

1959: Poquoson, VA

CE1

"Shoot a saucer" & hit it.

(Probably when Larry Bryant begins to get into trouble with the authorities.)

19 October. Poquoson, Virginia. (6:15 p.m.)

Boy shoots saucer? (See clipping on page 13)

Mark's mother called the Newport News *Daily Press* which sent a reporter to interview the Tenth Grader at his home on Ridge Road in the town of Poquoson. The interview of the boy, as published in the newspaper's October 21<sup>st</sup> edition, could have been more complete. It also stressed Mark's "interest in UFOs" which, as we shall see, is a point in doubt.

The Poquoson UFO incident came to the attention Larry W. Bryant who was associated with a Virginia UFO organization called the Air Research Group: "I read of Muza's harrowing encounter. I immediately realized the significance of the case --- here was the first public record of a 'flying saucer' having been attacked by an observer in Virginia. Unfortunately, as I was later to find out, the Air Force didn't share my enthusiasm." (20.)

Bryant visited Mark and spent some time questioning the boy. Mark's mother confirmed the fact her son had come home "all shaky and nervous." She believed her son's story and could not think of any reason he would lie about the incident.

More information was obtained about the site of the encounter which is an area about a mile from the Muza home, and about five to eight miles to the east of Langley Air Force Base. (See map on page 14) Bryant tells us:

"The remote terrain that was a temporary haven for the UFO is known as the 'Big Marsh.' But for two trespassing young hunters, this expansive, ugly low-land would have been a choice medium for concealing the roving of a flying saucer. It is practically inaccessible without the aid of boots." (21.)

The marsh was off-limits, and for a good reason. Signs were posted that read: "Warning— Danger Area, Bombing Range. Live Ammunition and Bombs. Warranted for Trespassing: \$10,000 or Ten Years Imprisonment or Both." Young Mark told Larry: "...he was reluctant to report the incident to the authorities because he was on government property at the time." (22.)



Mark explained to Mr. Bryant that he had gone about a mile into the marsh and had decided to stop and rest when he heard a whirring noise. The sound drew his attention to the sky. He saw a round object that was slowly coming down at him, tipping back forth as it descended. The fact that the object was heading straight toward his head was so scary he fired at it. The 12-gauge shotgun was loaded with some "Maximum 4's" and when the round hit it sounded like a rock bouncing off a kettle. The object came to stop and hovered. Mark fired another "Maximum 4." Finally he put a steel slug in the gun and fired again at the "thing" which he estimated was about 50 feet above him. Mark looked down at his shotgun to insert yet another shell and when he raised his eyes again the object was gone. Meanwhile, Harold Moore, who was about 100 yards away, heard the gun shots and watched as the object descended toward Mark. Harold confirmed Mark's story, saying Mark just kept firing. The object, according to Harold, began to spin very fast after the third hit and stopped its descent. The thing then zoomed back up, and traveled so fast it was out of sight within seconds, so fast in fact, it was gone before Mark could reload and aim. The duration of the experience was about one and half minutes. (23.)

Mr. Bryant was very interested in the object's appearance so he asked more questions about that aspect. The object, according to Bryant's interview, was a circular body about four feet in diameter which had: "...a dark center encompassed by a six-inch-wide silvery rim glowing brightly as if self-illuminated." (24.) As it turns out, Mark was unfamiliar with the expression: "self-illuminated" but we might know how he came to use those words. Mr. Bryant must have suggested it when Mark mentioned "glowing." Also, Mark seems to favor the word *silvery* to describe the color of the rim. Bryant, no doubt dubious a reference to a precious metal was appropriate, preferred to use the words "aluminum-like." (25.)

Mr. Bryant discovered that Mark had no special interest in "UFOlogy" contrary to what was printed in the *Daily Press* news story. Mark had read no books about UFOs and his only knowledge of the subject was from perusing a few press accounts because he had an interest in current events and often read the newspaper. (26.)

Mr. Bryant asked Mark if the Air Force had contacted him. The fifteen-year-old said that the *Daily Press* reporter was the only person that had expressed an interest. The lack of official curiosity amazed Bryant since Langley Field was just a few miles away. We can only share Bryant's amazement, especially when we consider something Mr. Bryant mentioned to Mark: "I asked Mark to contact me if he ever finds the slug, or slugs, which struck the thing." (27.) If Mark was telling the truth, those slugs would have been worth their weight in platinum, and the metal detectors then in use by the military could have found them, we assume, without a lot of difficulty.

The day following the interview with Mark, Mr. Bryant went the marsh with the both boys to view the encounter site and again discuss the events of October 19<sup>th</sup>. The two teens were getting use to telling their story, a fact we should remember. Mark and Harold were also given NICAP UFO report forms to fill out which also helped to organize their thoughts and make thing clearer. Moreover, there was also plenty of time and opportunity for both Mark and Harold to compare notes. On Mark's NICAP form he paused at question #18 which asked "Was the object - a.) Self-luminous?, b.) Dull finish? c.) Reflecting?, or d.) Transparent?" (28.) (See below) Mark

18. Was the object —

- a. Self-luminous?
- b. Dull finish?
- c. ~~Reflecting?~~
- d. Transparent?

M. G. M. JR.



first checked "Reflecting" and then recognized "Self-luminous" as a better description. He crossed out "Reflecting" and marked "Self-luminous," writing in his initials.

#### Bryant versus the Air Force.

Incredulous that no military representative had yet talked to the two teens, Larry Bryant telephoned Base Operations at Langley Field on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Someone there took the call and left a message with the Intelligence Office of the 4505<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing (probably not the best outfit to deal with UFOs). Shortly thereafter, a Sgt. R.M. Merklings of Air Refueling Intelligence phoned Bryant and said his department knew about the story in the *Daily Press*. Sgt. Merklings took notes on what Bryant had learned about the case and then ended the conversation with the statement that an official Air Force investigation would depend on a decision made by someone else on the base and not by him.

An official investigation was not authorized for reasons mentioned in BLUE BOOK records. For one thing, the two boys failed to officially report their purported sighting. Mr. Bryant's phone call to Langley did not count. The Air Force was quite stubborn about not checking UFO sightings not officially reported to a military installation. Bryant would be not impressed by that argument since Harold and Mark were afraid of reprisals if they confessed to hunting on the off-limits Plum Island Bombing Range. As for the value of Bryant's information on the case, it was discounted on the grounds it: "...contained insufficient evidence to allow any valid conclusions; and since the report was received approximately four days after the sighting, the urgency of the situation was considerably lessened [?]." (29.) Moreover, the Air Force said, since: "...no one else in the area [the middle of a swamp!] reported this sighting, the matter was dropped from further consideration." (30.)

Unaware the decision had been made to disregard the Poguoson incident, Bryant waited a week for something to happen. No one contacted the teens or him so he phoned the 4505<sup>th</sup> Intelligence unit on October 30<sup>th</sup> to learn the disposition of any investigation. The civilian UFO researcher was referred to a Major S.G. Scull who proved to be evasive. Major Scull tried to escape the situation by calling Bryant's data on the case "hearsay evidence." The Major even attempted to ignore the existence of the *Daily Press* news story. If Bryant wanted to pursue the matter further, he was told, it had to be done through "established information channels" (which meant dealing with BLUE BOOK or Major Tacker, both "dead ends" as far as civilian UFO buffs were concerned). (31.)

Determined to learn something, Bryant looked up Sgt. Merklings' phone number and called him at home! The enlisted man refused to discuss "government business" in such circumstances and insisted Bryant approach the Colonel in charge of Intelligence. (32.) On November 1<sup>st</sup> Bryant mailed a letter to Merklings' CO. That failed to work either. Bryant called the Air Base again on November 27<sup>th</sup>. He was informed his concerns were being "processed under Air Force Regulation 200-2." There was no hope such an action would produce results.

Bryant's colleague, Larry Maccubbin, complained to the Honorable Porter Hardy Jr., a member of the House Armed Services Committee. This move bore fruit. When a Congressman asks questions the military is obliged to respond. Col. Carl M. Nelson of the Air Force's Legislative Office told Rep. Hardy that the Poguoson sighting had "never been official reported," and as for the allegation information was obtained about supposed case over the phone from a Mr. Bryant, it was stated that any: "... indirect form of interrogation is contrary to Air Force policy." (33.) This infuriated Maccubbin when he found out so he had Bryant sign an affidavit.

To put the matter to rest, orders finally came down to interrogate both Mark Muza and Harold Moore. Both interviews can be found in BLUE BOOK files. (34.)

The Muza interview conducted on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1960:

"Two boys, Mark G. Muza age 15, and Harold Moore, Jr. age 14, were in swampland northeast of Plum Island Bomb Range. Muza heard an odd whirring sound and upon looking up, observed a circular object, shaped like a discus, about 4 feet in diameter. When first seen, the object was 75 to 90 feet above the ground. There was a round black dome in the center of the bottom of the object. The rest of the object was 'self-luminous.' It was after sundown, just before dusk, causing the object to glow. No windows, doors or other openings could be seen. Muza stated that when first seen, the object was '25 or 30 yards' above him, and it then steadily descended to about '60 feet.' He felt a light draft stirred up by the object. He indicated he was very frightened and fired at the object three times. The third round contained a lead slug and he heard it strike the object. He stated it sounded like 'metal scraping against metal.' After the third shot he closed his eyes and rubbed them with his hand, at which time the object disappeared. There appeared to be no tail, trail or exhaust and very little noise. The observation lasted 'a little over a minute.'

"The subject's mother appeared during the interview and stated that her son had returned from hunting in a highly nervous state and she stayed up all night with him trying to keep him calmed down. In her opinion, he is a truthful boy and she believes his story.

"I was impressed by the youth's pat answers to the usual questions required by AFR 200-2. They appeared to be well-rehearsed and required no thought on his part. In addition, he had a ready answer for questions concerning height, distance, and size. His use of the term 'self-luminous' seemed incongruous with his age and the rest of his speech. When asked to explain the meaning of 'self-luminous,' he became unsure of himself and stated it was 'like aluminum.' I was left with the distinct impression that the young man was not telling the truth and he was slightly apprehensive over the interest displayed in his story." (35.)

The account given above compares well with earlier versions. The differences are the small additions here and there that probably emerged after spending some time trying to recall any details he may have missed. The Air Force agent may not have known how many times Mark had told his story. The filling out of the NICAP UFO report form no doubt helped Mark appear to be "well-rehearsed," to say nothing of Bryant questioning the boy carefully. As we have seen, the use of the words "self-luminous" had an explainable origin. Mark had no qualms about speaking with Bryant but his apprehension sensed by the Air Force interviewer, as discussed earlier, could well have been engendered by confessing to "duck hunting on U.S. Government property." While the Air Force agent "suspected Mark was not telling the truth," he offers no rationale for such behavior.

The Moore interview conducted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1960:

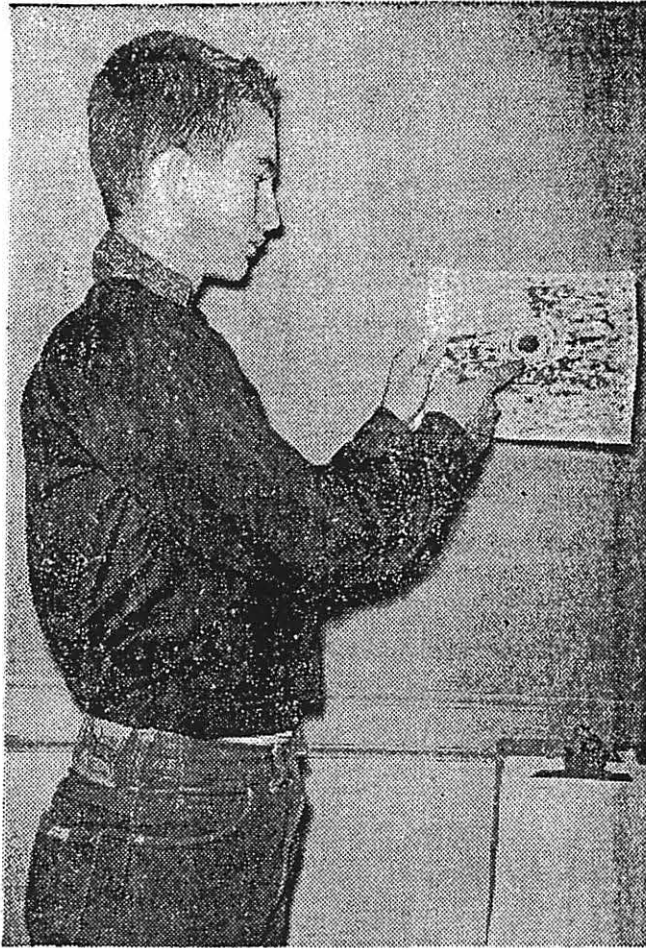
*"Moore was in company of Mark G. Muza at the time of the sighting, located*

PRESS

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### UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT

Mark George Muza, 15-year-old Poquoson boy, displays a picture he drew in an attempt to describe an unidentified flying object which he sighted and shot at Monday while exploring in marshland located off Ridge Road in Poquoson.

### UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT

## Tenth Grader Sees Saucer In The Sky

POQUOSON — "It appeared in the sky amidst a loud, rushing wind noise and hovered about 100 feet over my head."

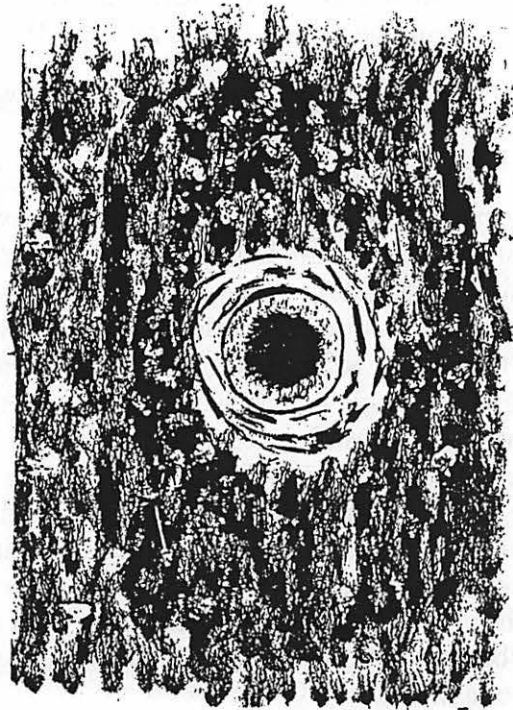
That's the way 15-year-old Mark George Muza Jr. of 176 Ridge Road described his encounter with an unidentified flying object "just about dusk Monday."

"It was about four feet in diameter and had a black body encircled by a silver rim about six inches wide," the Poquoson tenth grader added.

"I stood petrified for several seconds and then raised my 12-gauge shotgun and poured two blasts into it. I knew I hit it both times but nothing happened so I loaded my gun with a shell which had a little more lead in it and shot at it again as it disappeared."

The episode took place just after sunset Monday while he and Harold Moore Jr., 14, of 220 Ridge Road, were exploring in the marsh near their homes, Muza said.

Mark, a boy who reports that he reads everything he can find



about unidentified flying objects "because I'm interested in things like that," said the whirling object hovered above his head for a minute or more.

Harold stated that his attention was called to the "queer looking thing with a silver rim around it" when Mark began shooting at it. He said he saw it for only a few seconds before it disappeared. "At first I thought it might be some strange kind of bird," he added.

Mrs. Muza pointed out that her son came home very upset and told her he had shot at a flying saucer. "He's a pretty steady boy and I was surprised to find him so upset. He drew a picture to describe what he saw and the thing preyed on his mind all night long. He was still a very nervous boy when he went to school Tuesday," she declared.

The alert tenth grader admits he has read quite a bit about flying saucers and that what he saw "is similar in part" to descriptions of unidentified flying objects which he had read about. He emphatically denied that his reading spurred his imagination.

"I don't know what I saw and don't claim it was a flying saucer. I would like for someone to tell me what it was as it was the most frightening experience of my life and something which I won't get over for a long time," he said.

150 yards from Muza's position. His attention was drawn to the object by the sound of firing by Muza. The object was directly over Muza and had an elliptical shape. It was '4 feet in diameter, aluminum colored, with a black dome in the center - approximately 12 inches in diameter.' He could observe no trail or exhaust but the grass around Muza was 'laid down' by some force. He heard no noise and could see the object clearly although it was about dusk. The weather was clear with no clouds or wind. The object was observed for 'about a minute' and then gradually climbed 'straight up until it disappeared.' There was no side motion or other maneuvers performed by the object during the period of observation. Moore stated that he was not concerned with the sighting and had not mentioned it to anyone else. He stated, 'Muza went home and told his mother and next morning she got all excited and called the newspaper.'

"It seemed that Moore was attempting to coordinate the details given by Mark Muza. He stated that the diameter of the object was 4 feet which does not agree with the fact that he was 150 yards from the object. It is doubtful that he could have seen a 'black dome in the center of the object 12 inches in diameter' at a distance of 150 yards. His explanations of the manner in which the object disappeared did not ring true and was obviously fabricated. Most questions were answered with 'I don't know' with no further clarification. I evaluate the incident as being completely fabricated by the two boys. The publicity brought about by the newspaper article made it necessary for them to prepare a pat story and then stick to it to preserve face." (36.)

Like Mark's interview, this account is similar to earlier ones except for a few additions. One exception is the estimated distance between Mark and Harold, 150 yards instead of 100 yards. The distance plays a big role in determining the truth of Harold's testimony. Why the change? Another puzzle is the agent's remark he found Harold's explanation of the object's departure "obviously fabricated." This account says the object "gradually climbed straight up." What is so fantastic about that? Could it be Harold kept to the earlier explanation that the object zoomed out of sight in seconds and the agent refused to put that down?

A final note on the Poguoson case.

Twenty-four years later reporter Larry Bonko of the Norfolk, Virginia, *Ledger-Star* tracked down Mark Muza to ask him about the Poguoson case. If the incident had been a hoax Mr. Muza could have admitted it without embarrassment after so many years. Why pretend otherwise at such a late date. A lot of people brag about their schoolboy pranks. Bonko found that Mr. Muza still took the incident seriously. Asked if he shot at a UFO, Mr. Muza was emphatic: "Yes, I did." Mr. Muza repeated his 1959 claim that the UFO had a black body with a silver trim. The memory was so strong it seemed as if it had "happened yesterday," according to Mr. Muza. Why would the man risk ridicule by claiming he shot at a UFO? Certainly his co-workers would wonder. When Bonko interviewed Mr. Muza in 1983, the 39-year-old man was well established in his career as a police detective. (37.)

19 October. At sea off Columbia. (2122Z)

A teletype message sent to BLUE BOOK reads:

This case would have put Bryant on a "watch" list.