

On Events Possibly Related to the “Brazil Magnesium”

PIERRE KAUFMANN

*Centro de Rádio-Astronomia e Astrofísica Mackenzie, Universidade Presbiteriana
Mackenzie, Rua da Consolação 896, São Paulo, SP 01302-907, Brazil
e-mail: kaufmann@craae.mackenzie.br*

PETER A. STURROCK

*Center for Space Science and Astrophysics
Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305
e-mail: sturrock@flare.stanford.edu*

Abstract—Inquiries in the Ubatuba area have yielded evidence of three aerial events that may be related to an unusual magnesium specimen, which is usually attributed to an event in or near Ubatuba, an analysis of which has been published in this journal. There is undisputed evidence that an aircraft crashed in that area in April 1957. There is strong evidence that a meteorite, or an object resembling a meteorite, crashed or exploded in the area in the early 1930’s, and that a piece of strange light-weight material was caught in a fishing net at about that time. There is weaker evidence (mainly from one witness) that a very large object disintegrated, with a silent explosion, near Ubatuba in or about 1957. There is some evidence that, in or about 1957, one or more metal specimens were brought for analysis to an Air Force research center near São Paulo and found to be magnesium.

Keywords: UFOs—unidentified aerial phenomena—meteorology

1. Introduction

The material that is here referred to as the “Brazil magnesium” has an important place in UFO research. It was the only material specimen investigated by the Colorado Project, which is the only unclassified UFO research project funded by a United States government agency (Condon & Gillmor, 1969). In an earlier article (Sturrock, 2001), we have reviewed the history of this material and published the results of our composition analysis of the surviving fragments. Although it would have been possible for the Colorado Project to send an investigator to Brazil, or to request Brazilian authorities to make inquiries on its behalf, this was not done. As a result, our information about the origin of this material has been based entirely on Dr. Olavo Fontes’ account of how he acquired the material (Fontes, 1962), and of visits made to Ubatuba by himself, sometime between 1957 and 1960, and by a Brazilian journalist João Martins in 1957.

We reproduce once more P.K.'s translation of the letter received by Ibrahim Sued, which was reproduced in his article in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *El Globo* on September 14, 1957, with the heading "A Fragment from a Flying Disk!":

Dear Mr. Ibrahim Sued. As a faithful reader of your column, and an admirer of yours, I wish to give you, as a newspaperman, a "scoop" concerning flying discs. If you believe that they are real, of course. I didn't believe anything said or published about them. But just a few days ago I was forced to change my mind. I was fishing together with various friends, at a place close to the town of Ubatuba, São Paulo, when I sighted a flying disc! It approached the beach at unbelievable speed and an accident, i.e. a crash into the sea, seemed imminent. At the last moment, however, when it seemed it was almost striking the waters, it made a sharp turn upward and climbed rapidly on a fantastic impulse. Astonished, we followed the spectacle with our eyes, when we saw the disc explode in flames. It disintegrated into thousands of fiery fragments, which fell sparkling with magnificent brightness. They looked like fireworks, despite the time of the accident, at noon, i.e. at midday. Most of the fragments, almost all, fell into the sea. But a number of small pieces fell close to the beach and we picked up a large amount of this material which was light as paper. I am enclosing a sample of it. I don't know anyone that could be trusted to whom I could send it for analysis. I never read about a flying disk being found, or about fragments or parts of a disk that had been picked up. Unless the finding was made by military authorities and the whole thing kept as a top-secret subject. I am certain the matter will be of great interest to the brilliant columnist and I am sending two copies of this letter to the newspaper and to your home address.

From the admirer (the signature was illegible), together with the above letter, I received fragments of a strange metal.

Fontes visited Ubatuba sometime between 1957 and 1960 but was unable to identify any witness of the purported event described by the person who sent the material to Sued. According to his report to a Brazilian weekly magazine (*Visão*, April 15, 1960) he interviewed fishermen who had taken people on boat trips and who recalled tourists who claimed to have witnessed the event. However, he could not himself find any witnesses among people he met. João Martins, a well-known Brazilian journalist, wrote in another Brazilian weekly magazine (*O Cruzeiro*, November 16, 1957, and more extensively in the April 16, 1960 issue) and claimed to have carried out an intensive search for witnesses and evidence in the Ubatuba area, without obtaining any results. This is puzzling since the event described by the person who wrote to Sued was so spectacular that, if the event had really occurred, one would have expected the event would have been common knowledge. Hence the fact that João Martins and Fontes had been unable to find any witnesses to the event casts some doubt on the account contained in the letter to Sued. Indeed, João Martins concluded that "consistent evidence on the 1957 event required finding witnesses to confirm the content of the letter to Sued." To try to resolve this puzzle, P.K. and P.S. decided to make inquiries in the Ubatuba area to see what could be learned about the origin of the material. This article presents a brief account of these inquiries.

2. Initial Inquiry

In March 1982, P.K. and P.S. visited Ubatuba. At the Hotel Casarão da Lagoinha Hotel, near Ubatuba, they spoke with the husband and wife owners,

Francisco Sarroche Lupion, known as “Paco”, and Ana Maria Sarroche Lupion. On this occasion and a subsequent visit, P.K. met Jorge de Jesus who worked at the hotel. Jorge de Jesus said that the only event in 1957 of which he had heard was an aircraft crash. Around sunset (6:15 pm), on April 10, 1957, a Real-Aerovias DC-3 airplane had crashed into a hill on Anchieta Island, about 3 km from the sea. This event was reported widely and in detail in the Brazilian press.

3. Possible Debris

Paco and Ana Maria had both heard about events in the area, and they were helpful in introducing us to people who could provide more information about these events. In particular, Paco recalled conversations with Eduardo Graça, who owns a fish store in Enseada beach, to the effect that, some time in the 1930’s, Graça’s fisherman uncle (now deceased) picked up some strange material in his net.

P.K. met several times with Graça: twice in March 1982, during the 1982–1983 New Year holidays, twice in December 1984, and again in January 1985. Graça was born in 1931. When he was 11 years old (about 1942), his uncle João Patricio de Irlanda, also known as “João Vitória” (deceased), told him that, during a fishing expedition in the early 1930’s, he found a strange rock in his net when he drew it up from the sea close to Anchieta Island. Graça had also heard from several other fishermen that in the 1930’s, while they were fishing at night (typically between 6 pm and 4 am), they had observed a light and an explosion in the sky.

Irlanda described in detail to Graça the strange object he found in his net in the 1930’s. He and other fisherman were fishing off Anchieta Island, using a kind of net (no longer permitted) that is launched about 800 m from the beach and then hauled up on the beach, carrying everything from the bottom of the sea. When he pulled his nets up on Grande Beach on that island, he found a strange object in the nets. It looked like a stone, about 20 cm in size and light brown in color, but was very light in weight. According to Graça, his uncle promptly gave the rock to the director of the prison on Anchieta Island, Major Nilton Feliciano dos Santos, and it was never returned to Ubatuba. Graça understands that dos Santos took the rock to a laboratory in São Paulo city for analysis, and that it was found to have an “unusual” composition.

None of the fishermen who were with Irlanda were still alive in 1982.

4. Possible Meteorite Event

In his visit to Ubatuba in September 1982, P.K. met twice with Washington de Oliveira, also known as “Filhinho”, who was well educated and highly respected. De Oliveira once had a pharmacy, had served as mayor of Ubatuba, was a press correspondent for a major São Paulo newspaper, and was very knowledgeable about the area; he was known as the “Historian of the region”.

P.K. also interviewed de Oliveira in August 1984 and in December 1984. P.K. found the three accounts to be quite consistent.

De Oliveira had never heard of any event in that area around 1957. However, he had first-hand knowledge of an event that occurred in Ubatuba in 1933 or 1934. He was walking in the town with a friend, Dr. Benedito Sabastião Pires Nobre (deceased), who was a dentist. At that time, there were no streetlights in Ubatuba, except for 60-watt lamps at the street corners. They noticed a sudden flash of light, and then saw a bright, white object overhead, traveling north to south and making a whistling sound. The object they saw was much brighter than Venus, but not as bright as the moon—maybe equivalent to a half moon. The object disappeared behind a range of hills within a few seconds, and the disappearance was followed 15–20 seconds later by a strong explosion that shook the houses and woke up some of the inhabitants. De Oliveira's father, who lived nearby, was awakened by the sound of the impact and by the clatter of shaking glass and chinaware.

Since the explosion came 15–20 seconds after its disappearance, P.K. estimates an impact site 5 or 6 km to the south, at or near Anchieta Island. P.K. estimated that the object was traveling 5,000–13,000 km per hour, for assumed inclinations of 20 to 70 degrees, respectively. This observation is consistent with an impact in the sea near Anchieta Island's Grande Beach, so that there is some agreement between the event observed by Graça's uncle Irlanda, and de Oliveira's report. De Oliveira knew the Anchieta Prison Director, Major Nilton Feliciano dos Santos, who was in charge there from about 1930 to 1934 or 1935 (see map in Figure 1).

In 1984, P.S. sent a letter to the well-known meteor expert Professor Fred Whipple at Harvard, and received a reply from Whipple's colleague Dr. Richard McCroskey. McCroskey was not surprised about the direction of the event reported by de Oliveira. Meteors enter from all directions. Sounds such as whistles are sometimes reported, but there is no evidence that the sounds are real. They may be imagined. The shaking was probably due to a shock wave rather than a ground wave. However, McCroskey was very puzzled by the report that the object was bright enough to illuminate the streets when it was coming in at a shallow angle. In order for an object to be still ablating when it is almost at ground level, it must weigh several tons. A meteorite of several tons would leave a huge crater if it hit the land, or a huge wave if it hit the water. However, we should note the possibility that the final explosion happened above the apparent impact site, and that fragments fell in the water, and were later collected by Irlanda in his net.

5. 1957 Event

In the fall of 1986, P.K. interviewed Dr. Luciano Stancka e Silva, a doctor practicing in São Paulo city. He had heard about an event in 1957 from his uncle Dr. Olinto Schiafarelli (deceased) and from Mrs. Maria de Lourdes, whom he

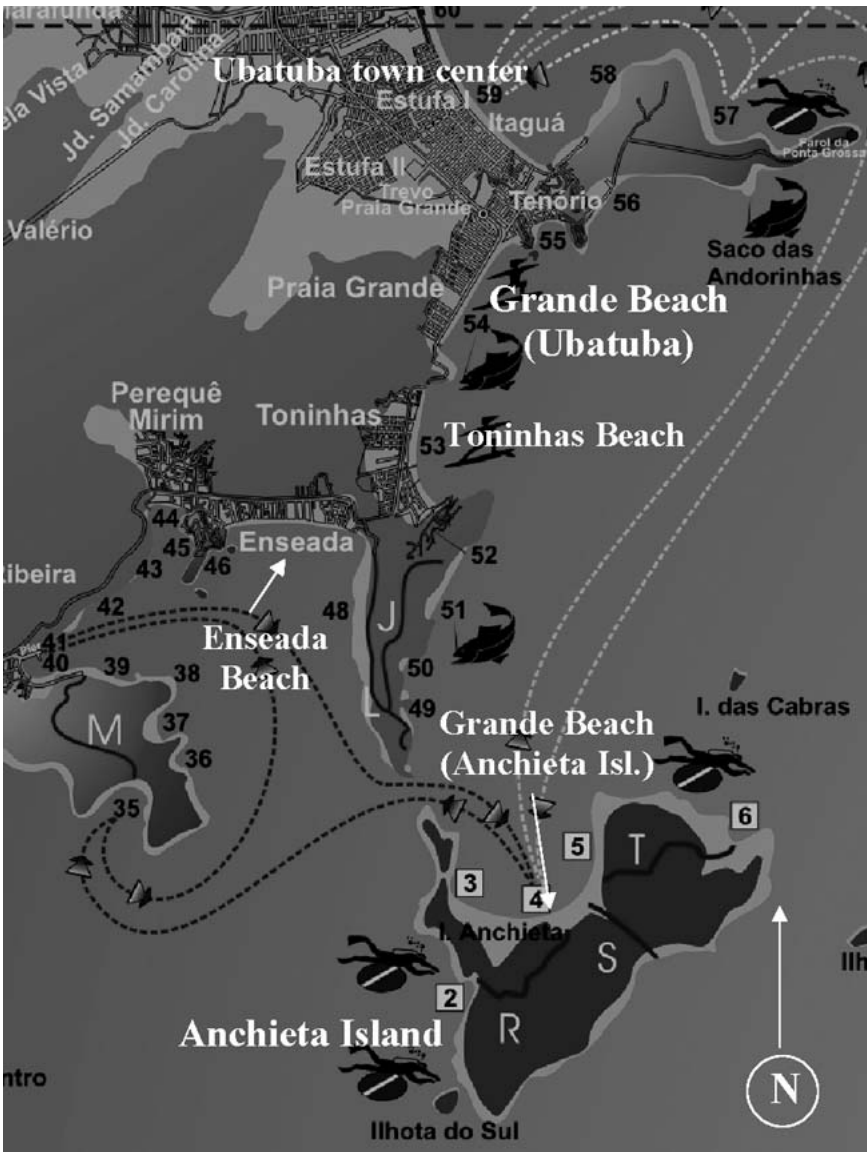


Fig. 1. Excerpt from a map of the surroundings of Ubatuba, extending from Ubatuba to Anchieta Island.

referred to as his aunt. They saw an explosion late at night, and felt a vibration in the ground. Silva said that a fisherman named Joaquim also watched the event. The impact occurred somewhere between Toninhas Beach and Enseada Beach (see Figure 1). According to Silva, Schiafarelli telephoned the Centro Técnico

de Aeronáutica (CTA, today known as Centro Técnico Aeroespacial), who sent people to collect samples of metallic debris.

P.K. interviewed Mrs. Maria de Lourdes twice on January 12 and 13, 1990. She knew about the aircraft crash at Anchieta Island in 1957, but she described another event that occurred sometime between 1955 and 1959, between 2 am and 3 am. She had been to Enseada Beach to pick up her brother Olívio, who had been drinking and playing cards, and was returning home with him. It was a dark, clear night, with no moon. They were on Toninhas Beach, which was then a desolate area—just mountains and beaches (see Figure 1), and she saw a bright egg-shaped object (brighter than the sun) in the clear dark sky. The event was towards the southeast, in the direction of Anchieta Island, possibly as far as Palmas Island, at an elevation of about 20 degrees, appearing to be at a height of 300–400 m. It was huge, like a large building, spinning rapidly, and descending. It exploded, turning bright white and sending bright material in all directions, and then vanished. All this occurred in complete silence and within a few seconds. The area was illuminated brighter than by sunlight, and debris was scattered over a large area.

According to de Lourdes, she was the only witness apart from her brother Olívio, who was intoxicated. She says she talked about the event so much that Schiafarelli asked her to stop. She thought some of the material may have been picked up by local fishermen. She also speculated that some of the material may have been picked up by divers, perhaps by members of the Paulistano Club (in São Paulo), who used to visit Ubatuba.

There is conflicting evidence as to whether Schiafarelli contacted authorities about the event. According to Silva he did, but according to de Lourdes he did not. In 1989, de Lourdes described the event in an interview filmed by the Japanese TV company NTV.

6. Laboratories in Rio and at São José dos Campos

In October 1986, P.K. met with Brigadier Hugo de Oliveira Piva, who was at the CTA, at São José dos Campos, in 1957. He clearly recalled that samples of metallic material of unusual purity were analyzed at CTA. Piva says that someone brought the samples to CTA. No one from CTA went to Ubatuba (if that is where they came from) to collect the specimens. (However, this leaves open the possibility that material was collected by some other official team.)

In November 1987, P.K. was in contact with Dr. David Goldstein, a chemist and Member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, in Rio de Janeiro. Although reticent, Goldstein informed P.K. that in 1957 he was working in the Mineral Production Laboratory (MPL) where the material was analyzed. The samples were brought to the laboratory by Dr. Olavo Fontes, who told him that he had obtained the samples from some fishermen somewhere between Rio and São Paulo. (This may be what Fontes told him or a false recollection on the part of Goldstein, since we know that Fontes acquired the material from Sued.) The

analysis of samples at the MPL in Rio has been reported several times in greater details (see Sturrock, 2001, and references therein).

Professor Aldo Vieira da Rosa, now at Stanford University, was at CTA when the laboratory was formed. Da Rosa informed P.S. that he had some recollection of a metal fragment coming to CTA for analysis. He informed P.S. that Dr. George Moraes, who was at CTA in 1957, also recalled that someone brought to CTA a piece of metal that was analyzed with a spectrograph and found to be magnesium.

In March 1982, P.S. met Mrs. Irene Granchi, an investigator living in Rio de Janeiro, who reported information obtained from Ms. Maria Augusta Rodriguez: She had heard from her father (deceased), who had worked at a laboratory at São José dos Campos as an engineer, that slabs of metal from the Ubatuba area were taken to that laboratory. Granchi had heard from other sources that a special team of the Brazilian army had collected debris from an explosion in the Ubatuba area in 1957.

In sum, there is strong evidence that metal specimens were taken to CTA for analysis in or around 1957, and some evidence that the specimens were found to be magnesium.

7. Discussion

In 1957, *O Globo* was strictly a Rio de Janeiro newspaper. It was hardly read outside Rio, and probably not read at all in Ubatuba. It is therefore unlikely that the magnesium specimens received by Ibrahim Sued, the columnist at *O Globo*, were mailed by someone in Ubatuba. It is more likely that they were mailed by an educated person who lived in Rio de Janeiro or in some town or city where *O Globo* was read. There are several possibilities:

- (a) Someone or a group of people from São Paulo or Rio were in Ubatuba on vacation when an object exploded near a beach, and they retrieved some of the material. This may have been a diving group, as suggested by Maria de Lourdes. The person may have sent the material anonymously (the signature was illegible), to avoid drawing attention to him- or herself.
- (b) Someone from Rio visited Ubatuba and was shown some of the material, and told that it came from an explosion. That person took possession of some of the material, and sent it to Sued with a covering note that may or may not accord with the story that accompanied the material.
- (c) Someone who worked at CTA was curious about the strange material that had arrived at CTA for analysis. The person sent some of the material to Sued not for analysis (which had been done expertly at CTA) but rather to publicize a presumed UFO event.
- (d) The letter and the magnesium were part of a well-staged hoax.

Concerning (d), it is interesting to recall an interview by P.K., on December 29, 1984, with Mr. Francolino Mateus de Souza, then 72 years old, who had lived all his life in Ubatuba. He had never heard of either an event in 1957 or one in the 1930's, and he was only vaguely aware of the crash of an airplane in 1957. However, he did know of stories about "flying saucers" that had been fabricated. He knew, for instance, that his younger brother had claimed that he had seen a big, round, revolving, multicolor object. His brother had invented the story for fun, and to impress outside people—especially engineers and laborers who arrived in the area for the construction of the new road—and was then too ashamed to correct it.

Concerning (a) through (c), P.K. found that the aircraft crash in 1957 was well known by people then living in the area. It was comparatively difficult to find any evidence for any other event in that year.

However, in his visits to Ubatuba, P.K. found two lines of evidence that an object passed near Ubatuba and crashed near Anchieta Island opposite Enseada Beach, or perhaps exploded in the air above the island, in the early 1930's. One line of evidence was the report from de Oliveira of what may have been a meteorite that caused a shock wave on impact with the earth or ocean, or a bolide that exploded before impact. This report is supported by the statements of Graça that some fishermen saw a light and heard an explosion at night sometime in the early 1930's. The other line of evidence, reported by Graça, is that some strange, light-weight, material was found in a fishing net at about that time.

The only testimony for an aerial event in 1957, other than the aircraft crash, comes from a single witness. However, we do know from her nephew that the story is not a recent invention, but originated in the 1957 timeframe.

An important question concerns the specimens taken to CTA for analysis. Here again there are several possibilities:

- (a) As reported by the person interviewed by Granchi, the military or some other official group retrieved material from Ubatuba.
- (b) Some citizen from Ubatuba took a specimen to CTA.
- (c) Dr. Olavo Fontes himself took a specimen to CTA, independently of his taking a specimen to MPL in Rio de Janeiro.
- (d) The analyst at MPL took the specimen to CTA for analysis, in addition to carrying out a spectrographic analysis at MPL.

It is to be regretted that Dr. Condon and his colleagues did not carry out or initiate inquiries in the Ubatuba area at the time of the Colorado Project (1966–1968), when there would have been a much better chance of resolving some of the intriguing (and still unresolved) questions concerning the origin of the Brazil magnesium.

References

- Condon, E. U., & Gillmor, D. S. (1969). *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*. New York: Bantam Press. pp. 257–260.

- Fontes, O. T. (1962). Physical evidence: A report on the investigation of magnesium samples from a UFO explosion over the sea in the Ubatuba region of Brazil. In Lorenzen, C., *The great flying saucer hoax: The UFO facts and their interpretation* (pp. 89–132). New York: William-Frederick Press.
- Sturrock, P. A. (2001). Composition analysis of the Brazil magnesium. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 15, 69–95.