

## 3.1.2

Two Pilot Witness Cases described as Spheres  
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## Case 1.

May 10, 1958. Brilliant huge “ball lightning” threatens DC-3.  
North American Sector: Western Canada

The flight from Cold Lake, Alberta to Victoria, British Columbia was necessary but for the pilot of the Dakota DC-3 (Figure 1) it was somewhat depressing. RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force) pilot, Flight Lieutenant Bob H., was carrying the body of a friend and fellow RCAF Flight Lieutenant, pilot instructor Jack Findley.

Findley had been killed three days before on May 7 during flight training. The pilot Officer Maybe and Findley were attached to 4 Wing and were taking off from what was then RCAF Cold Lake in Alberta in Canada’s all-weather interceptor at the time, the AVRO CF-100.

While climbing away from the runway, without warning, the controls ceased up. With too much runway behind them and at low altitude Flight Lt. Findley immediately ordered Flight Lieutenant Maybe to eject and waited the three seconds for him to do so while the aircraft rolled to the right. Maybe’s seat ejected horizontally. A fraction of a second later the instructor did the same but the roll had continued during that fraction of a second rocketing Flight Lt. Findley into the ground, killing him. Ironically this was not meant to be Findley’s flight and had taken it when the assigned instructor had cancelled out due to his wife having an operation.

Flight Lt. Bob H. had a couple of thousand hours on the Dakota, the RCAF designation for the Douglas DC-3, so he volunteered to fly the pilot’s body to Victoria.



Figure 1. DC-3 Airplane

The flight to Victoria was uneventful. It was during the return flight that Bob had one of the weirdest experiences of his 30 year air force flying career.

May 13, 1958.

It was a good day for flying. There were scattered, puffy white clouds along their northeastward route but the air was stable. Bob and his First Officer, Don P. were wheels up at 9:00 am at Sydney airport just outside Victoria, B.C. They were flying an IFR flight planned return trip from Victoria back to Cold Lake on a track that took them east over the northwestern tip of Washington State and the northern Cascade Mountain Range. As shown in Figure 3 their track line continued over successive mountain ranges; the Columbia Mountains, the Selkirk Mountains, the Purcell Mountains and finally the Rocky Mountains on their first leg which would end at Turner Valley, a mandatory check point. Their IFR Flight Plan dictated a turn to the northeast. This new leg of about 390 miles would take them directly over Calgary, Alberta.

The flight was going well Bob remembers they were at either 7,000 or 9,000 feet on top of the clouds which were still scattered and afforded an arresting panorama; so much so that Bob filmed them on an 8mm movie camera. Unfortunately upon arriving at their mandatory position reporting point he had stowed the camera.



Figure 3. Flight Track of Dakota from Victoria to Turner valley to Calgary to Cold Lake. Red below Calgary indicates approximate position when the black cloud was first seen.

It was about 12:15 pm. Upon turning to their new heading and some 25 miles southwest of the edge of Calgary the pilots noticed a giant and uncharacteristically black cloud that seemed to suddenly appear and lay directly across their flight path and at the same altitude. The cloud, which was very thick from base to its top stretched the width of the city of Calgary and increased in size as they approached it at about 155 miles per hour. Simultaneously with its appearance their radios went dead, or perhaps more accurately they worked but their VHF communications with Cold Lake and Calgary suddenly ceased.



Figure 4. Though thick and massive, note how white and fluffy this developing CuNim appears.

There were two things about this cloud that were exceedingly odd, Bob related upon reflection. The edges of it seemed indistinct, surrounded in a haze and unlike the normally well defined edges of Cumulonimbus clouds. (See Fig. 4 above) Secondly, this was early in the day for this kind of heavy cloud build-up, the type of Towering Cumulous usually associated with such a base. Thick as it was this cloud was more in the manner of a thick Cumulonimbus rather than a building thunder cell.

The two pilots were in a bit of a quandary. They were on an IFR flight plan that required that they report in their position report at Turner Valley and that forbade course and altitude deviation without getting permission but their radios were not working. However they were not inclined to fly into that black cloud.

Bob, who was the command pilot, passed control over to his co-pilot while he attempted to make contact with someone so they could get permission to update their flight plan around that cloud. He tried several times to raise Calgary only a few miles ahead but they would not answer nor would Cold Lake some 375 miles away. The black cloud continued to grow in the windscreen.

He finally heard someone talking to Lethbridge Tower radio 100 miles south-southeast of Calgary which on their present course was behind them at their 5 o'clock position. The cloud grew even larger in their windscreen during the approximately 5 to 6 minutes it took to determine that Calgary wasn't going to answer and then establish contact with Lethbridge, who's tower operator was busy working other traffic.

The huge dark cloud was now estimated by the pilots to be about ten miles ahead and lay menacingly right across their flight track. During the process of transmitting his position Bob remembers holding the microphone and speaking into it while at the same time he saw an exceedingly brilliant, white pin-point of light suddenly materialize in the dark cloud mass ahead. He broke off in mid-sentence. He watched this brilliance as it grew in size and taking the form of a brilliant ball of light. From his first glimpse of it as if coming directly at the nose of the aircraft until it grew in size filling Bob's whole field of view he estimates it took perhaps a maximum of seven seconds which he said were very long seconds during which he noted that slowing down of time which we sometimes seem to experience when in an emergency situation.

#### Collision seemed unavoidable

Bob dropped the microphone and remembers disengaging his seat belt and rolling right over his right arm rest. He threw his arms up and threw himself backward through the curtain and fell onto the cabin floor between the seats.

Bob fully expected to be a part of the Dakota's debris; a flaming ball of wreckage raining down into the northeastern Turner Valley after the collision. But nothing happened. Looking up from his position on the deck, he was shocked to see some of the military officers and enlisted personnel staring down at him in wonderment. He was still alive.

With a sheepish grin on his face Bob quickly got back to his feet and re-entered the cockpit of the DC-3 to find Don P. rigid in his seat, gripping the control yoke.

“I’m still flying it,” he said without being asked. The event had happened so fast he had had no time to react to it.

“Then just like that the black cloud suddenly vanished and we could hear Calgary working traffic just as clear as a bell.” Bob remembered. This too was a real puzzle. He re-established with Lethbridge and told them to disregard and contacted Calgary to make his position report.

“So what happened? Where did the light go?” I asked Bob.

“Well that’s the damndest thing.” Bob told me. We never even discussed it and we didn’t report it when we got to Cold Lake. It filled our whole field of view, was brilliant then it must have gone down one side of the aircraft or the other.” He thought for sure he was going to be killed.

I asked Bob what he thought this might have been.

“I guess it must have been ball lightning.” He assumed the light had been generated within the cloud and once free of it the cloud collapsed.

Bob did not then and does not now believe that there is anything to the phenomenon we often attribute to Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (sometimes referred to as UFO), but that there is a natural explanation for each UAP event. I did explain to him that ball lightning is still an unproved phenomenon and that most of them are reported to be of small dimensions up to a foot in diameter.

Bob is eighty years old and still holds a pilot’s license. He was in the Canadian Air Force for 30 years and retired in 1976 then went into civilian commercial aviation for another ten years. He holds endorsements on floats and skis and has flown numerous types of aircraft; jets, B-25s, DC-3s, TBM Avengers - one of which nearly killed him when a prop blade separated from its hub - and numerous smaller aircraft of both military and civilian registrations. He still putters around in his Experimental homebuilt aircraft. I asked him why this event was so important to him. The question caught him off guard as he didn’t really assign real importance to it, but I reminded him that he remembered many small details to an event that happened 50 years ago.

“I suppose because I thought I was going to die,” he replied.

Case 2.

Silver Sphere disconcerts pilot/police officer.

North American Sector: East Coast of Canada



A private pilot related to me that in July of 1996 he had been flying his Piper Cherokee PA-28 140 from Waterville, Nova Scotia, my home turf, to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island a distance of 110 statute miles. The pilot was also a police officer of 20 years. On this day he was returning his airplane to his home airport after getting his annual inspection completed. His father-in-law was in the right seat and his son was asleep in the back seat. They were level at 3,500 feet and the sky Ceiling And Visibility Unlimited (CAVU).



Figure 6. Piper Cherokee PA 28 140

They were crossing over Cape Blomidon (See World Aeronautical Chart [WAC] insert, Figure 5 below) and almost to the water in Minas Basin. It was the pilot's father-in-law who first spotted the anomaly. He pointed it out to the pilot who looking out to his eleven o'clock position spotted a chrome colored sphere which he estimated to be about 60 feet in diameter about two miles away and traveling at the same speed as his aircraft. The Father-in-law had spotted the sphere in the Vee created by the curve in the Instrument panel and the window frame on the Cherokee. The pilot estimated that the object was about 500 feet lower than his aircraft and was dropping lower still. It appeared to be so highly polished that he could see the terrain on Cape Blomidon reflected in it. The UAP was between him and the terrain which were low hills rising to about 1,025 feet some 5 statute miles on his port side. It was only pure luck that his father-in-law had spotted the thing at all through the 'Vee'.



Figure 5. Long red line is the Cherokee's flight track. Double slash = Cherokee. Red dot, bottom end of line=object. Short blue track = UAP's track to over Springhill. Arrowheads indicate direction of flight.

I gleaned as much information as I could from the pilot on the phone and through e-mails and then met him during a fly-in about 6 months later. Again he would not fill out a report. [Note: The pilot is known to me as determined during our contact both before I knew of the event and after.]

I learned the only real affect resulting from this encounter was on the pilot himself. As much as he did not want to know what the "thing" was still, he banked gently in its direction. As soon as he did this the UAP almost instantaneously darted from its position to a position estimated to be over Springhill about 20 statute miles away. It hovered there as a bright dot. The pilot's track would have taken him closer to Springhill but a bit south of it, however at some point the object just disappeared.

As for the effect on the pilot he said that he felt dread. I asked him to explain what he meant. "I got a sick feeling when I saw the thing. I knew right then that this was not natural or man made," he said. He told me that he thought he was being observed and that in the space of a few seconds that his whole belief system was impacted. One of the worst situations a police officer can roll on is a violent domestic dispute. "The feeling I had that day was worse than going into one of those situations." He radioed Halifax Tower about 40 miles away and was told they were receiving his transponder code of 1200 but there was nothing else in his locale.

As noted, the pilot in this case was distressed at what he had seen. He, like the other pilots, never forgot the incident. Not only did the sighting disturb him but it had another effect on him as well. He was so affected by the incident that he was distracted to some degree during the rest of the flight. He was constantly rolling the encounter over and over in his mind. Being distracted while flying an airplane is definitely a negative influence on a pilot's ability to counteract against any situation that may arise to impact the passenger's safety and control the aircraft.

#### Comments and Conclusion

Is there such a thing as ball lightning<sup>1</sup> that is as large as that described by the pilot of the DC-3 in Case 1? My research indicates that the 'ball lightning' phenomenon is a gray area similar to the UAP phenomenon. In any event the material I have had access to indicates that, in nature at least, these BL phenomena are small and on the order of 6 to 10 inches in diameter, not 11 feet or more in size. What connection would this large ball have to the curious monstrous black cloud that so quickly vanished once the event had occurred?

Although ball lightning is part of the popular lexicon there has been very little research that supports any natural phenomenon that might account for huge balls of 'lightning' or, as is more likely, plasma events.

Laboratory research has generated small, electrically charged balls of light but nothing that would account for what happened to the pilots of the Dakota on May 13, 1958. Few reports have been generated by pilots it seems though the present collection of papers may improve those numbers.

Almost two years before the Dakota event on August 27, 1956 RCAF pilot Capt. R.J. Childerhose flying a Canadiar F-86 Saber Jet (one of a formation of four F-86s) photographed a brilliant object from his cockpit. Childerhose was at 36,000 feet [10,980 meters] altitude. His aircraft was over Fort MacLeod, Alberta; the object was at his 11 o'clock position and below him putting this brilliant UAP between himself and the ground. Childerhose described the object as being like a bright, horizontal, silver dollar. It was in a clear space between cumulonimbus clouds. Many years later Maccabee analyzed the Kodachrome slide and determined that the photograph object was emitting light on the Lambertian scale of some 30,000 Megawatts. Fort MacLeod is approximately 75 miles [125 kilometers] south-southwest of Turner Valley where the Dakota event took place. Could

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<sup>1</sup> See 4.3 for further discussion of this subject. (Ed.)



some natural phenomenon be generating huge electrical potential in the clouds just east of the Canadian Rocky Mountains?

Silver spheres are not common in UAP reports. In the case of the pilot/police officer who reported to me personally his encounter with such an object I found it interesting that he had a physical response (probably triggered by some psychological factor) that resulted in his feeling queasy and experiencing dread. The chrome-like, 60 foot (18meter) diameter, object was below the horizon and reflecting ground features and when he banked left slightly to approach it, it traveled 20 nautical miles in the space of several seconds. I can conclude little as to what this object might have been other than that there is no such aerospace craft that can match it in appearance and speed. The pilot in this case most likely suffered a paradigm shift where the affect of the object's appearance cause a psychological affect rather than a physiological affect by its presence. Though UAP with chrome-like surfaces are not unheard of they do not represent a large percentage of all UAP.

In both the Dakota 'ball lightning' episode and the Chrome Ball encounter there is a safety issue at hand which needs to be fully explored in other UAP encounters. Since these two occurrences seem to be exceptional in their (low) frequency it is difficult to pursue scientific investigation of their sources. Where each incident impinged on aviation safety, they need to be taken very seriously. Science in these two cases has yet to catch up.

#### References

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