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Flying Saucers

Plastic 'Moby Dicks' Flying Since 1950

Whale-Like Air Force Balloons Rise 20 Miles, Solve Flying Saucer Riddle, Wind Secrets

By the Associated Press

The magazine Aviation Week published a new report yesterday on what the Air Force has found out about the upper atmosphere with its "Moby Dick" balloons—whale-like bags which have often been mistaken for flying saucers.

Since the big helium-filled balloons made their appearance three years ago, the magazine said, more than 90 percent of the "saucer" sightings have coincided with their logged ascents and charted courses.

The shiny surface of the plastic balloons is an excellent reflector of light. Long after the sun has set and darkness has covered the earth, they shine brilliantly with the light reflected from the sun at altitudes of from 90,000 to 100,000 feet, almost 20 miles up in the sky.

Vapor dust or other foreign particles in the atmosphere make the light appear white, red, purple, or green. Because of the difficulty of judging speed at high altitudes, the balloons

sometimes seem to be racing at tremendous velocities, whereas they actually are moving at 60 miles an hour or less.

One evening after sunset many units of the Strategic Air Command in Texas were kept busy trying to catch and shoot down a flying object that was actually a Moby Dick drifting along at about 90,000 feet in a glow of dust-refracted sunlight.

B-36 bomber crews, accustomed to flying high altitudes, gave up the chase when they were left behind at 45,000 feet, and jet fighters stalled trying to pursue the object above their altitude ceiling.

Another mysterious object, later identified positively as a research balloon, floated over San Francisco last spring during a parade welcoming Gen. James A. Van Fleet home from Korea. It shone as a brilliant white sphere as jet fighters vainly tried to reach it. On another day, Dayton, Ohio, was filled with "saucer" reports as another balloon floated over the city. The balloon flights have con-

firmed the fact that air currents travel in opposite directions at different altitude layers. The prevailing wind moves from West to East across the United States at about 50,000 feet. About 10,000 feet higher, however, the flow is sometimes reversed.

Balloons have also carried various kinds of animal life, ranging from fruit flies to mice and monkeys, up to 80,000 feet. The experimental animals have survived such altitudes for 24 hours and have been recovered to provide living data for scientific research.

The Moby Dick balloons are released almost daily at Tillamook, Ore.; Vernalis, Calif., and Edwards Air Force Base in California. Two more sites will be used to take advantage of late summer winds—the Moody Air Force base near Valdosta, Ga., and Sedalia, Mo.

The big bags are made so that they destroy themselves automatically when they descend to 33,000 feet. Recording machines and instruments are parachuted to earth.

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INDEXED - 81 | *62-83894-A*

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- Wash. Post P. M 1
- Wash. News _____
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58
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Date: AUG 23 1953