intervals indicates that one-third of the reports last up to one minute and roughly two-thirds from one minute to one hour. This is probably due to the fact that a large number of cases can be attributed to misinterpretations of aircraft and astronomical bodies.

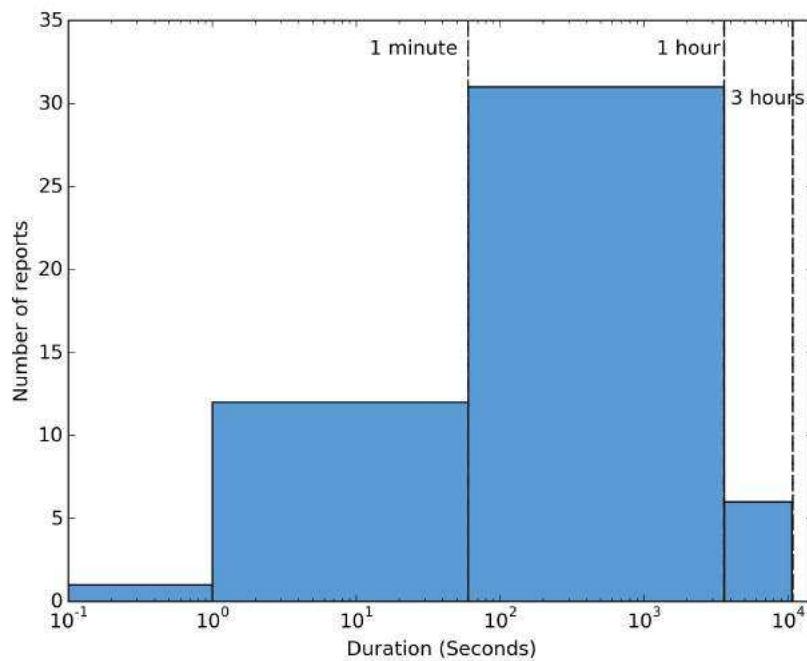


Fig. VI. Duration by increasing time intervals. Courtesy of Julio Plaza del Olmo.

6. Geography of reports

On the map below we plotted the locations for the cases reviewed in this volume. 83 locations in total since no precise location is mentioned for two cases, while in the one case collected for 1954 the images turned out to be shot at two different locations. Possible relationships between geographical and demographic distribution will be studied in Volume 2 using the larger sample from the complete 1950-2005 catalog. What already catches the eye, though, is that the biggest concentrations coincide with the country's major cities (Bruges, Ghent and Brussels). This is also where the major UFO groups were active in the 1970s and 80s (GESAG, SPW, SOBEPS). Smaller concentrations appear near the cities of Antwerp, Liège, Charleroi and Namur.

Black dots represent the cases reported during the “wave” years from 1972 to 1975. Apart from the cluster around Bruges (which is where “repeater witness” Werner Bruyneel took his pictures), the only marked difference between the reports for the 1972-1975 period and the rest are the six reports centered around the city of Kortrijk, not far from the French border. Note, however, that three of these concern pictures taken by another “repeater”, namely P.V. from Moorslede).

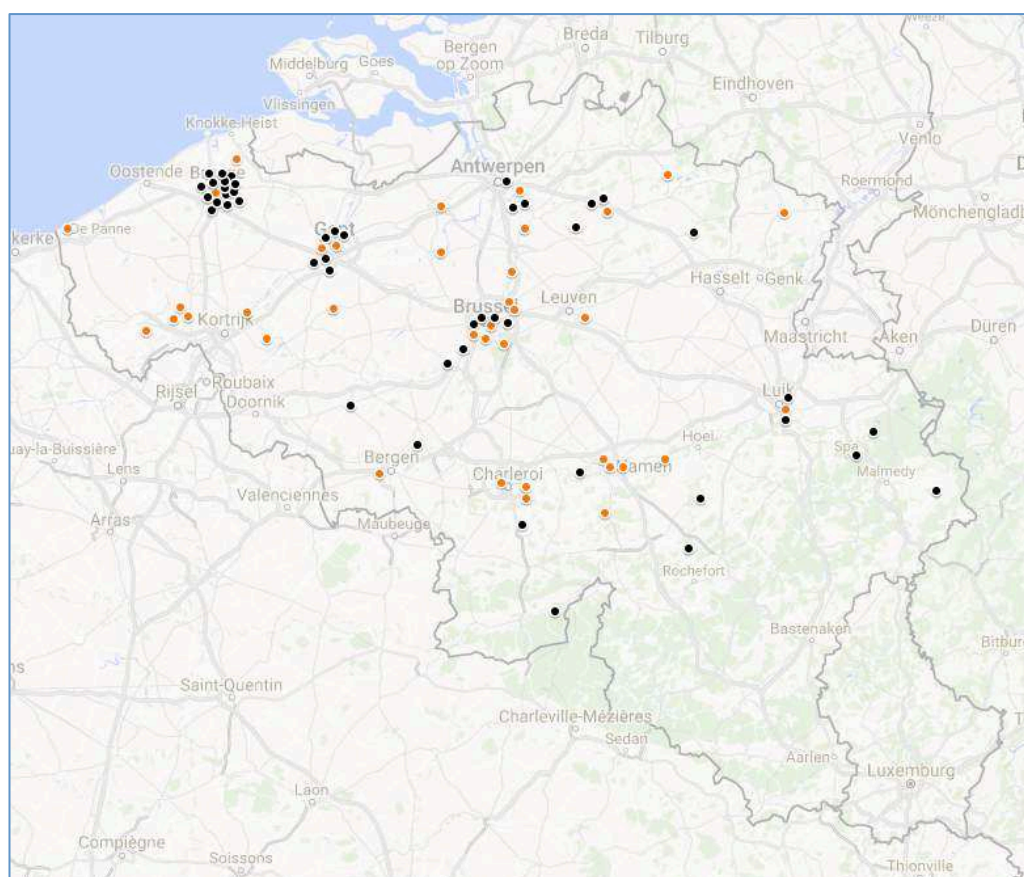


Fig. VII. Repartition of reports by location. Courtesy of Frederick Delaere

7. Age groups

The youngest photographer in the sample was an 11-year-old boy; the eldest a lady of 60. A breakdown of the photographers by age allows us to compare their age distribution with the actual age distribution of the Belgian population. To this end, we have used official figures taken from Eurostat (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>) for 1973, the weighted average year during the 1950-1988 period. We have divided population and photographer's ages into eight 10-year groups:

Age group	Population ('000)	Percentage	Photographers	Percentage
10-19	1,536.7	19%	12	25%
20-29	1,396.6	17%	14	28%
30-39	1,160.0	14%	19	39%
40-49	1,299.4	16%	2	4%
50-59	1,009.6	12%	2	4%
60-69	1,004.0	12%	0	0
70-79	638.6	8%	0	0
80-89	195.0	2%	0	0
Total	8,239.9	100%	49	100%

Table I. Age distribution. Photographers *versus* Belgian population.

The exact age of the photographers is known in 49 cases (58%). Basically, what was found is that youngsters and young adults fit best with the profile of the typical UFO photographer. In order to calculate how much the age distribution found for photographers resembles or departs from that of the Belgian population, we computed the Pearson correlation coefficient, which is given by the formula:

$$\frac{\sum x \cdot \sum y}{(\sum x^2 \cdot \sum y^2)^{1/2}}$$

and where $x = X_n - X_{n-1}$ and $y = Y_n - Y_{n-1}$.

Applied to the series of age groups for the Belgian population (X) and the series of age groups for photographers (Y), the resulting value is 0.044. This means that the two numerical series are not correlated. In other words: the ages of UFO photographers are not related to the age distribution of the Belgian population. This is a significant bias and should be taken into consideration when evaluating the claims of UFO photographers.

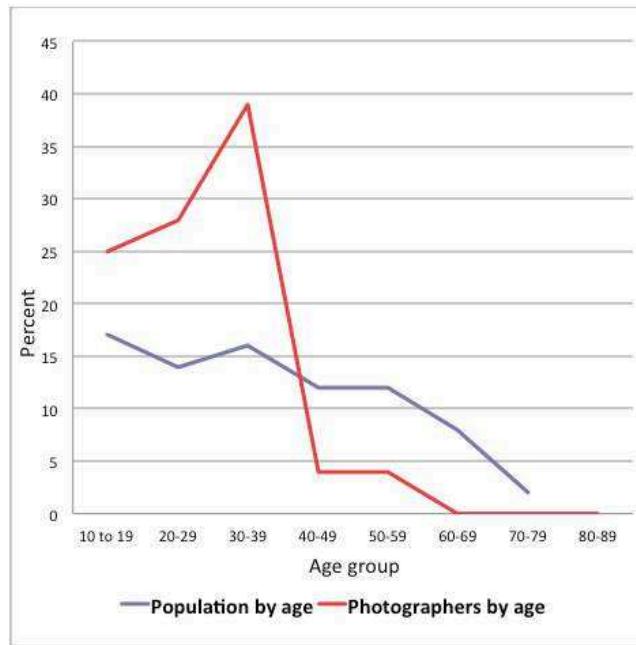


Fig. VIII. Comparing age groupings: Belgian population *versus* UFO photographers.
Courtesy of David G. López.

8. Witnesses

In 13 out of 84 reports (15%), the identity of the photographer could not be established. The graph below shows the total number of people that were present when the photographs/films were taken. When more than two, the identity of the witnesses and their exact number are rarely mentioned. In over half of the reports (45 cases or 54%) we have a single person's claim with no support from other witnesses.

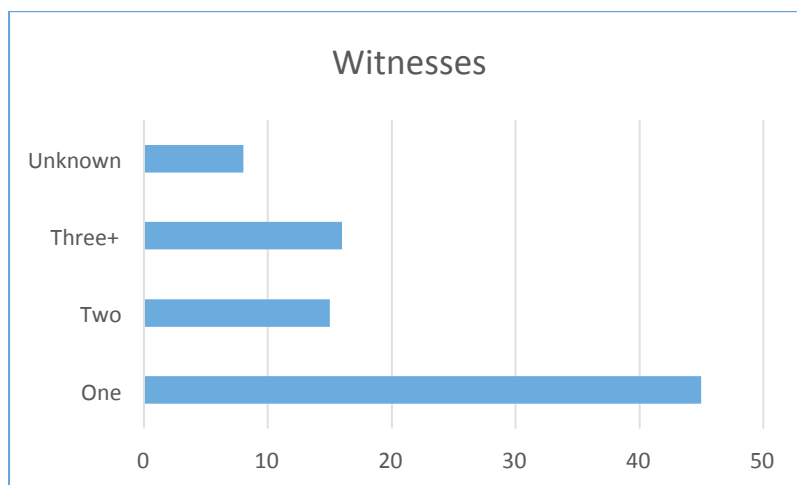


Fig. IX. Number of people present when photos/films taken.

In 15 cases (18%), there were two witnesses (the photographer included). In 16 cases (19%) there were three or more. For the remaining 8 cases (9%), the number of witnesses is either not specified or irrelevant (e.g. cases in which objects were detected on pictures, but nothing was observed visually).

9. “Repeater witnesses”

The term “repeater witness” is used to designate any individual who claims to have observed—not necessarily photographed—UFOs on more than one occasion. The present catalog contains no less than 32 reports (38%) that involve repeater witnesses! The cases for which the names of these witnesses are known are tabulated as follows:

Photographer	Number of cases
W.B.	12
P.V.	3
B.H.	3
W.D.G.	3
K.G.	2
E.V.	2
R.	1
C.S.	1
G.S.	1
L.V.	1
E.S.	1
M.M.	1
A.D.	1

Table II. Repeater witnesses.

10. Special features

In 12 cases (14%) the original negatives or pictures are said to have been destroyed or lost. In 14 cases (17%), there was no visual observation, but only a supposed anomaly found in the pictures after processing. Finally, in 15 cases (18%), the compilers of the catalog have been unable to retrieve and view the claimed photographic evidence.

11. Types of explanations

Following the standards established by FOTOCAT to group the variety of possible explanations into classes, we have split the 84 Belgian cases into seven major categories:

- I. On Purpose (hoaxes) —**25**
 - Fake (*) —24
 - Non-event —1
- II. Accidental (camera & film related) —**16**
 - Film or developing flaw —13
 - Camera artifact (**) —2
 - Reflection —1
- III. Misinterpretation – Aerospace —**14**
 - Aircraft (any type) —13
 - Satellite —1
- IV. Atmospheric —**2**
 - Sundog (parhelia) —1
 - Light pillar —1
- V. Astronomical —**16**
 - Stars & planets —11 (***)
 - Moon (****) —5
- VI. Miscellaneous —**4**
 - Street lamp —2
 - Fiber on film —1
 - Insect pillar —1
- VII. Insufficient information —**7**

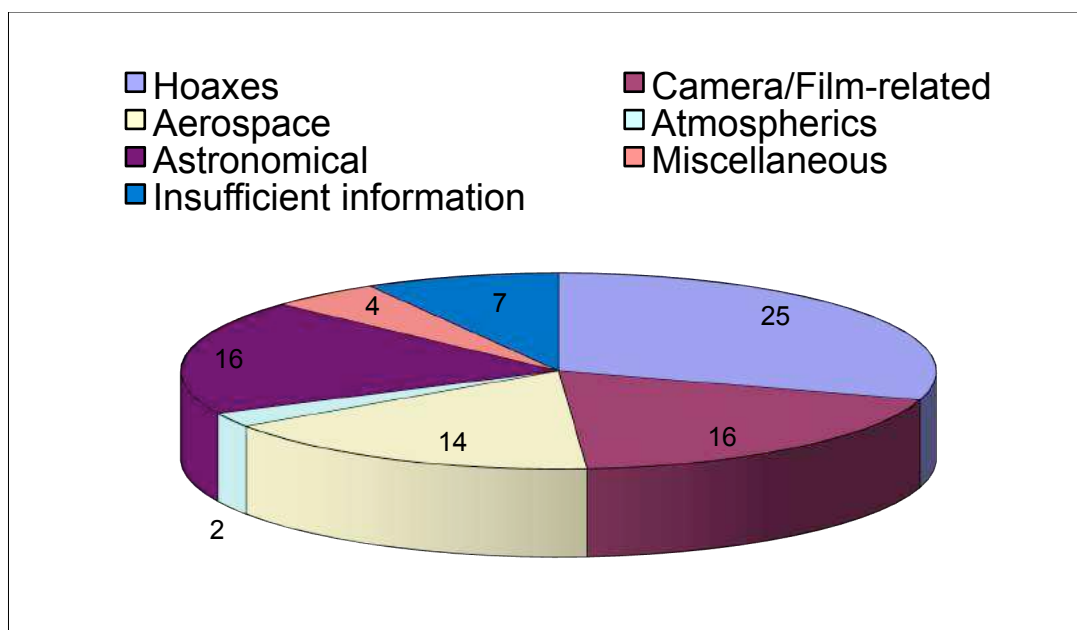


Fig. X. Classes of explanations.

In other words, and translated into percentages, hoaxes are the prime cause of reports with 30%, followed by astronomical stimuli (19%), film and camera artifacts (19%) and aircraft (17%). Only two reports (2%) in this sample were attributed to atmospheric phenomena and 5% to a variety of causes. Finally, 8% of all cases had insufficient information to attempt a classification, with over half of them reported by two distinct repeater witnesses.

(*) Perpetrated by a single individual, a group, or a journalist.

(**) Including out-of-focus images of small airborne particles that are illuminated by a camera flash (the so-called “orbs”).

(***) Five of which have been attributed to Venus.

(****) Either our natural satellite itself or a lens-produced ghost image thereof (“mirror ghosting”).

Conclusions

This first volume of our study paints the average UFO photographer as a young male who already entertained an interest in the phenomenon before he came forward with his own photographic evidence. The case sample we reviewed further underlines the importance of the so-called 'repeater witnesses' in the history of UFO imaging. In over one-third of all cases, we are dealing with photographers who claim to have spotted UFOs on more than one occasion. The mere idea of someone having had multiple opportunities to observe, let alone photograph what he or she considers to be an exceptional phenomenon inevitably raises questions about the fantasy proneness of these individuals. This already precarious situation is aggravated by the nature of the evidence itself: unconvincing images that show little more than dark- or light colored blobs and are often accompanied by incoherent narratives that lack essential data. For the very few images that show structured craft captured by non-repeaters, we found evidence (direct or circumstantial) that points to deliberate falsehood.

Next to the poor quality of the evidence, we also noted a striking lack of competence among the ufologists who evaluated and then promoted the Belgian UFO and flying saucer photos from the past. It is true that in the 20th century, investigators could not rely on the luxury of readily available electronic applications that enabled them to pay a virtual visit to a supposed sighting location, consult news sources for additional info, check databases for airplane flights and satellite passages, or generate weather data and sky maps for any time and place in just a matter of minutes. Still, it remains painful to see how exotic theories were fiercely defended and simple explanations systematically overlooked. In many of the cases we dissected, key elements like azimuth and altitude were not specified. It is almost as if the investigators were convinced from the start that the scientific method would not supply any answers to what they personally felt was a mystery that surpasses human understanding.

But the ufologists are not the only ones who are to be criticized for a distressing naiveté and a lack of knowledge about the scientific process. In fact, the authors were quite surprised to discover the extent of the role played by the press in fomenting what an increasing number of researchers are calling 'the flying saucer myth', especially after finding strong indications that journalists were, if not actively then passively, involved in the promotion of dubious photographs, like in the much-publicized 1953 Bouffioulx and 1955 Namur pictures. Our discussion of the very first entry of the catalog shows that this was not an exclusively Belgian situation. Indeed, the international press soon jumped on the bandwagon, usually with a joking or disbelieving posture but always ready to provide a broad coverage to a sensational UFO story. From the start, newspaper editors realized there was an avid audience

for these modern tales from the twilight zone, no matter how low the credibility or how high the explicability of the claims that were made.

In summary, the current sample for Volume 1 (1950-1988) shows that, the majority (92%) of the reviewed reports can be explained without any need to resort to exotic theories. Examination of these reports further reveals that the remaining 8% could not be properly assessed because of lack of information.

What we did find is a recurrent pattern of powerful emotional responses from people around the globe to news reports of flying saucers and UFOs. In that pattern's consistency and intensity, we may also discern the human desire to believe in UFOs as aerial carriers of otherworldly beings or as technological bridges to a superior culture. Often, it is that expectation that causes mundane stimuli to morph into UFOs.

We demonstrated that the first 40 years of Belgian ufology are interspersed with flawed fieldwork, often carried out by biased amateur investigators or scientists who ventured outside the area of their expertise. The fact that a majority of the UFO photographers were already worked up by the media before they made their observations, often in uncontrolled conditions and with unprofessional cameras is another crucial point that separates "ufology" from mainstream science. In fact, the authors were often confronted with so many false or missing variables that sometimes even coupling the reported data to an obvious and mundane explanation proved difficult. Even today, two opposing views prevail: there are those who adhere to the exactitude and correctness of the witness' narrative, and those who understand that reporters of UFO sightings can, quite frequently, be mystified, make faulty estimates and fabulate.

Both on-site and desk-based investigations, carried out by amateurs and scholastic researchers alike, suggest that most UFO observations are produced by a large assortment of different stimuli, be they natural or man-made (e.g. Menzel, 1953; Ruppelt, 1956; Gillmor, 1969; Hendry, 1979; Randles, 1981; Ballester Olmos, 1984; Van Utrecht, 2014). Over the years, researchers have reached the consensus that there is not a unique, singular UFO phenomenon, but a wide variety of not necessarily strange phenomena that, given the right conditions, can trigger UFO reports. The reasons and motives that lead people to wrongly identify and/or represent natural events and man-made objects are innumerable. When casual, coinciding circumstances are linked together and serious misinterpretations are made, error builds upon error, generating spurious and often complex UFO sightings that appear unexplainable after superficial probing.

Whether or not we will find real pay dirt (i.e. unexplained images accompanied by reliable eye-witness testimony) in the complete collection of reported data remains to be seen when we present the results of our analysis performed on the Belgian reports from after 1988. Up to the present, we

have reviewed approximately one-third of all reported photo cases for the 1950-2005 period. The key question that will be addressed in our second and last volume is whether the abundance of modern cameras has actually produced better evidence for the existence of new phenomena not yet understood by science, or if this latest photographic revolution has only muddled the water further.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFU	Archives For the Unexplained (Sweden)
AREPS	Association pour la Recherche et L'Etude des Phénomènes Spatiaux / Research Association for the Study of Space Phenomena (Belgium)
BIRA	Belgisch Instituut voor Ruimte-Aeronomie / Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy
BRT	Belgische Radio en Televisie / Belgian Radio and Television
CEI	Centro de Estudios Interplanetarios / Center for Interplanetary Studies (Spain)
CIUFOR	Contact International UFO Research (United Kingdom)
CNEGU	Comité Nord-Est des Groupes Ufologiques / Committee of Nord-Eastern Ufological Groups (France)
COBEPS	Comité Belge pour l'Etude des Phénomènes Spatiaux / Belgian Committee for the Study of Space Phenomena
ESA	European Space Agency (France)
GESAG	Groupement pour l'Etude des Sciences d'Avant-Garde / Group for the Study of Avant-Garde Science (Belgium)
GSFC	Goddard Space Flight Center (United States)
GSW	Ground Saucer Watch (United States)
IASB	Institut d'Aéronomie Spatiale de Belgique / Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy
IGAP	International Get Acquainted Program (Belgium)
IFO	Identified Flying Object
IPACO	Interface Pilote pour l'Analyse des Clichés d'OVNIs / Interactive Picture Analysis of Celestial Objects (France)
IRM	Insitut Royal Météorologique / Royal Meteorological Institute (Belgium)
KMI	Koninklijk Meteorologisch Instituut / Royal Meteorological Institute (Belgium)
LAET	Laboratoires d'Analyse et d'Expérimentation Technique / Laboratories for Analysis and Technical Experimentation (Belgium)

MOC	Mystérieux Objets Célestes
MUFON	Mutual UFO Network (United States)
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration (United States)
NUSC	Nederlands Ufologisch Studie Centrum / Dutch Ufological Study Center
SCEAU	Sauvegarde et Conservation des Etudes et Archives Ufologiques / Safeguarding and Conservation of UFO Studies and Archives (France)
SOBEPS	Société Belge d'Etude des Phénomènes Spatiaux / Belgian Society for the Study of Space Phenomena
SPW	Studiegroep voor Progressieve Wetenschappen / Group for the Study of Avant-Garde Science (Belgium)
SVL	Studiegroep voor Vreemde Luchtverschijnselen / Group for the Study of Strange Aerial Phenomena (Belgium)
SUFO	Survival UFO, later Study of Unidentified Flying Objects (Belgium)
UAP	Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon
UFO	Unidentified Flying Object
UROS	Ufologie Ruimtevaart Oudheidkunde Sterrekunde / Ufology Spacetravel Archaeology Astronomy (Belgium)
USMZ	Ufologisch Studiecentrum Midden-Zeeland / Ufological Study Center Midden-Zeeland (the Netherlands)
UWZV	UFO Werkgroep Zeeuws Vlaanderen / UFO Working Group Zeelandic Flanders (The Netherlands)
VVS	Vereniging Voor Sterrenkunde / Association for Astronomy (Belgium)

APPENDIX: BELGIUM FOTOCAT SPREADSHEET 1950-1988 (*)

Presentation of the catalog spreadsheet for the Belgium photo cases reviewed in Volume 1

The FOTOCAT database consists of a basic Excel file with 26 standard data columns, plus another three created specifically for the present study (27 to 29). The structure of the database is described hereafter. By default configuration, this listing will print in sets of four pages, as follows:

Page Number 1

Columns 1 to 7: Housekeeping

The seven initial columns either contain control codes for the housekeeping of the catalog, or information that is only relevant to the Spanish section of the databank. These have been erased in this version.

Column 8: Date

The date is displayed as Day/Month/Year.

Column 9: Approximate Date

A triple column denotes "Y" for approximate year, "M" for approximate month, and "D" for approximate day. When a month or day is unknown, "01" is entered.

In cases where a witness states that the event occurred in the night from day A to day B, and no precise time is given, the catalogue records only day A.

Criteria for seasons are: spring (May), summer (August), fall (November), winter (February).

Column 10: Time

The local time (CET/CEST) is given. When the time is not specified, we use "Day", "Night", etc.

Column 11: Description

When "UFO" is displayed, this should be regarded as just a tag devoid of any epistemological significance. It purely designates events that could not be identified with the information at hand.

When paucity of data does not allow an evaluation, "Insufficient information" is entered.

When a plausible explanation was put forward by the source and/or the compilers, this column mentions that explanation.

“Ground level”, “Sea level” or “Creature” respectively denote a phenomenon that is claimed to be positioned on the ground or on a water surface, or the mention of a creature.

“Non-event” means that investigation showed the claimed event to be fictitious, or that the images never existed.

“Backdated from year . . . ” is added when the report originated years after its alleged occurrence.

Column 12: Explanation

“OK” is displayed when an explanation was found or proposed, that is considered plausible by the compilers.

Column 13: Location (Country)

Municipality (sometimes preceded by a local village), province, and country (Belgium in the present sample).

When the phenomenon is believed to have been located outside the Earth’s atmosphere, “Outer space” is used, followed in parentheses by the municipality where the photograph was shot.

Page Number 2

Column 14: Nation Code

Shows the nation’s code according to the United Nations alpha ISO 3-digit code (here “BEL” for Belgium.)

Column 15: Local Regional Codes

Contains the official codes for the various Belgian provinces. These are: “AN” (Antwerp), “BCR” (Brussels Capital Region), “EF” (East Flanders), “FB” (Flemish Brabant), “HA” (Hainaut), “LG” (Limburg), “LI” (Liège), “LU” (Luxembourg), “NA” (Namur), “WB” (Walloon Brabant), “WF” (West Flanders).

Column 16: Photo, Film and Video

Shows the type of image (photograph, film/movie, or videotape).

Column 17: CE

“CE” (for Close Encounter) denotes a phenomenon on the ground or on a water surface, and/or the sighting of a creature.

Column 18: BL

“BL” denotes cases that were linked to ball lightning or bead lightning.

Column 19: Photographer

Gives the full name of the author of the image. (In brackets, if affiliated to a UFO group or serving as a police officer or in military).

Column 20: Media

When the author of the image is associated with a newspaper, TV channel or other professional media, the name of the company or publication is included.

Column 21: Duration

The full visual lifetime of the event expressed in seconds.

Column 22: Special Photo Features

Specifies singular particularities of the images and/or the circumstances in which they were taken. For example: infrared, ultraviolet or special sensibility film, stereo or 3D photography, underwater, imagery from an automated camera, photographs shot from military aircraft (“gun camera”) or civil aircraft (“photographs from airplane”), objects not observed visually (“unseen by photographer”), blank photos/no images showed up, spectral or magnetic recordings, radar echoes, night-vision cameras, telescopic images, pictures confiscated by authorities, pictures lost, etc.

Column 23: Blue Book Files

An asterisk (*) in this column indicates that the case was filed by the USAF Project Blue Book (closed 1969).

Column 24: Airborne

An asterisk (*) in this column indicates that the image was taken from the air.

Page Number 3

Column 25: References and Sources

Brings together all references, sources and bibliographical data that document the event and are known to the compilers.

Page Number 4

Column 26: Full Date

It describes in more detail the date for approximate dates, for example “summer”, “before June”, “around September 5”, “published on...”, “early December”, etc.

Column 27: Image Not Viewed

When the authors were unable to locate the images.

Column 28: Age

Age of the person who took the photo, film or video.

Column 29: Attending People

Number of persons who claim to have witnessed the photographically recorded event.

(*) The Belgium FOTOCAT spreadsheet (1950-1988) can be consulted by accessing the following link:

https://www.academia.edu/34194218/1950-1988_BELGIUM_FOTOCAT_August_2017.pdf

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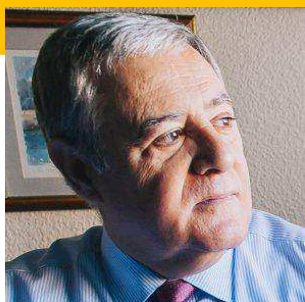


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