

recalled. "The ship was built like a wire rat-trap, with the horizontal stays molding the slightly bulged end and fastened smoothly. The stays around appeared to form squares in the superstructure. In retrospect the covering looked like a thin grocery bag of today, emitting little light through it, but seemingly to be illuminated revealingly outside without casting a reflection into the atmosphere.... The windows were squat with two sashes and multi clear glass panes. They were placed equidistant from each other.... There were no appendages above or below the ship, and no sign of life, and no noise."

Her father estimated that the object, which was hovering just behind the upper branches of three maple trees, was over 100 feet long and "30 feet deep." As he ran toward it, it started to move, at first slowly, then with increasing speed. "It took off, zigzagging across the sky like a child's balloon when you let go of the air tube," Madge remembered. Frightened, she fled inside. Her father came in soon afterwards and said that the object had stopped its jerking motion, then headed straight west at a dizzying speed. He told his daughter that the object "is not of this world."

A few months later, on September 13, residents of Stratford, Indiana, and southeastern Indianapolis saw a strange sight high in the late-afternoon sky: a 30-foot-long cigar-shaped vehicle. It circled Stratford, then flew on to the east. One witness was alerted to its presence by the sudden cackling of his chickens. He notified his neighbors, E. A. Perkins (president of the Indiana Federation of Labor) and his wife, who studied the object through binoculars. They saw a "canopy" at the top-center, and under it were two figures who were moving backward and forward as if in rhythm. The "airship" did not have a propeller (*Indianapolis Star*, September 14). The next day the *Star* claimed that the mystery had been "solved"—two Indianapolis boys had constructed a 13-foot-long "airship" which was "made of numerous pieces of tissue paper, representing all the colors of the rainbow and some others." Unless the witnesses before were wildly in error, this is not what they saw.

A somewhat similar UFO was seen by two young Dixboro, Michigan, men in 1904. Around twilight Wirt Covert and Arthur Eldert were walking home from a trip to a rural grocery store when they spotted

a large object moving from east to west at a low altitude. It went behind some tall pine trees and then passed on the other side of a high Methodist church steeple. Covert recalled, "I can still see the steeple outlined between us and this object" and, beyond the object, a range of hills. "Suddenly this object rose at least a 60 degree angle over the hills and disappeared. To this day it is fresh in my mind. Its shape reminded me of pictures of the Confederate gunboat *Merri-mac*[k]. It had sort of a thick mast sticking up from the center and when it banked up so quick I'll swear this mast tipped backward at least 45 degrees and a bright orange light shone in the windows" (Covert, 1965).

On August 2, 1905, at 1:30 in the morning, a Silsbee, California, man named J. S. Jackson, driving a herd of hogs from his ranch to nearby Imperial, was startled when a bright light flashed on him from above. It was so bright that it momentarily blinded him, and his terrified livestock headed for the high weeds. The source was a huge airship—70 feet long by one account (*Brawley News*, August 2), 100 feet by another (*Imperial Press*, August 5)—with a brilliant searchlight and huge wings which moved up and down. Jackson thought he could hear the whir of machinery. The object had smaller lights along the sides and was without an attached balloon. Jackson awakened W. E. Wilsie, who lived nearby, and the two watched the object disappear in the northeast. A neighboring farmer, A. J. Morey, saw the airship as it passed over his land. Other sightings of the same or a similar object occurred during the week.

One night in late May 1906 an object thought to be an airship flew over Hallock, Minnesota. It carried lights and alternately hovered and moved, finally vanishing into the darkness at "tremendous speeds" (*Kittson County Enterprise* [Hallock], June 1). Hundreds of Indianapolis residents saw a cigar-shaped object over the southern part of the city late on the afternoon of September 16, 1906, a Sunday. From its motion observers thought it was disabled and about to crash (*Indianapolis Star*, September 18). The airship, or one very much like it, reappeared at the same time on another Sunday afternoon, October 7. This time, however, it was flying smoothly (*Indianapolis Star*, October 8).

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### UFOs, 1900-1946

Around three o'clock one morning in the summer of 1900, as he was returning from a dance in a rural area near Reedsburg, Wisconsin, 14-year-old P. A. McGilvra stopped his horse atop a small hill. The animal was acting up, apparently disturbed by something in the densely wooded area, and as McGilvra searched for the cause, he happened to look up into a cloudless sky brilliant with stars. There he saw the outline of an enormous dark, dirigible-shaped vehicle. The object passed at a low altitude over some nearby poplar trees, and as it did so, the trunks of the trees bent dramatically as if in reaction to a strong wind, but no wind was blowing. When the object flew over the witness' head, he heard a loud swishing sound which reminded him of the sound of a stick passed rapidly through the air. Soon the UFO was out of sight, but the horse remained frightened for some time. When interviewed many years later, McGilvra said that other local people had had similar experiences around the same time (Marshall, n.d.).

Reports like these, when they made the newspapers of the period, were called **airship sightings**, though the objects witnesses claimed to have seen only generally resembled "airships" (dirigibles), which in any case were not operating in the United States and which, even if they had been, could not have performed maneuvers like those described in many reports. No history of aviation recognizes these sightings as relevant to the evolution of flight in America or elsewhere. The phenomena described are UFOs of a

kind that by mid-century would be described not as airships but as "cigars."

The overwhelming majority of airship reports available to us are from press accounts, which are often unreliable; many, especially from the famous 1896-97 scare, are known or suspected hoaxes, some of them concocted by practical jokers within the editorial offices of the newspapers. Early twentieth-century American press stories are marginally more credible. At least they do not include patently bogus tales of encounters with secret inventors or cattle-rustling Martians. Firsthand reports—that is, ones that exist outside the newspapers—are all but nonexistent where the 1896-97 events are concerned, but a few surfaced many years later in the modern UFO age through interviews or spontaneous testimony.

An unusually interesting newspaper account appeared in the March 15, 1901, issue of the *Silver City Enterprise* in New Mexico. The *Enterprise* reported that on the seventh Dr. S. H. Milliken of Pinos Altos had seen a passing airship, "and in support of his statement shows a Kodak picture of same. The machine as seen in the picture has the appearance of three cigar-shaped objects which seemed to be lashed together, the one hanging below the other two. All reports go to show that Dr. Milliken was sober on that particular day and his reputation for veracity is unquestioned." Unfortunately the photograph was not reproduced.

A firsthand report comes from a Hiram, Ohio, woman named Madge Brosius Allyn. According to her account (Allyn, 1963, 1971), the sighting took place on March 17, 1903—a date she remembered clearly because her sister Grayce was born that morning—on the family's Helmer, Indiana, farm. In mid-evening Madge Brosius, then twelve and a half years old, saw her father burst into the kitchen, where she was preparing his meal, and shout, "Come see this!" The two rushed outside and observed, in the southwestern sky over a neighbor's pasture, a "huge object like a gigantic ripe cucumber with slightly tapered ends ... brilliantly aglow despite the fact that the sun had set more than an hour before." It had eight windows along the side, in two rows of four each, divided by a dark median line. "There was a light inside, brightest in the end towards us, but illuminating the inside of the ship like a kerosene lamp in a large room," she

At 2 P.M. on July 2, 1907, Bishop John S. Michaud was standing in front of a bank in Burlington, Vermont, and talking with two men when, he reported in a letter to *Monthly Weather Review* (1907:310), "without the slightest indication, or warning, we were startled by what sounded like a most unusual and terrific explosion, evidently very nearby. Raising my eyes, and looking eastward along College Street, I observed a torpedo-shaped body, some 300 feet away, stationary in appearance, and suspended in the air, about 50 feet above the tops of the buildings. In size it was about 6 feet long by 8 inches in diameter, the shell, or covering, having a dark appearance, with here and there tongues of fire issuing from spots on the surface, resembling red-hot, unburnished copper. Although stationary when first noticed, this object soon began to move, rather slowly, and disappeared over Dolan Brothers' store, southward. As it moved, the covering seemed rupturing in places, and through these the intensely red flames issued" (Fort, 1941). Another observer of what was termed the "airship" was Alvaro Adsit, who said it was encircled by a yellow halo (Lore and Deneault, 1968), and one witness claimed that a "ball of fire" dropping from the sky had caused the explosion. The *Burlington Free Press* (July 3) theorized that lightning was responsible because a few minutes later a two-hour shower of rain commenced. Charles Fort noted the similarity of this incident to one reported by a member of the French Academy. On August 20, 1880, during a violent storm, M. A. Trecul saw a torpedo-shaped object drop an object which left a luminous train (Fort, *op. cit.*).

Venus and lanterns suspended from kites, not airships, inspired a spate of "sightings"—attributed to Japanese spy balloons—in the state of Washington in January and February 1908 (Bullard, 1982), but sightings in Ohio, Connecticut, and Massachusetts later in the year are seem less easily explainable. At 6 P.M. on July 25 a vehicle described as an "elongated gas bag under which was suspended a framework equipped with a propeller" flew from north to south over Bristol, Connecticut. Observers thought they saw a figure inside. When the craft reached Lake Compounce, it stopped and circled a few times before turning and heading west, descending as if for a landing on Wolcott Mountain (*Boston Herald*, July

26). Subsequently an East Bristol resident claimed that the object had been nothing more than a large, pig-shaped paper balloon sent aloft to celebrate his daughter's birthday (*Willimantic [Connecticut] Daily Chronicle*, July 29), but airship sightings continued into December and beyond. As had many witnesses during the 1896-97 scare, some observers reported that the airships shone bright searchlights (*Manchester [New Hampshire] Union*, November 2).

During the summer of 1908 residents of Denmark were puzzled by repeated sightings of unidentified airships, sometimes seen flying against the wind. The objects were often said to have wings and searchlights and, on at least one occasion, to have an antenna jutting from its front. There are also suggestions in some reports of what during the later UFO era would be called "cloud cigars." Some reports are of odd-shaped clouds from which bright lights emanated and swept the ground (Wegner, 1977). Peculiar "dirigibles" of unknown origin caused alarm in Estonia and Sweden in late August of the following year (Keel, 1970b).

An early hint of events to come in Great Britain was an occurrence on the ocean 35 miles off Lowestoft, Suffolk, though it would receive no publicity until months afterwards. On a clear night in October 1908 Skipper J. H. Stockman of the smack *Superb* noticed a "large star" which appeared to be approaching the ship. He and a crewman lit a flare in an effort to get a better look at the object. To their surprise the object replied with a red flare of its own. In the resulting light they could see the outline of a "sausage-shaped" airship. The two men then lit a white flare, to which the airship replied with a blue one. A few minutes later the object headed out to sea (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 20, 1909).

*The worldwide wave of 1909-10.* The British press first took note of the presence of a mysterious aerial visitor in March 1909. In its issue of the twenty-seventh the *Peterborough Advertiser* quoted the testimony of Constable P. C. Kettle of Peterborough, Northamptonshire:

I was on duty in Cromwell Road and was coming out of Cobden Street into that thoroughfare when I heard what I took to be a motorcar, which I judged was some 400 yards distant. It

was 5:15 [A.M.] and still quite dark. I walked along Cromwell Road, expecting to see the lights of an approaching car, but none appeared. Still I could hear the steady buzz of a high-powered engine, and suddenly it struck me that the sound was coming, not along the surface of the road, but from above! I looked up, and my eye was at once attracted by a powerful light, which I should judge to be some 1200 feet above the earth. Outlined against the stars was a dark body ... somewhat oblong and narrow in shape ... about a couple of yards long.... It was going at a tremendous pace, and as I watched, the rattle of the engines grew gradually fainter and fainter, and it disappeared into the northwest. Altogether I should say I saw it for about three minutes.

Though Kettle's was the first published account of the British airship, it was not the first sighting of 1909. The first known report (published two and a half months after the fact in the *London Evening News*, May 18) was that of church organist Charles Maberly of Lambourne, Berkshire. At 8:25 P.M., as he was returning home from choir practice, Maberly spotted a bright searchlight emanating from a torpedo-shaped object heading west at 200 feet altitude. It traveled three-quarters of a mile in the time it took him to walk 50 yards. As it passed out of sight, he heard three explosions which sounded at regular intervals.

The sightings, which began on England's east coast but soon spread to Wales and Ireland, continued well into May, amid growing paranoia about German spies, fanned in part by occasional reports of strangers seen showing up in the wake of sightings and speaking in a foreign tongue or with a "guttural accent" (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 18 and 20; *London Daily Mirror*, May 21). Conceivably these were German agents, as puzzled as the British by the reports and seeking answers.

Some representative sightings: Southend-on-Sea, Essex, May 9: At 11:20 P.M., looking toward the northeast, H. M. Boville saw a "large dark object" which "crossed the sky and remained nearly stationary in front of my window. I could see the outline of a torpedo-shaped airship, very long and large ... no more than about a quarter of a mile above the houses

and trees." After hovering for a few minutes, it "rose higher, and travelled very swiftly in a westerly direction towards the coast and London showing, as it did so, two very powerful searchlights at either end for a second or two" (*London Evening News*, May 15). Kelmarsh, Northamptonshire, May 13: Three men in a moving car heard what sounded like a motor engine. Looking up, they saw an "oblong airship" 100 feet long and some 500 feet above them. It had lights at its front and back; they "were not very bright," C. W. Allen said, "but we could distinctly see the torpedo shape and what appeared to be men on the platform below" (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 13). Lowestoft, Suffolk, May 16: At 1:30 A.M. a Mrs. Wigg awoke to a motor-car sound. When she looked out the window, she observed a long, dark, bottle-shaped object pass by at a low altitude. At the front of the machine she thought she saw a man steering the craft. Other persons in the neighborhood reported hearing engine sounds and flashes of light at the same time (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 18 and 19). Thurston, Norfolk, May 19: As a man named Chatten was cycling home around midnight, the trees and hedges lit up briefly in a brilliant blue color. Then, he said, "I saw a long cigar-shaped object, looking a little thicker at the blunt end than a cigar, some 300 or 400 feet above me; it was soaring upwards, the tapering end going foremost, and was moving rapidly in the direction of Norwich. On the under side was what I should call an iron bar supporting a sort of framework, with a yellow light shining at each end" (*London Daily Telegraph*, May 21).

In mid-1908 trappers in Southland, New Zealand, observed something like a "powerful searchlight" moving through the sky. They saw the light on three separate occasions, and once it appeared with two other lights. One year later, in July 1909, airship hysteria hit New Zealand, with a flurry of sightings of "blunt-head cigars" with searchlights (*see UFOs in Australia and New Zealand*).

The events of July 31 give something of a sense of the wave, which ended in September (during August a few sightings took place in Australia as well). Sometime during the early morning hours a Greendale farmhand was feeding horses when a loud whirring sound from an airship frightened the animals. The object, 150 feet long, was moving so fast that by the

time he roused friends, it had almost vanished. It was shaped, he said, "like a boat with a flat top"; apparently it resembled the UFO seen by two Michigan men five years earlier (see above). Early that same morning someone on Grosvenor Street in Dunedin sighted an airship. A bright yellow light shot up what resembled a "mast" and remained there until the craft had passed from view. At 4:55 P.M. a dark, bulky, cigar-shaped object with a boxlike structure underneath it sped over the eastern hills near Akatore and climbed rapidly in the western sky. At 11:30 that night a couple living near Gore watched an airship over the Blue Mountains. In the first few minutes it was nothing more than a bright light, but they soon distinguished a huge cigar-shaped machine which traveled on a straight course with a rocking boatlike motion. The UFO reappeared at 1 and 3 A.M. (Brunt, 1975; Clark and Farish, 1974a).

As the New Zealand/Australia scare was peaking, a new wave of sightings was beginning in America, especially (though not exclusively) in New England. Between 7:30 and 8 P.M. on August 9 two bright lights—one apparently at front, the other of the rear, of what most thought was an airship too high to be visible—flew over Concord, New Hampshire, and eventually disappeared into a cloud. Some theorists suggested it was a toy balloon (*Concord Evening Monitor*, August 10). That same evening similar lights were observed across the border in Vale Perkins, Quebec (*Concord Evening Monitor*, August 13). But the first truly compelling airship report comes from Fishers Island, off the southeast coast of Connecticut, where at 2:30 A.M. on August 18 four men at the island's life-saving station sighted an airship 60 feet long and 20 feet wide. Moving at a "terrific clip" against the wind, it came in from the northeast, its engines whirring, a dazzling white light at its head illuminating the dark, cloud-covered sky. According to the *Providence Journal* (August 19), "In the centre of the aeroplane could be seen two dark figures, but the observers could not tell whether they were men.... The frames and wings could be seen but the watchers could not clearly make out the huddled figures in the centre." Visible for three minutes, the object disappeared in the west. At least two airship sightings were recorded around the same time in Montclair, New Jersey. On the occasion of the second, on August 22, the high-flying

airship emitted smoke and started to descend, though without its lowering its speed. Some witnesses thought it was going to crash, but instead it flew off to the north (*New York Times*, August 24).

September brought a handful of reports from Indiana, including a daylight sighting by several hundred residents of Bloomington on the third (*Indianapolis Star*, September 4) and an odd story (unfortunately lacking both details and documentation) which alleges that an anchor from a passing airship got caught in high-tension wires in Edinburg. "The same balloon passed over Taylorsville, four miles north of [Columbus] a few minutes later," the *Indianapolis Star* stated (October 1), "and it was down so low that the occupants were able to talk to the citizens of the town, inquiring the distance to Indianapolis and Cincinnati." Such stories have dubious precedents. Another airship-and-anchor story, reported from Merkel, Texas, in April 1897, was a hoax patterned after an old British legend; the same period also chronicled many tales of aeronaut encounters but none that are in any way credible.

Another September sighting occurred in Windham, Connecticut, where E. B. Hanna sighted a high-flying, meandering light. After heading in his direction for a short time, it changed direction and moved southward. It looked, he thought, like a "traveling searchlight" (*Willimantic [Connecticut] Chronicle*, December 14). Three months later, in December, a Worcester, Massachusetts, man named Wallace E. Tillinghast would claim he had invented a marvelous aircraft (supposedly it could take off straight into the sky from a sitting position) and flown it on the evening of September 8 (*Boston Herald*, December 14), but despite this and other extravagant claims Tillinghast never produced, then or later, a functioning aircraft. New England newspapers wasted much space on Tillinghast as a wave of airship reports for which the would-be aviator claimed responsibility erupted in the Northeast.

After a few scattered sightings earlier in the month, on December 22 the airship scare began in earnest. At 6:30 that evening residents of Worcester saw a "brilliant ray" approaching them, apparently emanating from a flying machine 1000 feet in the southwestern sky. The *Boston Globe* (December 23) report-

ed that the "rays proceeded from a lamp about the size of the searchlight of an automobile. As it came nearer it was apparent that the lamp was attached to a large black object, but the machine was so high that its form could not be distinguished." After circling over the town, the airship flew off to the west, where it was seen in the town of Marlboro. Then it returned to Worcester between 7 and 7:30, flying in the winter darkness at a low altitude and flashing a searchlight. Some witnesses thought they could see one or two figures inside, and a police officer swore that it had enormous wings. At one point the object hovered above an insurance building. In Augusta, Maine, at around the same time, the appearance of Venus sparked airship reports (*Daily Kennebec Journal* [Augusta], December 24).

On Christmas Eve thousands of citizens of Boston and neighboring communities saw a high-flying airship, or at least the lights from one, alternately flying and hovering above them. Alex Randall of Revere claimed the closest encounter. "It was a few minutes after 10 o'clock when I saw the airship," he told the *Boston Journal* (December 24). "It was flying quite low, not more than 400 feet I should say, and was over Nahant, coming in my direction. I thought for a moment it was going to land on the aeroplane station I have constructed on my garage, but the thing gradually swerved upward as it got over where I was standing, and it was then I saw it distinctly and heard the engines. It carried a searchlight at either end, and the operator seemed to have no difficulty in keeping to any course he desired or in keeping dead against the wind which must have been blowing nearly 30 miles an hour at that time." Randall thought that the wings had a "sweep of 70 feet and the tail and propeller seemed about 45 feet in length." Randall's story, told by a man described by the *Journal* as "considerable [sic] of an expert in aeronautics and motors," may be suspect. Most other reports were simply of a long, cylindrical object.

Between Christmas Eve and early January 1910 other sightings of varying credibility were recorded. On the twenty-fourth, at Providence, Rhode Island, an object "came out of the north like a shooting star. As it approached ... the glare of its headlight grew larger and larger until it appeared as one of the most powerful searchlights, its rays penetrating the dark-

ness at a great distance" (*Providence Journal*, December 25). It had first been seen far up Blackstone Valley, in the Woonsocket area, six or seven minutes before. One of the last New England sightings was of a 50-foot-long string of electric lights seen hovering above a Willimantic building at 1 A.M. during a rain-storm (*Willimantic Daily Chronicle*, January 7, and *Hartford Courant*, January 8).

Such sightings were not, however, confined to the Northeast. At 10 P.M. on December 13, as he looked out the doorway of his house, A. W. Norris of Mabelvale, Arkansas, spotted a bright, bobbing light coming from the south and moving rapidly through the air. Norris ruled out the possibility that it was a meteor because the sky was overcast. A "cigar-shaped" vessel passed over Chattanooga, Tennessee, at 9:30 on the morning of January 12 and returned the next day (*Chattanooga Daily Times*, January 13 and 14). On the afternoon of the twelfth, Huntsville, Alabama, residents watched a high-flying object believed to be an airship (*Nashville Banner*, January 13). Other sightings occurred in Knoxville (*Knoxville Journal*, January 15).

In 1968 Myrtle B. Lee recalled this 1910 experience:

When I was around seven years old, my brother Jack and I were playing in the yard. We saw a bright object hovering just above the trees about 50 yards from us. It was silver colored and shaped like a zeppelin, but not quite as big. It had nothing hanging from the underside. We stood frozen to the ground, not seeing something like that before. We thought whoever was inside was watching us. There were no windows. When it took off, we saw it start up, and it completely vanished before our eyes. We called it a balloon. When I saw a real balloon, I knew what Jack and I saw wasn't a balloon. No one believed us when we told of seeing this thing. I'm 65 years old now and remembered the object well. I'm still wondering what we saw. That was in Fulton County, Arkansas, one mile across from Missouri. Bakersfield was four miles north and west of us (Lee, 1968).

Ten months elapsed before "airships" briefly returned to New England. Two such objects, flying at a "great altitude," showed up over East Providence at

5:30 on the morning of October 29. The witnesses said they were too far away to be observed as dirigibles or cigar-shapes, which is what they assumed the objects would look like up close; as it was, they resembled luminous pumpkins. One was far ahead of the other, but both were "cutting pigeon wings, looping aerial loops, circling and diving like birds and generally doing skylark stunts, but all the time making progress toward the southeast" (*Providence Journal*, October 30).

*The last of the airships.* Early in the evening of October 14, 1912, an "unknown aircraft"—or at least the sound of one—startled residents of Sheerness, England. At Eastchurch residents lighted flares to guide the craft in case it decided to land. When questions were asked in Parliament, Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill said the government knew nothing about the aircraft. An opposition member expressed the anxious view that it was a "Zeppelin dirigible" (*London Times*, November 22)—no small concern in the context of mounting tensions between Britain and Germany, which less than two years later would go to war against one another. Nonetheless no zeppelin could reach England (*Manchester Guardian*, February 26, 1913) until August 1915, during World War I (Lore and Denealt, 1968). In early January 1913 the number of airship reports accelerated dramatically. At 5 A.M. on the fourth, at Dover, John Hobbs heard the sound of motors in the air, looked up, and saw a light speeding toward him from the sea in a northeasterly direction. The vehicle, if that was what it was, was moving steadily despite the presence of a nearly gale-force wind. Two other persons, one a police officer, heard the sound but did not see the object (*London Times*, *London Daily Express*, *London Daily Telegraph*, January 6). Two days later, at 10 in the evening, two lights "thought to be the lamps of an airship" maneuvered in the sky over an Army fort near the coast of Lavernock and the Bristol Channel (*London Daily Express*, January 7). As fear of German aerial espionage mounted, a remarkable sighting occurred at Cardiff, Wales. Capt. Lionel Lindsay, chief constable of Glamorganshire, said, "At quarter to five I noticed the object. It was dusk and foggy so that one could not define it." Still, he could determine that it was large and fast-moving "and it left in its trail a dense volume of smoke" (*London Times*,

January 21). Other witnesses backed up Lindsay's testimony. They reported that after leaving Cardiff, the airship changed direction from due west to north-west (*London Times*, January 22).

When sightings took place on the evening of January 25 over both Liverpool, England, and Chancery, Wales, it appeared that not one but two airships were violating British air space (*London Daily Express*, January 28, and *London Times*, January 30). In each case the object flashed a bright searchlight. An airship appeared over Cardiff on February 1, and it or another was seen over Croyden, England, at 8:45 the next evening. "It came from the southeast and moved overhead, disappearing rapidly to the northwest," an East Croyden resident reported. "I could not make out the exact shape of the envelope, but it must have been an airship of great size. Rays of light issued from it to the right and left, and also downward. There was quite a considerable volume of light altogether" (*London Daily Express*, February 3). That same night an Aberavon, Wales, constable saw something over Swansea Bay, and several witnesses said they could detect the outline of an airship reflected in the light it carried (*London Times*, February 3).

Over a two-hour period on the evening of February 21, an object was observed at various locations in the district of Selby, halfway between Hull and Leeds. It alternately flew and hovered, flashing its searchlight and skirting the roofs of houses before vanishing in a northerly direction "at great speed." At one point a group of businessmen waiting for a train were treated to the sight of a powerful searchlight running along the tracks. Other witnesses swore they had heard the whir of motors as the vehicle passed by (*London Daily Express* and *London Daily Telegraph*, February 24). Reports of airships continued into the next night (*London Daily Telegraph*, February 25). On the twenty-fifth an airship flew over Hull and was observed by hundreds, who agreed it had two lights, one with a reddish tint. Falconer Jameson, who watched it through binoculars, claimed that the lights were attached to a cone-shaped craft (*London Daily Telegraph*, February 26). On Saturday, March 1, the *Manchester Guardian* published this log of reports from the previous eight days:

FRIDAY. Scarborough (searchlight seen and

engine heard). Bridlington (lights and dim shape seen). Selby (long cigar-shaped body, searchlight, and other lights seen; noise of motor heard). Hunstanton (rapidly moving lights seen). SATURDAY. Scarborough (lights and dim shape seen). Corbridge-on-Tyne (lights seen). MONDAY. Sanday, Orkney Isles (airship seen). Witherness (lights and, by help of the lighthouse, body of vessel seen). Portsmouth (lights seen). Ipswich (ordinary lights, powerful searchlight, and body of the vessel seen; throb of engine heard). TUESDAY. Hornsea (white and red lights and cone of airship seen). Hull (lights seen). Grimsby (lights and dim shape seen). Seaforth, Liverpool (bright light and outline of vessel seen; whirring of propeller and throb of engine heard). Dover (lights seen; engine heard). Hunstanton (bright lights seen). WEDNESDAY. Portland Harbour (dazzling searchlight and clear outline of airship seen; sound of propeller heard). Hyde (flashing lights and long, dark, moving object seen). Romiley (nine distinct flashes of vivid searchlight seen). Avonmouth, Bristol (two lights seen). THURSDAY. Hucknall, Nottinghamshire (airship and powerful searchlight seen). Kirkcaldy and Rosyth (brilliant light and dimly outlined airship seen). Liverpool and New Brighton (bright lights and dim shape seen). Ardwick, Manchester (two head lights and a tail light seen)... SUNDAY. Market Weighton, Yorkshire (half deflated [fire balloon], with fuse burnt out). FRIDAY. Seacombe, Cheshire (undamaged [fire balloon], with all fuel consumed).

These last references are to balloons sent aloft by pranksters who were taking advantage of the growing hysteria to further scare the impressionable. It is certain that some of the "airship" reports were of ordinary astronomical phenomena, such as Venus. Moreover, even in the case of the more credible accounts, a close reading suggests, as is also true of the nineteenth-century airship sightings, that these were not "airships" but moving lights which may or may not have been attached to a cigar-shaped vessel. A newspaper account reveals the mental processes that figured in sighting and reporting: "A leading resident at Stratford, Manchester, states that he saw an aircraft, which at first looked 'like a huge ball',

passing overhead in a southerly direction about nine o'clock on Monday night [January 27]. He estimated its height at 700 feet, and saw that it carried a light, which at first seemed yellowish, but afterwards light red. It seemed to be travelling at the rate of about forty miles an hour, and when over Eccles turned westward in the direction of Liverpool. It was, in the opinion of the onlooker, an aircraft of 'huge' size. No sound was heard, but that is attributed to the wind" (*London Daily Express*, January 31). Only the witness' determination to make this an airship gives this the appearance of being anything other than a sighting, reminiscent of thousands of modern UFO reports, of an anomalous nocturnal light.

In the meantime sightings of airships were being made on the European continent. In Russia, Poland, Germany, Austria, and Belgium, airships with great searchlights were sparking paranoia. Of the more interesting reports, perhaps the most spectacular involved an alleged airship crash between Jerch and Caputh, Germany. Two women walking along a rural road at 6 P.M. claimed to have seen an airship catch fire and explode, the remains dropping into the forest below. The fire brigades of three villages, 40 riflemen from the local garrison, and a number of policemen and medical attendants rushed to the scene. Though they searched till early morning, they found nothing. The women were known locally as "thoroughly trustworthy and creditable" (*Berliner Tageblatt*, March 13), but afterwards they were accused—understandably, no doubt—of hoaxing the report (*London Daily Telegraph*, March 14). Still, many generally comparable (and, according to military investigators, credible) reports of crashes of cylindrical objects with no attendant traces were chronicled in northern Europe during the 1946 epidemic of **ghost rockets**. An antecedent is an August 17, 1910, report from just outside Dessau, Germany, where a group of laborers saw a distant balloon burst into flames and crash into a forest. A search found no remains. Possibly, the *London Times* (August 17) speculated, "the supposed balloon was nothing more than a large toy balloon filled with hot air heated by burning spirit," thus not easily findable in a vast forest.

The British airship scare ended on the evening of April 8, with the reappearance of an unidentified flying object over Cardiff. Among the many witnesses



was Chief Constable Lionel Lindsay, whose earlier sighting had been much publicized (*London Times* and *Manchester Guardian*, April 9).

Near dusk on June 29 a fast-moving airship sailed over a Lansing, Michigan, racetrack while a race was in progress. "So swiftly did the strange craft travel," the *Lansing State Journal* (June 30) reported, "that it was not more than three minutes until it had passed from sight in the northwest. The aerial mystery carried no lights of any description and was too elongated for an ordinary balloon.... The craft was at a great height and when it passed to the northwest of the city had reached a still higher altitude."

In 1968 Lloyd L. Arnold, who lived in Lansing in 1913, told ufologist Gary Larreategui of his own sighting made sometime that same summer:

The sun had barely sunk below the horizon, and scarcely a cloud was in the sky. I was seven or eight years old at the time and was outside our corner house, waiting for the arrival of the lamplighter to light the gas street light nearby. Glancing up, I was surprised to see a golden-colored oval-shaped object traveling eastward and much more rapidly than anything with which we were then familiar, it was perfectly delineated and was well lighted by the setting sun, which would probably account for its golden hue.

When it passed due south of me, it was about a half mile away, approximately 500 feet up, and doing what I would judge to be 100 to 200 miles per hour. There was no wind whatsoever at ground level. All in all, it was as clear a sighting as possible.... It was better than 100 feet in diameter and moved without a sound. It traveled much too fast for any balloon. It was definitely a UFO (Clark and Farish, 1974b).

Perhaps if Arnold's sighting had been reported in the local newspaper, the UFO would have been called an "airship."

*Other kinds of UFOs.* It is likely that the sightings recounted above and those that follow are different only in that witnesses to the latter did not characterize what they saw as "airships." After 1913, in any case, references to UFOs as airships—or efforts to

cram them into that pigeonhole—fade from printed sources.

Reports that do not mention airships are unambiguously indistinguishable from sightings of the post-Arnold period. Some examples from the first years of the century:

Perthshire, Scotland, circa 1900: A boy named James Scrimgeour and his sister saw a mysterious light three-quarters of a mile away. It was "proceeding in a westerly direction in zig-zag fashion[;] its speed was far greater than anything on earth at that time except railway trains. [I]t was traveling across fields where there was [sic] no roads and had to cross many fences.... [It] seemed to be about the size of an automobile head light but [had] no glare." It was observed against a "background of hills so that it never rose above the horizon or we might have been able to see [the] shape of it against the sky" (Scrimgeour, 1950).

Pacific Ocean, off the east coast of Korea, February 28, 1904: At 6:10 A.M. Navy personnel aboard the *U.S.S. Supply* sighted what one of them, Lt. Frank H. Schofield (who in the 1930s would become commander-in-chief of the Pacific fleet), called "three somewhat remarkable meteors.... They appeared beneath the clouds, their color a rather bright red. As they approached the ship they appeared to soar, passing above the broken clouds. After rising above the clouds they appeared to be moving directly away from the earth. The largest had an apparent area of about six suns. It was egg-shaped, the larger end forward. The second was about twice the size of the sun, and the third, about the size of the sun. Their near approach to the surface appeared to be most remarkable. That they did come below the clouds and soar instead of continuing their southeasterly course is also curious. The lights were in sight for over two minutes and were carefully observed by three people whose accounts agree as to details" (Schofield, 1904).

Yonkers, New York, 1905: While standing on the east bank of the Hudson River, six-year-old Gerald Thew and a friend noticed a slow-moving, wheel-shaped flying object moving in his direction. It was about 10 feet in diameter. "When it got over the shore," Thew remembered, "it seemed to bounce higher, and as it got over the land it would bounce up and keep the

same elevation" until it finally disappeared over a hill (Thew, 1978).

Wales, 1905: Around 10 P.M. observers witnessed something "like a long cluster of stars, obscured by a thin film or mist," in the sky. Soon it grew brighter, revealing a single, concrete object "like an iron bar, heated to an orange-colored glow, and suspended vertically," according to the *Cambrian Natural Observer* (Fort, *op. cit.*).

Paia, Maui, Hawaii, January 4, 1906: From the beach Martin Myerson saw a green object appear from behind the southern slopes of the Wailuku Mountains, travel like a "slow-pitched baseball," and disappear behind Mount Haleakala to the southeast. Visible for five or six seconds, the object, which had the general shape and apparent diameter of the full moon, gave off light so intense that it illuminated the cane fields below. He recorded the sighting in his diary that evening (Myerson, 1956). Many similar reports of enigmatic **green fireballs** would be made in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Southeast of Anadarko, Oklahoma, November 1906: Roy Russell and four other cotton-pickers were taking a brief respite from their labors at dusk when they spotted, at a distance of about two city blocks, a fiery object shaped like a stovepipe nine or 10 inches in diameter and 16 feet long. From an initial altitude of 60 feet, Russell recalled, it "sank down, came toward us, and passed within about 16 feet of us at eye level." Then it seemed to "flatten out" just before it "just blacked out." No sooner had that happened than "another one came sailing along behind the first. The second was just like the first in size and shape. There was another and another. We stood out there watching for almost 20 minutes. I don't know how many of those things went by in that time" (Owens, n.d.).

Toronto, Ontario, 1907 or 1908: At dusk a couple watched a "luminous ball traveling in an undulating way from west to east parallel with the horizon and slightly above it." It was visible for several minutes (Jordan, 1952).

Waltham, Massachusetts, fall 1907 or 1908: Half an hour after sunset "two lights, one following the other, passed directly overhead paralleling the axis of the earth. They were the size of a star of the first magni-

tude lightish in color. At the time I thought they were slow moving meteors, but were unlike any meteors that I have often seen. They were perhaps separated by a distance of three degrees in the arc of the sky overhead, and passed from view in about three seconds. They did not go out as meteors do, but must have been travelling at nearly meteoric speed, and at a great height" (Drury, 1952).

Great River, Long Island, May 1908: A string of lighted "beads" was seen in the late-evening sky. Then, a witness recalled, "the first one seemed to stop and as the others reached it they seemed to bump into it and it grew a little larger and appeared like a large star and all of a sudden it began to spin like a Fourth of July pinwheel but without sparks[,] just the motion.... [T]he motion stopped and what looked like a very bright star at a great speed took off towards the southeast. It traveled so fast had we not been watching it I am sure we would have missed it altogether" (Peterson, 1958).

Ostfriesland, Germany, 1909: Walking home on a pitch-black night, Frederick Hehr saw a bright white light executing a "curious dance" over a village a mile away. A minute later the light suddenly streaked in his direction, coming within 100 yards of him as it passed by at 60 feet altitude. Three seconds later it was gone (Hehr, 1951).

La Porte, Indiana, October 1909: A huge object resembling two inverted bowls, with a row of lights crossing the center, shined a blinding light on a wagon containing persons on their way home from church at 10:30 P.M. The horses reared up in terror. According to one of the witnesses, Ruth Smith, "illuminated tentacles of phosphorescent color" extended from the UFO to the ground; these light streams had the "intensity of a giant flood bulb." After a few minutes it began moving slowly, edging in the direction of the wagon in a smooth, graceful manner. At 10:45 it disappeared suddenly (Smith, 1961; Lore and Deneault, *op. cit.*).

Near Vernal, Utah, summer 1910: A cowboy riding in the night noticed that his horse was starting to act strangely as if disturbed by something. He dismounted and, gun in hand, brought the animal through the brush to a clearing, where he spotted a row of lights a few feet above the ground. As his eyes adjusted to the

darkness, he saw that the lights were attached to a huge, hovering disc. After watching it for a while, he stepped toward it, and it made a buzzing sound as if, he thought, in warning. But as he continued his approach, it rose slowly into the sky until it reached an altitude of several hundred feet and suddenly streaked off toward the north (Darden, 1966).

*The Welsh lights.* In 1905 an emotional religious revival swept Wales. A leading figure in the movement was Merionethshire evangelist Mary Jones, who claimed to be led by angels whom she encountered in visions. More impressive to outside observers, including those unsympathetic to the revival, was the fact that enigmatic lights seemed to follow Mrs. Jones around. These appearances caused something of a sensation, and reporters came to Wales hoping to view the phenomena themselves.

One such journalist was a *London Daily Mail* correspondent, who wrote (in the February 13 edition): "At twenty past eight I saw what appeared to be a ball of fire above the roof of the chapel [in Merionethshire]. It came from nowhere and sprang into existence instantaneously. It seemed to be about twice the height of the chapel, about fifty feet. Suddenly it disappeared, after having lasted a minute and a half.... [F]ifteen minutes later two lights flared out, one on each side of the chapel. They seemed about a hundred feet apart. I made a rough guess that they were a hundred feet above the roof of the chapel. They shone brilliantly for thirty seconds and then began to flicker." The lights faded out, and the reporter started on a trek back to Barmouth. On the way he saw another strange sight: a "solid bulb of light six inches in diameter" and "about three hundred feet up the hillside and about five hundred feet from where I stood." The object was "tiring to look at."

Reporter Beriah G. Evans recounted a peculiar experience in the February 16 edition of the *Barmouth Advertiser*. He was walking alongside Mrs. Jones and three other persons when, he wrote:

I saw three brilliant rays of light strike across the road from mountain to sea, throwing the stone wall twenty or thirty yards in front into bold relief, every stone plainly visible. There was not a living soul there, nor house, from which it could have come. Another half mile and a

blood-red light, apparently within a foot of the ground, appeared to me in the center of the village street just before us. I said nothing till I reached the spot. Then it disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come.

When Evans finally spoke, all but Mrs. Jones denied they had seen anything. Perhaps the excitement had caused Evans (the major nonevangelical chronicler of the revival [McClure and McClure, 1980]) to hallucinate.

More puzzling is a report related by the Rev. H. D. Jones, a local Baptist minister. He and others were walking back to Egryn from a revival meeting in nearby Llandebr; meanwhile Mrs. Jones (apparently no relation) and several followers drove alongside in a car. Rev. Jones wrote in the *Advertiser* (March 23): "[T]he mysterious light suddenly appeared in the roadway a few yards in front of the car, around which it played, sometimes in front, others behind. When we reached the crossroads the road towards Egryn makes a sudden turn to the left and, on reaching this point, instead of proceeding straight on, the light at once made its way in the direction of Egryn in front of the car. Up till then it had been a single light but here it changed. After going some little distance up the road to Egryn a small red ball of light appeared around which danced two attendant white lights, playing around it. Meanwhile the car proceeded on its journey, leaving the lights behind. Those then suddenly again combined in one and rushed at a rapid pace after the car, which it then overtook. For over a mile did we thus keep it in view."

Along with numerous apparently "objective" sightings of peculiar lights (Evans, 1905; Fryer, 1905; McClure and McClure, *op. cit.*), visions of Christ, angels, or the devil were claimed by the faithful. There were, as well, two reports of other kinds of UFO-associated phenomena. One—which today would be characterized as a **close encounter of the third kind**—was a February sighting, attributed to two men, one a prominent farmer, of a "gigantic human form rising over a hedgerow. Then a ball of fire appeared above and a long ray of light pierced the figure, which vanished" (*Barmouth Advertiser*, February 23). The other story, anticipating the men in black and their terrifying secrets in the 1953 **Bender mystery**, is told briefly in

the *Advertiser* of March 30: "In the neighborhood dwells an exceptionally intelligent young woman of the peasant stock, whose bedroom has been visited three nights in succession by a man dressed in black. This figure has delivered a message to the girl which she is frightened to relate."

*UFOs through the 1910s and 1920s.* Sightings of discs ("flying saucers") grew ever more frequent as the new century put on years. Alameda, California, fall 1912: 15-year-old C. F. Rowling and two friends saw, in the northern sky, "three round objects traveling in parallel with the horizon and at about a thirty five degree angle from where I stood," Rowling recalled. Headed west, "they were less than a mile away.... It was a clear sunny day—about two or three o'clock in the afternoon. They were traveling in a vertical formation one precisely over the other. They were perfectly round and a pale green in color. The shading of the color made them appear as if they were disks on edge and not globular. There were no indications of openings of any sort. They made no noise or left any vapor trails.... I would say that they were at least 75 to 100 feet in diameter.... They were in view for about 10 seconds when they passed behind some trees that were across the street from where I was standing" (Rowling, 1969). Ottertail, Minnesota, June 2, 1919: A tiny circular "cloud" appeared in an otherwise cloudless sky. Suddenly it expanded to several times its original size, yet kept its shape. Seconds later the house from which the sight was being observed started to shake and creak. By the time that stopped, the cloud had expanded still more, now having a ragged appearance and bending toward the earth. Out of the bottom a "black object trailing a streamer much like a jet trail today" dropped, according to a witness. "Then the object began a spiral barrel roll [at the rate of several tight rolls a minute]. After six or seven rolls, the object peeled off in a straight line, going north, the contrail following. Each successive roll was deeper into the atmosphere as the object angled downward, until it peeled off with artistic neatness to the north. It then continued northward in a straight line" ("Supersonic Jet," 1982). Near Mount Pleasant, Iowa, June 3, 1920: 22-year-old Jesse Clark Linch, fishing on a pond, sighted a soundless, blue, disc-shaped object "of a size like a five-gallon cream can" (approximately the size of a fire hydrant). It emerged

from behind a grove of 100-foot-high maple trees, flew across the pond, and landed 15 feet away from Linch. More curious than alarmed, Linch got up and walked toward the object, which then rose up, "slowly lifted over the trees in the west, and disappeared—still no noise" ("Mini UFO," 1978). Gulf Coast, 50 miles north of Freeport, Texas, fall 1920: A fisherman spotted an unusual aerial phenomenon around 3 A.M. C. B. Alves watched a disc approach him, then when 100 yards away veer to the south. Three discs were behind it. "The only noticeable difference was in the light emanating from them. The first and last 'discs' showed a brilliant pink pastel light, and the second and third glowed a pale green that was just as brilliant.... These things looked exactly like two big silver plates set edge to edge and appeared to be about 25 feet in diameter and some 10 feet thick at the center." They disappeared in the distance (Alves, 1955). Mongolia, August 5, 1926: As mountain climber and explorer Nicholas Roerich and his crew were resting at a campsite, they spotted a "huge oval moving at great speed" from north to south. Through field glasses they "saw quite distinctly an oval form with shiny surface, one side of which was brilliant from the sun." When it passed over their camp, it altered its pattern of flight to the southwest and "disappeared in the intense blue sky" (Roerich, 1929). Westmont, Illinois, August 1926: At dusk Frank Tezky and his father watched six disc-shaped objects, five smaller ones trailing in a straight line behind a much larger one, passing in a westerly direction beneath cirrus clouds, which reflected the light cast by the UFOs (Tezky, 1966, 1977). Near Milton, North Dakota, early November 1928: Two brothers driving cattle around 10:30 P.M. saw a metallic object like a "soup bowl turned upside down" fly by at low altitude (15 or 20 feet) and high speed. It had four or five lights, bright enough to illuminate the ground below it, at its front. It made a sound like that of air pouring through a tube (Hartle, 1963).

Other reports were of the sort that in the past had given rise to "airship" speculations, already fading from memory after the British scare of 1912-1913. Manchester, England, October 10, 1914: Albert Buss observed an "absolutely black, spindle-shaped object" crossing the sun. "Its extraordinarily clear-cut outline was surrounded by a kind of halo" (Fort, *op.*

cit.). Rich Field, near Waco, Texas, early 1918: Soldiers leaving the mess hall after the evening meal were startled to see a 100- to 150-foot-long cigar-shaped object coming toward them. "It came directly overhead," according to witness Edwin Bauhan, "and was no more than five hundred feet high so we got an excellent view of it. It had no motors, no rigging, it was noiseless.... It was... a rose or sort of flame color.... I could observe no windows.... We all experienced the weirdest feeling of our lives, and sat in our tent puzzling over it for some time" (Bauhan, 1953). Between Wathena, Kansas, and Rushville, Missouri, June 8, 1920: Two hundred persons, all of them rural residents, saw a large cylindrical object; they said it flew at an altitude of no more than 75 feet. When it reached Rushville, it turned sharply to the right and to the east and vanished into a cloud two miles away (*St. Joseph [Missouri] Gazette*, June 9). Northern Montana, 1920: As he walked across his uncle's pasture on his way home, a 10-year-old boy saw, in a clear sky, an "object traveling from the northwest to the southeast. It seemed to be very high and traveling fast. It was a long, slim, pointed shape and appeared silvery in color" (Clason, 1954). Osage hills of Oklahoma, January 1924: On a very cold night two riders saw a beam of light shining on the snow. The source was a large, oval-shaped object "with white dots of lights on the side and a blue flame at the stern." The UFO "made a slight hissing noise" (Powers, 1953). North of Chicago, June 1925: At 2:30 A.M. a driver stopped his Model-T Ford to watch a 300-foot-long, cigar-shaped object fly south toward the city. "It was a lot of colors, such as blue, red, white, green; also, red sparks were flying away from its nose ... and about 100 feet down through the center [was] all lit up with windows. As it passed in front of us a heat wave came down from it" (*San Diego Evening Tribune*, August 12, 1965). Wolfe County, Kentucky, summer 1927: Nine-year-old Reece Lacey saw a "perfectly shaped, huge fish, with big fins extended outward near the front and small, short ones near the rear" (Lacey, 1958). Lacey's description echoes that of many 1896-97 airship witnesses. See, for example, the widely reproduced sketch that first appeared in the *San Francisco Call* on November 23, 1896.

As in the later decades of the UFO age, most sightings were of nocturnal lights. Devonshire, England, sum-

mer 1915: Two British Naval Intelligence officers interviewed Cecilia Peel Yates about her sighting of a large white light which she had seen rise up from the ground and fly off toward the west. Two weeks later they talked with other witnesses who had seen the same phenomenon on several occasions. On September 4, at 9:30 P.M., the officers observed it themselves. According to their official report, a mile from their position a "bright white light, considerably larger in appearance than a planet, steadily ascended from the meadow to an approximate height of 50 or 60 feet. It then swung for a hundred yards or so to the left, and suddenly vanished" (Randles, 1987). Lowry, South Dakota, March 12, 1916: In the early evening darkness Claude McGee was walking home from a trip to a ranch outside town when he spotted a strange glowing light in the hills ahead of him. Because he knew there were no buildings there (and, moreover, no electricity in the area), he was puzzled. "Suddenly," he recalled, "the light swung in a huge arc down into the valley but stayed close to the wall of hills.... It came to rest on this same wall of hills somewhat to the west of my location. It stayed there a few moments and returned to where it started. It did the same thing once more and returned to the original spot, then again to the spot to the west and south of me.... Then it disappeared and it was all over.... The distance between the two spots must have been at least two miles" (McGee, 1974). Miami, June 13, 1928: Something resembling a "great blurred electric light" appeared over the city for over half an hour between 9 and 10 P.M. "It had every appearance of a comet, except that it had no tail," said one witness, astronomer R. C. Fahrion, who saw it with his unaided eyes; it was gone by the time he got his telescope set up. "In addition this thing did not move and it disappeared too suddenly." It was, he added, of "enormous size" (*Miami Herald*, June 14).

In December 1969 three investigators for the **Aerial Phenomena Research Organization** interviewed a St. Louis-area businessman who related a remarkably detailed close-up sighting he had made in March or April 1927. The witness, who asked for anonymity, said his mother had punished him after he told her what he had seen. X, then a five-year-old boy living in West Frankfort, Illinois, was on his way to the store on an errand. About a block away from his intended

destination he glanced toward the west and spotted a bright, flashing disc approaching silently in his direction.

As he watched, it stopped and hovered over a house across the street from him, about 100 feet away. A large, round sphere, it was nearly the size of the house underneath it: approximately 40 feet in diameter. At first the object had been revolving from right to left, but the revolving motion stopped when the UFO stopped. The object seemed to be made of a stainless-steel material, with a smooth surface. Underneath the UFO was an attached "gondola," on which four or five illuminated "portholes" suddenly opened. A blue-white light shone through them.

After a time the UFO drifted 100 feet to the right and then stopped again, this time letting down a thin, reflecting line from its bottom section. X thought it might have been a glass rod or pencil-thin pipe or wire. Finally the portholes closed just as they had opened, in an effect rather like that of the "iris shutter of a modern day camera." The object started to rotate again and took off in the same direction from which it had come.

The next day X returned to the site and noticed that the area above which the UFO had hovered looked as if oil had been poured on the ground and had soaked in (Clark and Farish, 1975b).

*Mystery airplanes.* If anomalous airships were largely forgotten after 1913, they would be replaced soon enough by something comparable: enigmatic aircraft—in other words, unidentified flying objects perceived or theorized to be powered, heavier-than-aircraft which did not require balloons to propel them and which presumably carried human pilots, probably from a foreign power with unfriendly intentions.

The term "airship" appears occasionally in press accounts of the mystery-airplane scare of 1914, but the references clearly are not to dirigibles; words such as "aeroplane" and "airplane" had not taken a firm hold in the public vocabulary, and they are used interchangeably with "airship." This holds true for the newspapers in America, Canada, and South Africa which covered the sightings in their respective nations.

In 1914 no functioning aircraft existed in South Africa, and there were no airfields. At one point there were a few airplanes in the country, but by 1913, owing to crashes or other problems, none was flying. Even when the craft were flying, none flew at night (Sievers, 1955). Nonetheless, beginning in January, when a man and his children watched a "powerful light or lamp attached to what appeared to be an aeroplane in shape" as it circled a Pretoria neighborhood with a "loud swishing kind of noise" (*Johannesburg Star*, August 26, 1914), persons all over South Africa were reporting mysterious aircraft, usually at night, with powerful searchlights. By August officials and military leaders were thoroughly alarmed. On August 29 the British Military Authorities released this statement: "Reports having been made in the Press and elsewhere during recent weeks of aeroplanes having been seen in flight in various parts of the Union, it is officially notified by the Government that, as there are no Union aeroplanes in South Africa, any which may henceforth be seen are enemy aeroplanes. Anyone, therefore, seeing an aeroplane in flight anywhere in the Union is required to fire on it and attempt to bring it down, or, should it be seen in repose, is invited to capture it and report the matter to the nearest police post" (*Johannesburg Star*, August 29). As with the earlier airship sightings, most witnesses saw only a bright moving light or searchlight which they assumed was attached to a larger structure, occasionally glimpsed (or imagined to be glimpsed) in the reflected glow. One mid-August sighting from the Capetown area was unusual in claiming to be of more than that. Three women saw "what looked like two large pieces of wood about 12 feet along gliding horizontally through the air at a great height" (*Rand Daily Mail* [Johannesburg], August 19). More typical were reports from Graaf-Reinet, where according to the *Cape Argus* (August 24) the "various accounts all state that a bright light (like a head light or search-light) was seen high up passing at a fast rate.... Some eye-witnesses state they heard a loud whizzing noise." Predictably, Venus inspired some sightings, and wild rumors flew. The wave was over by the latter part of September.

Many years later South African ufologist Edgar Sievers revived the long-forgotten episode in his *Flying Saucer über Südafrika* (1955), and one reader, an old

man from Greytown, Natal, came forward to say that back then he had seen one of the "airships" on the ground. Nearby were two of its occupants—"German spies," he took them to be—getting water out of a brook with a pail (Creighton, 1962).

Meanwhile, on September 1—one day after Canada had declared war on Germany and prohibited non-military airplanes from operating during the crisis—a guard at a military prison in Niagara Falls, Ontario, thought he heard an airplane engine in the night. Although he saw nothing, soon enough other soldiers in the area were seeing strange aircraft which carried red lights and fired rockets (*St. Catharines [Ontario] Standard*, September 12). By the next month residents of neighboring Niagara Falls, New York, were hearing engine noises and seeing lights sail across the sky, sometimes stopping to hover (*Niagara Falls [New York] Gazette*, October 13).

The sightings continued into the new year. Late on the evening of February 14, 1915, the lights of Ottawa were shut off when four unidentified aircraft were seen heading in the direction of the Canadian capital. The episode began at 9:15, when a flying object appeared as if out of nowhere immediately above the town of Brockville, Ontario, and shot off toward the north (where Ottawa lay 60 miles away) at a high altitude and rapid rate of speed. It was too far up to be observed as anything but a light, but its engine could be heard. Five minutes later the sounds of another engine could be heard. Persons who looked up in search of the source saw three fireballs drop out of the sky at one-minute intervals and fall into the St. Lawrence River. Minutes later another fast-moving light was seen heading in the same direction, and a few minutes later another. The police chief of Brockville notified Ottawa, and the order went out to dim lights in government and other buildings. The aircraft never showed up, however (*Toronto Globe and New York Times*, February 15), and soon scoffers were claiming that the objects had been toy balloons, an identification witnesses disputed because the lights they had seen were flying against the wind (*Toronto Globe*, February 16). The morning following the Brockville panic, a flying object made a rare daylight appearance, at just before eight o'clock, over Buffalo, New York. Again it was at a high altitude—3000 feet, witnesses estimated—and even in good light details

were difficult to discern. According to the *Niagara Falls (Ontario) Evening Review* (February 19), "at times the machine seemed to head directly for the Canadian shore and then quickly swerve back again.... It was going at a terrific pace and caused considerable excitement."

Sightings continued sporadically but with decreasing intensity. A brief flare-up of excitement ignited in January 1916, when residents of Philadelphia reported seeing fast-moving lights accompanied by motor sounds, and soon sightings spread to nearby areas of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, amid mounting alarm that German saboteurs were scouting munitions factories (not the case, history attests). As always the objects carried bright lights or searchlights, seldom flew in daylight, and were able to hover (Shoemaker, 1985).

There is no more bizarre "mystery airplane" story than the one that follows, and it surely has its genesis in a hallucination. It is mentioned here only because its wild and comic flavor makes it all but irresistible. In 1929 a brother and sister playing in a garden in Hertford, Hertfordshire, England, heard engine sounds and saw a tiny (12- to 15-inch) biplane aircraft coming over the fence from the direction of the orchard. It swooped down, nearly hitting a garbage can in the process, and landed for a few seconds before resuming its flight. During its brief stay on the ground, one "witness" would claim, "I had a perfect view not only of the tiny biplane but also of a perfectly proportioned tiny pilot wearing a leather flying helmet, who waved to us as he took off" (Creighton, 1970).

More puzzling are the many "ghost-flier" sightings of northern Norway, Finland, and Sweden in the early 1930s. Most reports were of nocturnal lights with engine sounds, and like the mystery airships and airplanes before them, these objects carried brilliant searchlights. They also appeared frequently in snowstorms, when the conventional aircraft the various Scandinavian air forces had assigned to pursue them could not even get off the ground. According to one analyst who studied press reports from the period, "Approximately 35 percent of all the known sightings of the 1934 Scandinavian wave took place during severe weather conditions. Heavy snowstorms, bliz-

zards and dense fog were mentioned in many of the accounts. The aircraft even operated at very low level during snowstorms, hedge-hopping with great skill and circling low over villages, ships and railway stations in hazardous mountain regions" (Keel, *op. cit.*).

References to ghost fliers begin to show up in Scandinavian newspapers in December 1933, though the sightings apparently started in 1932, according to some witnesses. One was a Langtrask, Sweden, curate who said that a mysterious aircraft had flown over the town numerous times. On four occasions it flew so low that observers could see it was single-winged, gray, and without insignias (Keel, 1970b). As the sighting wave continued into January and February 1934, speculation tied the airplanes to narcotics or liquor smugglers or to Japanese or Russian spies—and then, when the craft and their pilots proved peculiarly uncatchable—to Venus, hoax balloons, and hallucinations. But not in all quarters; military investigators declared that because there were so many similar sightings from so many reliable witnesses, it was "preposterous" to conclude that mere delusion could explain the reports (*Svenska Dagbladet* [Stockholm], April 14 and 30, 1934). Reports persisted for years afterwards.

In 1978, when Swedish ufologist Anders Liljegren was given permission to examine the still-classified military files on the ghost fliers, he found that the Swedish government had taken a serious interest and the police and the army had conducted thorough investigations, solving many cases but finding that the most interesting reports resisted explanation. "Serious attempts at finding patterns among the reports are found," Liljegren noted. "Every sighting was pinpointed with time-of-observation and direction-of-flight on maps. In its actions the Swedish military had frequent contacts with civilian authorities (police and customs) and with the military forces of Norway and Finland. Interception of radio traffic was ordered and special radio-reconnaissance units transferred from the south of Sweden" (Liljegren, 1982a).

Ghost fliers were not confined exclusively to north-central Europe. During a heavy snowstorm on December 26, 1933, the sounds of an aircraft circling New York City were widely heard, though weather

conditions kept it from being seen. Checks with all airports in the area failed to produce any information about the flight, and no trace of the flying machine was ever found (*New York Times*, December 27). At 6 p.m. on February 14, 1936, during a blinding blizzard the roar of an airplane engine was heard over Cody, Wyoming. The craft seemed to circle the town a few times; then there was silence for an hour. At seven o'clock the sound was back, and Cody residents trudged through the storm to the airport, circling it with flares so as to guide the plane to safety. But the engine sounds faded and did not return, and no explanation for the curious incident would be forthcoming (*Portland Oregonian*, February 15 and 17).

*UFOs in the 1930s.* The sorts of UFO reports that attracted newspaper attention were usually those that could be pigeon-holed as observations of airships and airplanes; in other words, they could lend themselves to the sort of headline treatment that catered to romantic or paranoid speculation, typically about secret inventors or sinister spies. In fact, judging from witnesses' descriptions, what were being seen in most of the close encounters were spindle- or cigar-shaped objects, sometimes with wings—a species of UFO traceable in unbroken succession from the nineteenth-century airships through the 1946 ghost rockets and well beyond. In most cases, however, the phenomena reported were simply lights in the sky; though these were assumed to be airships or airplanes, conceivably a closer view would have revealed other shapes—discs and globes, for example—comparable to those well known to students of modern UFO reports.

Hardly had the **Kenneth Arnold sighting** hit the press wires than individuals started coming forward with stories of their own earlier—sometimes, as we have seen, *much* earlier—UFO encounters. It is unfortunate that no ufologist-investigators existed in the first four and a half decades of the century. Consequently these accounts, in all but a few cases, rest solely on the testimony of a single informant and are, of course, subject to the vagaries of memory. On the other hand, they *are* firsthand, thus not dependent on the whims of journalists and their editors, whose treatment of UFO reports then and now leaves much to be desired. In a sense it is reassuring that these reports tend to be unsensational, in other



words not the kinds of stories people would be likely to make up, and they would be considered entirely ordinary if reported after June 1947. (The exceptions are the occupant reports, dealt with in another entry; see **Close Encounters of the Third Kind, 1901-1959**.) Of course some of these early sightings did see their way to print, and they were duly noted in the writings of Charles Fort and the **Fortean Society**. No one else was paying attention.

An example of an early sighting that came to light later—41 years later—is one said to have occurred on the Italian island of Sardinia on an afternoon in May 1931. Two young men on an outing at a prehistoric site saw an object the size and shape of a soccer ball pass in front of them. It entered a thick growth of bushes, which parted as the object approached them and straightened up again after it went on (Boyd, 1974). Perhaps this event has more to do with ball lightning than with UFOs, though other small, less ambiguously UFO-like objects have been reported (see, for instance, the Wattsburg, Pennsylvania, case below). An example of a sighting less easily explained, yet chronicled not long after its occurrence, took place at 8 P.M. on January 22 or 23, 1935, when a Vienna, Virginia, woman saw flashes of lights in the southwestern sky. As she watched, the lights grew brighter, and soon she determined that they were emanating from a brightly glowing ball. The ball and its attendant lights were moving along the horizon and were lost to view low over foothills near the town (*Science* 81 [March 22, 1935]: 294).

Some typical and not-so-typical sightings from the 1930s:

Newberry, Michigan, spring 1930 or 1931: As he walked down a country road at 7 P.M., high school student Ralph Newman was startled when a “distinctly green fireball ... suddenly appeared in the low eastern sky and moved from south to north for about 20 degrees and simply ‘vanished into thin air’. No sound [was heard] and its illumination brightened the countryside, like a full moon does. It was apparently a bit smaller in [apparent] size than the moon, but it was green” (Newman, 1952).

Tasman Sea, June 10, 1931: Francis Chichester, who as Sir Francis Chichester would become famous as an aviator, sailor, and author, looked out the cockpit of

his Gypsy Moth aircraft to see a series of flashes as if from several aircraft. Then he saw the “dull, gray-white shape of an airship” which “nosed towards me,” he would write, “like an oblong pearl.” Chichester glanced off to the left, where the flashes were continued. When he looked in front of him again, the airship was gone. Soon another emerged from clouds on his right. It “drew steadily closer until perhaps a mile away when, right under my gaze as it were, it suddenly vanished.... But it reappeared close to where it had vanished.... It drew closer. I could see the dull gleam of light on nose and back. It came on, but instead of increasing in size, it diminished as it approached! When quite near, it suddenly became its own ghost. For one second I could see clear through it and the next ... it had vanished. A diminutive cloud formed perfectly to the shape of an airship and then dissolv[ed].” The experience baffled him, naturally enough, but later, when the UFO phenomenon emerged into public consciousness, he realized that what he had seen tallied “with many things people have seen since” (“Chichester,” 1968; “Flying Saucers,” 1950).

Wattsburg, Pennsylvania, June 1932: In the early evening farmer Reuben Knight “stood looking across the meadow ... when there appeared out of the scrub woods 400 yards to the south a bright speck of light, which appeared to advance toward me. It grew in size and came up within four feet of where I stood. It was [at] about eye level, a silvery ball, about 14 inches in diameter, brilliant blue. It traveled in a loop when near me and went back into the woods, proceeding at [sic] a steady, straight path, at about 35 or 40 miles per hour. Having disappeared in the woods for about six or eight seconds, it came again and followed the original route up to me and looped away again. Then I called to my wife, ‘Come here’. She came and I said, ‘Look, watch’, and the silvery ball came again. When it had gone, we waited for it to return, but it did not come back” (Knight, 1965).

Oakland, California, early summer 1932 or 1933: At 7:30 in the evening Fred and Milton Van Sant, teenagers on their way to a Boy Scout meeting, saw “seven or eight meteors ... all flying in a bunch” over the Oakland hills to the east. Fred Van Sant recalled, “We stared at them in amazement for we knew that meteors didn’t fly in bunches. Also these didn’t seem to

fall toward the earth, but maintained the same altitude, which seemed very high, and flew in a great arc as though they were on a great circle route. When I first saw them ... they were at an angle of approximately 30 degrees in the east. They flew toward the west at around 45 degrees. They appeared to be bright points of light like the planet Venus and from each one there was a flame at the back end. They were so bright that they seemed to be emitting their own light, and they remained in their relative position during the time we observed them. There was no sound" (Van Sant, 1958).

Between Chrysville and Morrestown, Pennsylvania, summer 1933: Among the most fantastic of pre-1947 UFO reports is one told by an anonymous individual to the *Allentown [Pennsylvania] Sunday Call-Chronicle* (February 16, 1964). The alleged witness, Y, who desired no publicity, claimed that at 2:30 A.M., as he was on his way to Nazareth, his car had a flat tire. As he was fixing it, he noticed a faint violet glow in a field to his right. Curious, he walked toward it and soon found himself facing a ball-shaped craft 10 feet in diameter and six feet high. The light was coming from a slit in a circular opening which on close examination proved to be slightly ajar. With a push Y opened it and put his head through the one-foot circle to observe the inside. The violet light, emanating, he thought, from the ceiling, made it difficult for him to see, but as his eyes adjusted, he discerned dials, tubing and walls seemingly of a marblelike material as well as a kind of "console" in the center. There were no windows. An ammonia scent permeated the room, which was notably chilly. Y then walked around the object and felt the outside surface, which was slick, metallic, and cold. At no time did Y see the craft's occupants. After 10 minutes he returned to his car, fixed the tire, and drove home ("1933 Sighting," 1964).

New Forest, England, July 14, 1934: Late in the evening Paul Faiveley, a French tourist, was returning to his rented cabin from the swimming pool when the ground around him became illuminated. The light's source turned out to be a "perfectly circular disc of a vivid white color." It was too bright to be looked at directly, so Faiveley watched it at an angle. At first it was moving, but within seconds of his observing it, it stopped and hovered above him. "After about two

minutes or so," he recalled, "the machine, which lit up the whole countryside around, developed a blue fringe around it, like a halo, concentric to the dazzling white circle." A minute later the blue light went out, and soon after that the brilliant white light became dimmer, then turned yellow, orange, and red. The object then took off at great speed and vanished in seconds (Bourret, 1974).

Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1938: One sunny afternoon 13-year-old Harvey Sperry watched a white, "vapor-like" phenomenon pass from north to south at five to 10 mph and about 100 feet altitude. In 1953 Sperry, then a chaplain in the U.S. Army, recalled its "strange movement.... The whole 'rim' of the doughnut-shaped 'cloud' seemed to be composed of two interwoven parts revolving and moving in opposite directions" (Lore and Deneault, *op. cit.*).

*The Los Angeles raid.* Though "flying saucers" would not be called such until 1947, sightings of peculiar aerial phenomena were occurring with ever greater frequency, and during World War II they were inevitably assumed to be advanced enemy aircraft. Consider, for example, the curious—and, to those who participated in them, alarming—events of February 25, 1942.

The stage had been set two days earlier. At 7:05 that evening a Japanese submarine surfaced 2500 yards off Ellwood, eight miles north of Santa Barbara, California, and fired for 20 uninterrupted minutes on gasoline-storage tanks lining the shore, then slipped away. Even as the attack was occurring, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was giving a nationwide radio address from Washington, D.C., warning that no part of America should consider itself immune from the war that had been raging for the past two and a half months. For all southern Californians knew, an invasion from Japan was imminent.

At 7:18 the following night, the twenty-fourth, blinking lights and flares were observed near defense plants, and an alert was called. When nothing further developed, it was lifted at 10:23. Calm reigned for about four more hours, until 2:15 A.M., when radar tracked an approaching unidentified target 120 miles to the west. A blackout was ordered at 2:21, and four minutes later numerous observers were reporting the presence of an enormous luminous object, larger

than an apartment house. Caught in searchlights and photographed, it was subjected to withering anti-aircraft fire, to no effect.

Antiaircraft batteries also were firing on other, smaller unidentified flying objects. One witness recalled, "The eerie lights were *behaving* strangely. They seemed to be navigating mostly on a level plane at that moment—that is, not rising up from the ground in an arc or trajectory or in a straight line and then falling back to earth, but appearing from nowhere and then zigzagging from side to side. Some disappeared, not diminishing in brilliance or fading away gradually but just vanishing *instantaneously* into the night. Others remained pretty much on the same level and we could only guess their elevation to be around 10,000 feet, but some of them dived earthward only to rise again, mix and play tag with about 30 to 40 others moving so fast that they couldn't be counted accurately" (Collins, 1987). Another witness, an air-raid warden, remembered a "formation of six to nine luminous, white dots in triangular formation ... visible in the northwest. The formation moved painfully slowly—you might call it leisurely—as if it were oblivious to the whole stampede it had created" (Lore and Deneault, *op. cit.*). A 23-year-old man, also an air-raid warden, sighted a brightly glowing, spherical red object over Hawthorne. "It traveled horizontally a short distance very slowly and then made an abrupt 90-degree [turn] rising abruptly," he said. "Again it stopped and remained motionless." After a few minutes it flew away and was lost in the distance (McCartney, 1966).

The firing continued from 3:16 until 4:14, leaving the streets of Los Angeles and neighboring communities littered with shell casings and thousands of anxious, frightened citizens. Unexploded shells destroyed streets and buildings and killed three persons outright; three others died of heart attacks attributable to the panic. Three hours later, at 7:21, the unidentified aircraft long gone, the blackout was lifted, and a furious controversy commenced. Those who doubted the "objects" were Japanese airplanes theorized that they were imaginary. Those who thought they were Japanese airplanes charged that traitorous Japanese-Americans had flashed signals to them, and in fact 20 such citizens were arrested in the hours after the "raid," though they were later released (*Los Ange-*

*les Times*, February 26). Another theory, based on the testimony of an anonymous Army artillery man, held the objects to be hydrogen-filled nickel balloons with attached metal wires. Launched as part of a radar test, they got caught in winds which took them over southern California (Henstell, 1991). No independent evidence supports this interpretation, which in any case is difficult to square with witnesses' descriptions of how the objects looked and behaved.

The objects were not of Japanese origin, and the accusations against Japanese-Americans proved groundless, part of a hysterical—and unfortunately successful—press campaign to have these loyal citizens placed in concentration camps for the duration of the war. In appearance and behavior the "unidentified aircraft" were, as would become apparent a few years later, classic UFOs. On February 26, contradicting a claim made the day before by Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox that the scare had resulted simply from a "false alarm" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, February 26), Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson declared, after reading a report prepared by West Coast Army officials, that there could be no doubt that "as many as 15 airplanes may have been involved, flying at various speeds, from what is officially reported as being 'very slow' to as much as 200 miles per hour, and at an elevation of from 9000 to 18,000 feet." The airplanes, he said, remained "unidentified" (*Los Angeles Times*, February 27).

*Other UFOs of 1940-1946.* The most celebrated aerial anomalies of World War II were the **foo fighters**, a catch-all phrase encompassing a wide variety of flying phenomena reported in both the European and Pacific theaters by Allied and Axis troops. Each side suspected the other had developed extraordinary new military devices (Clark and Farish, 1975a; Lore and Deneault, *op. cit.*). But great numbers of sightings were occurring, albeit with much less public or official attention and concern, in the United States as well. The objects seen fell into patterns that soon would become all too familiar:

*Nocturnal lights.* Columbus, Mississippi, August 29, 1942: At 7 P.M. Pvt. Michael Solomon, a radio operator at Columbus Army Flying School, was working at the control tower when he spotted a tiny red dot high in the air. It was descending rapidly. Soon the object was

“very large” and hovering over the trees 1000 feet past the runway. Then another red dot fell from the sky and took up a position a mile away in the same direction. Solomon and another operator left the tower to get a better view. After six minutes the first object moved upward five degrees. “The next part is hard to describe,” Solomon said, because of an odd sense of sensory dislocation. Then the “object was a blur upon movement ... [and traveled] way past supersonic speed.” As it did so, a “red ring” shot away from it (Solomon, 1958). Washington, D.C., winter 1943: While on his beat at between 2 and 3 A.M., police officer Harry G. Barnes observed a street light up a brilliant purple-blue. “I looked up and to my left I saw these three lights traveling east,” he reported. “Each of these lights had rippling lights, such as an air exhaust, coming from its [bottom] side.... These exhaust lights seemed to pulsate. They were a greenish red color. While I watched there was another blue-purple flame from the leading object. This flare seemed to puff out the right side and was much longer and briter [sic] than the rippling lights. It went out, down and up in back of the object.... As the big flare, which lit up the neighborhood again, died out, I could plainly see smoke mixed with the white lights. These objects were going in a straight line in a V formation and at the same rate of speed” (Barnes, n.d.). Hollywood, California, 1943: An object resembling the “detached fuselage of an airplane, incandescent, with brightly lit ‘portholes’” passed from southwest to northeast around dusk (Zaslove, 1981). Fisherville, Kentucky, April 17, 1945: A “beautiful light” was observed in the eastern sky at 11 P.M. by Mr. and Mrs. James L. Hendry. It glowed and receded in brilliance “like a heart throb” as it approached the Hendry residence, casting a “light downward, like a lamp shade over the earth.... After about ten minutes it went out like a snuffed candle” (“Another Sky-Light,” 1945/1946).

*Discs and cigars.* Hinsdale, Illinois, spring 1940: Walking down a street one afternoon, William T. Powers saw five disc-shaped objects in the northern sky. They were traveling together at 100 to 200 mph and disappeared into a cloud from which they did not reemerge (Powers, 1964). Between Lafayette and Newton, New Jersey, circa August 1942: Three adults saw a huge cigar-shaped object hovering near them. It

“had two rows of windows” which “gave off blue, green, white and red fluorescent lights.... We watched this object for approximately 10 minutes; then it silently and very slowly took off. From where I stood, I had the impression of hearing laughter or happy voices. My imagination? I cannot say. I know I felt this happiness very strongly. My husband and I also got in our car and drove to Ogdensburg [New Jersey] to our home. As we drove along, I again saw this large cigar-object and suddenly it took off very fast and disappeared” (Howell, 1979). Queens, New York, summer 1944: “We were riding our bikes on a footpath adjacent to Grand Central Parkway ... in a wooded section. As we started climbing a hill, we looked up and saw a cigar-shaped object broadside to us.... [I]t was longer and slimmer than a blimp; it was of smooth metal construction with no windows or openings in sight. It didn’t have a gondola on its underside as normal dirigibles and blimps do.... [W]e raced up the hill ... to get a better look at it. When we arrived ... the object had *completely disappeared*. We had an excellent vantage point[;] yet it was nowhere to be seen” (Wieland, 1961). St. Paul, Minnesota, October 1944: Two women about to drive to work sighted what they first thought to be a plane about to crash. Then it abruptly stopped 20 feet above their heads, revealing itself to be a shiny brown bullet-shaped object with a flat end “like frosted glass with a bright light behind it.” The object made a crackling noise, turned right, and ascended at a blinding speed (Carlin, 1950). West Texas, mid-February 1945: As their C-47 prepared to land at Biggs Field in El Paso, Staff Sgt. Ralph Bayer was alarmed to see an aircraft approaching from the left and only 300 yards below. “The object progressed very rapidly out of sight under the wing,” he remembered, “and I was able to stand up and view its departure momentarily from the rear windows. All told, the object was in view less than five seconds. In that time I had the following impression: (a) The object was about 30 feet long and a dully, flat grey in color. (b) It traveled in a straight and level manner without any deviation from its course until it was lost from sight in the distance. (c) It was not more than 500 feet above the ground at the time it passed over the pass below us. (d) No contrail or exhaust was noticed. (e) The fuselage or hull presented an absolutely unbroken expanse of smooth cylindrical, featureless surface. No wings, windows, or tail surfaces

were noted. (f) The general appearance was that of an open ended, thick walled section of sewer-pipe. At least two of the other passengers noted the device" (Bayer, 1962).

An October 1943 report from Santa Barbara, California, bears special attention. It is one of those reports—others have already been noted—that tell us what the searchlight-shooting "airships" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries really looked like, minus the hysteria and exaggeration of the press accounts, to those who saw them. It also demonstrates that sightings of the particular UFO types that gave rise to airship mythology continued for many years after "airships" as such had been forgotten. The following incident could as easily have occurred in November 1896, when all of California was in the grips of an airship panic.

At 9 P.M., as she gazed out from the balcony of her home facing the Goleta Valley, Wilberta Finley, an air spotter for the Civilian Air Command, noticed a "huge dark aerial object approaching." Moving soundlessly, it barely skimmed over a nearby hill. "From the front of the object a beam of light shot down at an angle toward the earth," she said. "At intervals it swung from side to side as if scanning the hills and homes below. I sat on my balcony, too frozen with terror to move. I realized that the object was flying very low, for it filled my view and seemed just barely to miss hitting our two-story house as it passed overhead. There was no hum of a motor, no windows I was able to see. I was conscious only of the hugeness of the 'thing', its beam of light scanning the earth like an evil eye, and the intense fright which it created in me. I was unable to discern its shape, for it was upon me before I realized it" (Finley, 1958).

Nineteen forty-six was rich in reports of discs and cigars. Best known to students of UFO history are the "ghost rockets" whose appearances over the Scandinavian countries sparked unfounded fears of advanced Soviet weapons technology and aggressive intentions. But in North America, where reports were getting little press attention, the groundwork was being laid for all that would come in 1947 and after. Some examples:

Anima-Nipissing Lake, Ontario, April 25: While ice-fishing, Don Cameron and his family watched 12 to

14 small disc-shaped objects descend at a 45-degree angle 75 feet from them. They came spinning down on the ice, rose two feet into the air, and came down again. As they continued this curious ritual, Cameron walked toward them. The discs then ascended and shot off at the same angle and in the same direction as on their arrival. They left black marks on the snow and ice ("Flying Saucers," 1957). Lafayette, New York, April or May: Driving in an open convertible, Richard Hill and Stanley Ogdryziak noticed a gleam in the sky. It turned out to be from the sun reflecting on a metallic cigar-shaped object with sharply pointed ends. It was perfectly smooth, with no protrusions, motionless, 300 to 400 feet long, and at 5000 to 10,000 feet in altitude. After two minutes it disappeared instantaneously (NICAP files). La Grange, Florida, May: A Navy lieutenant on leave was picking oranges at his wife's family's home when he heard a whistling noise. "Directly overhead," he recalled, "I saw a dark 'Flying football' ... flying from west to east at about 1000 feet elevation, possibly less, at the speed of a light plane—say 125 mph. It appeared dark against the bright cloud layer which had a ceiling of perhaps 1500 feet—there was no blue sky showing.... There was *no* sound of any engine; it had no wings or other appendages, no props, and no trail of smoke in back. It appeared 15 to 20 feet in diameter, perhaps *less*, and as I watched it curved smoothly in an arc to the southeast and vanished forever in a lower cloud bank. My wife and the rest of the family heard this queer [whistling] noise and all rushed out to see what it was, and my wife glimpsed it as it vanished in the clouds" (Titcomb, 1955). Ipswich, Massachusetts, July: A "long silver-colored cigar (projectile shaped) appeared suddenly out of the haze which hung over the water on a hot muggy day.... It moved noiselessly. It was low over the water—it had no fins—nothing that I could see projecting and I saw no flame nor [sic] smoke, nor [sic] vapor like the pilot [Clarence S. Chiles of the **Chiles-Whitted sighting**] described ... [in] this article in *True Magazine* [presumably **Donald E. Keyhoe's** 'The Flying Saucers Are Real', January 1950 issue].... Otherwise it completely answered the same description. My view was brief since it disappeared so suddenly" (Allen, 1952). Colorado Springs, Colorado, summer: "I was looking southwest toward Cheyenne Mountain, rising from the prairie about twelve miles away. Suddenly 'out of nowhere' there

appeared two shining silver objects, moving very rapidly in tandem from east to west directly toward the sheer escarpment of Cheyenne Mountain. I was so startled by the speed at which these 'planes' were moving that I almost dropped a dish I was holding in my hands. I was certain that in a matter of seconds they would crash into the face of the mountain. But just before they reached this point they moved straight up into the air, still in formation, and disappeared. It all happened in a matter of seconds, but I have never forgotten it" (Hancock, 1979). North of Chicago, August: "I saw three silver disks going from east to west near the lake [Michigan].... I was returning to Great Lakes Training Center [in the suburb of North Chicago] after taking an officer to Chicago. I believe I was on Route 41 which goes along the lake shore when I saw these things in the sky. They were flying in [a triangular] formation" (Johnson, n.d.).

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The object passed at a low altitude over some nearby poplar trees, and as it did so, the trunks of the trees bent dramatically as if in reaction to a strong wind, but no wind was blowing. When the object flew over the witness' head, he heard a loud swishing sound. Soon the UFO was out of sight, but the horse remained frightened for some time. When interviewed many years later, McGilvra said that other local people had had similar experiences around the same time.

Reports like these, when they made the newspapers of the period, were called **airship sightings**, though the objects witnesses claimed to have seen only generally resembled "airships" (dirigibles), which in any case were not operating in the United States and which, even if they had been, could not have performed maneuvers like those described in many reports. No history of aviation recognizes these sightings as relevant to the evolution of flight in America or elsewhere. The phenomena described are UFOs of a kind that by mid-century would be described not as airships but as "cigars."

An unusually interesting newspaper account appeared in the March 15, 1901, issue of the *Silver City Enterprise* in New Mexico. The *Enterprise* reported that on the seventh Dr. S. H. Milliken of Pinos Altos had seen a passing airship, "and in support of his statement shows a Kodak picture of same. The machine as seen in the picture has the appearance of three cigar-shaped objects which seemed to be lashed together, the one hanging below the other two." Unfortunately, the photograph was not reproduced.

A firsthand report comes from a Hiram, Ohio, woman named Madge Brosius Allyn. The sighting took place on March 17, 1903—a date she remembered clearly because her sister Grayce was born that morning—on the family's Helmer, Indiana, farm. In mid-evening Madge Brosius, then twelve and a half years old, saw her father burst into the kitchen, where she was preparing his meal, and shout, "Come see this!" The two rushed outside and observed, in the southwestern sky over a neighbor's pasture, a "huge object like a gigantic ripe cucumber with slightly tapered ends . . . brilliantly aglow despite the fact that the sun had set more than an hour before." It had eight windows along the side, in two rows of four each, divided by a dark median line. She recalled:

There was a light inside, brightest in the end towards us, but illuminating the inside of the ship like a kerosene lamp in a large room. The ship was built like a wire rat-trap, with the horizontal stays molding the slightly bulged end and fastened smoothly. The stays around appeared to form squares in the superstructure. In retrospect the covering looked like a thin grocery bag of today, emitting little light through it, but seemingly to be illuminated revealingly outside without casting a reflection into the atmosphere. . . . The windows were squat with two sashes and multi clear glass panes. They were placed equidistant from each other. . . . There were no appendages above or below the ship, and no sign of life, and no noise.

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Her father estimated that the object, which was hovering just behind the upper branches of three maple trees, was more than 100 feet long and "30 feet deep." As he ran toward it, it started to move, at first slowly, then with increasing speed. "It took off, zigzagging across the sky like a child's balloon when you let go of the air tube," Madge remembered. Frightened, she fled inside. Her father came in soon afterwards and said that the object had stopped its jerking motion, then headed straight west at a dizzying speed. He told his daughter that the object "is not of this world."

A few months later, on September 13, residents of Stratford, Indiana, and southeastern Indianapolis saw a strange sight high in the late-afternoon sky: a 30-foot-long cigar-shaped vehicle. It circled Stratford, then flew on to the east. One witness was alerted to its presence by the sudden cackling of his chickens. He notified his neighbors, E. A. Perkins and his wife, who studied the object through binoculars. They saw a "canopy" at the top-center, and under it were two figures who were moving backward and forward as if in rhythm. The "airship" did not have a propeller (*Indianapolis Star*, September 14).

A somewhat similar UFO was seen by two young Dixboro, Michigan, men in 1904. Around twilight Wirt Covert and Arthur Eldert were walking home from a trip to a rural grocery store when they spotted a large object moving from east to west at a low altitude. It went behind some tall pine trees and then passed on the other side of a high Methodist church steeple. Covert recalled, "I can still see the steeple outlined between us and this object" and, beyond the object, a range of hills. "Suddenly this object rose [to] at least a 60 degree angle over the hills and disappeared. To this day it is fresh in my mind. Its shape reminded me of pictures of the Confederate gunboat Merrimac[k]. It had sort of a thick mast sticking up from the center and when it banked up so quick I'll swear this mast tipped backward at least 45 degrees and a bright orange light shone in the windows."

At 2 p.m. on July 2, 1907, Bishop John S. Michaud was standing in front of a bank in Burlington, Vermont, and talking with two men when, he reported in a letter to *Monthly Weather Review*,

without the slightest indication, or warning, we were startled by what sounded like a most unusual and terrific explosion, evidently very nearby. Raising my eyes, and looking eastward along College Street, I observed a torpedo-shaped body, some 300 feet away, stationary in appearance, and suspended in the air, about 50 feet above the tops of the buildings. In size it was about 6 feet long by 8 inches in diameter, the shell, or covering, having a dark appearance, with here and there tongues of fire issuing from spots on the surface, resembling red-hot, unburnished copper. Although stationary when first noticed, this object soon began to move, rather slowly, and disappeared over Dolan Brothers' store, southward. As it moved, the covering seemed rupturing in places, and through these the intensely red flames issued.

During the summer of 1908 residents of Denmark were puzzled by repeated sightings of unidentified airships, sometimes seen flying against the wind. The objects were often said to have wings and searchlights and, on at least one occasion, to have an antenna jutting from its front. There are also suggestions in some reports of what during the later UFO era would be called "cloud cigars." Some reports are of odd-shaped clouds from which bright lights emanated and swept the ground. Peculiar "dirigibles" of unknown origin caused alarm in Estonia and Sweden in late August of the following year.

**The worldwide wave of 1909-10.** The British press first took note of the presence of a mysterious aerial visitor in March 1909. In its issue of the twenty-seventh the *Peterborough Advertiser* quoted the testimony of Constable P. C. Kettle of Peterborough, Northamptonshire:

I was on duty in Cromwell Road and was coming out of Cobden Street into that thoroughfare when I heard what I took to be a motorcar, which I judged was some 400 yards distant. It was 5:15 [a.m.] and still quite dark. I walked along Cromwell Road, expecting to see the lights of an approaching car, but none appeared. Still I could hear the steady buzz of a high-powered engine, and suddenly it struck me that the sound was coming, not along the surface of the road, but from above! I looked up, and my eye was at once attracted by a powerful light, which I should judge to be some 1200 feet above the earth. Outlined against the stars was a dark body . . . somewhat oblong and narrow in shape . . . about a couple of yards long. . . . It was going at a tremendous pace, and as I watched, the rattle of the engines grew gradually fainter and fainter, and it disappeared into the northwest. Altogether I should say I saw it for about three minutes.

Though Kettle's was the first published account of the British airship, it was not the first sighting of 1909. The first known report (published two and a half months after the fact in the *London Evening News*, May 18) was that of church organist Charles Maberly of Lambourne, Berkshire. At 8:25 p.m., as he was returning home from choir practice, Maberly spotted a bright searchlight emanating from a torpedo-shaped object heading west at 200 feet altitude. It traveled three-quarters of a mile in the time it took him to walk 50 yards. As it passed out of sight, he heard three explosions that sounded at regular intervals.

The sightings, which began on England's east coast but soon spread to Wales and Ireland, continued well into May, amid growing paranoia about German spies, fanned in part by occasional reports of strangers seen showing up in the wake of sightings and speaking in a foreign tongue or with a "guttural accent" (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 18 and 20; *London Daily Mirror*, May 21). Conceivably, these were German agents, as puzzled as the British by the reports and seeking answers.

In mid-1908 trappers in Southland, New Zealand, observed something like a "powerful searchlight" moving through the sky. They saw the light on three sep-

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arate occasions, and once it appeared with two other lights. One year later, in July 1909, airship hysteria hit New Zealand, with a flurry of sightings of "blunt-head cigars" with searchlights.

The events of July 31 give something of a sense of the wave, which ended in September (during August a few sightings took place in Australia as well). Sometime during the early morning hours a Greenvale farmhand was feeding horses when a loud whirring sound from an airship frightened the animals. The object, 150 feet long, was moving so fast that by the time he roused friends, it had almost vanished. It was shaped, he said, "like a boat with a flat top"; apparently it resembled the UFO seen by two Michigan men five years earlier (see above). Early that same morning someone on Grosvenor Street in Dunedin sighted an airship. A bright yellow light shot up what resembled a "mast" and remained there until the craft had passed from view. At 4:55 p.m. a dark, bulky, cigar-shaped object with a box-like structure underneath it sped over the eastern hills near Akatore and climbed rapidly in the western sky. At 11:30 that night a couple living near Gore watched an airship over the Blue Mountains. In the first few minutes it was nothing more than a bright light, but they soon distinguished a huge cigar-shaped machine that traveled on a straight course with a rocking boatlike motion. The UFO reappeared at 1 and 3 a.m.

As the New Zealand/Australia scare was peaking, a new wave of sightings was beginning in the United States, especially (though not exclusively) in New England. The first compelling airship report comes from Fishers Island, off the southeast coast of Connecticut, where at 2:30 a.m. on August 18 four men at the island's life-saving station sighted an airship 60 feet long and 20 feet wide. Moving at a "terrific clip" against the wind, it came in from the northeast, its engines whirring, a dazzling white light at its head illuminating the dark, cloud-covered sky. According to the *Providence Journal* (August 19), "In the centre of the aeroplane could be seen two dark figures, but the observers could not tell whether they were men. . . . The frames and wings could be seen but the watchers could not clearly make out the huddled figures in the centre." Visible for three minutes, the object disappeared in the west. At least two airship sightings were recorded around the same time in Montclair, New Jersey (*New York Times*, August 24).

September brought a handful of reports from Indiana, including a daylight sighting by several hundred residents of Bloomingdale on the third (*Indianapolis Star*, September 4). Another September sighting occurred in Windham, Connecticut, where E. B. Hanna sighted a high-flying, meandering "traveling searchlight" (*Willimantic [Connecticut] Chronicle*, December 14).

After a few scattered sightings earlier in the month, on December 22 the airship scare began in earnest. At 6:30 that evening residents of Worcester saw a "brilliant ray" approaching them, apparently emanating from a flying machine 1000 feet in the southwestern sky. The *Boston Globe* (December 23) reported that the "rays proceeded from a lamp about the size of the searchlight of an automobile. As

it came nearer it was apparent that the lamp was attached to a large black object, but the machine was so high that its form could not be distinguished." After circling over the town, the airship flew off to the west, where it was seen in the town of Marlboro. Then it returned to Worcester between 7 and 7:30, flying in the winter darkness at a low altitude and flashing a searchlight. Some witnesses thought they could see one or two figures inside, and a police officer swore that it had enormous wings. At one point the object hovered above an insurance building. In Augusta, Maine, at around the same time, the appearance of Venus sparked airship reports (*Daily Kennebec Journal* [Augusta], December 24).

On Christmas Eve thousands of citizens of Boston and neighboring communities saw a high-flying airship, alternately flying and hovering above them. Between Christmas Eve and early January 1910 other sightings of varying credibility were recorded. On the twenty-fourth, at Providence, Rhode Island, an object "came out of the north like a shooting star. As it approached . . . the glare of its headlight grew larger and larger until it appeared as one of the most powerful searchlights, its rays penetrating the darkness at a great distance" (*Providence Journal*, December 25). It had first been seen far up Blackstone Valley, in the Woonsocket area, six or seven minutes before. One of the last New England sightings was of a 50-foot-long string of electric lights seen hovering above a Willimanic building at 1 a.m. during a rainstorm (*Willimanic Daily Chronicle*, January 7, and *Hartford Courant*, January 8).

Such sightings were not, however, confined to the Northeast. At 10 p.m. on December 13, as he looked out the doorway of his house, A. W. Norris of Mabelvale, Arkansas, spotted a bright, bobbing light coming from the south and moving rapidly through the overcast sky. A "cigar-shaped" vessel passed over Chattanooga, Tennessee, at 9:30 on the morning of January 12 and returned the next day (*Chattanooga Daily Times*, January 13 and 14). On the afternoon of the twelfth, Huntsville, Alabama, residents watched a high-flying object believed to be an airship (*Nashville Banner*, January 13). Other sightings occurred in Knoxville (*Knoxville Journal*, January 15).

In 1968 Myrtle B. Lee recalled this 1910 experience:

When I was around seven years old, my brother Jack and I were playing in the yard. We saw a bright object hovering just above the trees about 50 yards from us. It was silver colored and shaped like a zeppelin, but not quite as big. It had nothing hanging from the underside. We stood frozen to the ground, not seeing something like that before. We thought whoever was inside was watching us. There were no windows. When it took off, we saw it start up, and it completely vanished before our eyes. We called it a balloon. When I saw a real balloon, I knew what Jack and I saw wasn't a balloon. No one believed us when we told of seeing this thing. I'm 65 years old now and remember the object well. I'm still wondering what we saw. That was in Fulton County,

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Arkansas, one mile across from Missouri. Bakersfield was four miles north and west of us.

**The last of the airships.** Early in the evening of October 14, 1912, an "unknown aircraft"—or at least the sound of one—startled residents of Sheerness, England. At Eastchurch residents lighted flares to guide the craft in case it decided to land. When questions were asked in Parliament, Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill said the government knew nothing about the aircraft. An opposition member expressed the anxious view that it was a "Zeppelin dirigible" (*London Times*, November 22)—no small concern in the context of mounting tensions between Britain and Germany, which less than two years later would result in war. Nonetheless, no zeppelin *could* reach England until August 1915, during World War I.

In early January 1913 the number of airship reports accelerated dramatically. At 5 a.m. on the fourth, at Dover, John Hobbs heard the sound of motors in the air, looked up, and saw a light speeding toward him from the sea in a northeasterly direction. The vehicle, if that was what it was, was moving steadily despite the presence of a nearly gale-force wind. Two other persons, one a police officer, heard the sound but did not see the object (*London Times*, *London Daily Express*, *London Daily Telegraph*, January 6). Two days later, at 10 in the evening, two lights "thought to be the lamps of an airship" maneuvered in the sky over an Army fort near the coast of Lavernock and the Bristol Channel (*London Daily Express*, January 7). As fear of German aerial espionage mounted, a remarkable sighting occurred at Cardiff, Wales. Capt. Lionel Lindsay, chief constable of Glamorganshire, said, "At quarter to five I noticed the object. It was dusk and foggy so that one could not define it." Still, he could determine that it was large and fast-moving "and it left in its trail a dense volume of smoke" (*London Times*, January 21). Other witnesses backed up Lindsay's testimony. They reported that after leaving Cardiff, the airship changed direction from due west to northwest (*London Times*, January 22).

When sightings took place on the evening of January 25 over both Liverpool, England, and Chancery, Wales, it appeared that not one but two airships were violating British air space (*London Daily Express*, January 28, and *London Times*, January 30). In each case the object flashed a bright searchlight. An airship appeared over Cardiff on February 1, and it or another was seen over Croyden, England, at 8:45 the next evening (*London Daily Express*, February 3). That same night an Aberavon, Wales, constable saw something over Swansea Bay, and several witnesses said they could detect the outline of an airship reflected in the light it carried (*London Times*, February 3).

Sightings of comparable phenomena continued over two months, ending on April 8 with a mass sighting over Cardiff (*Manchester Guardian*, April 9).

In the meantime sightings of airships were being made on the European continent. In Russia, Poland, Germany, Austria, and Belgium, airships with great searchlights were sparking paranoia. Of the more interesting reports, perhaps the most spectacular involved an alleged airship crash between Jerch and Caputh,

Germany. Two women walking along a rural road at 6 p.m. claimed to have seen an airship catch fire and explode, the remains dropping into the forest below. The fire brigades of three villages, 40 riflemen from the local garrison, and a number of policemen and medical attendants rushed to the scene. Though they searched till early morning, they found nothing. The women were known locally as "thoroughly trustworthy and creditable" (*Berliner Tageblatt*, March 13), but afterwards they were accused—understandably, no doubt—of hoaxing the report (*London Daily Telegraph*, March 14).

Near dusk on June 29, 1913, a fast-moving airship sailed over a Lansing, Michigan, racetrack while a race was in progress. "So swiftly did the strange craft travel," the *Lansing State Journal* (June 30) reported, "that it was not more than three minutes until it had passed from sight in the northwest. The aerial mystery carried no lights of any description and was too elongated for an ordinary balloon. . . . The craft was at a great height and when it passed to the northwest of the city had reached a still higher altitude."

In the fall of 1914, many Norwegians sighted searchlight-bearing airships. A typical incident was recounted in the newspaper *Morgenbladet* (November 25):

At Mindlandet in Tjolta last Saturday evening an air-sailer was seen again cruising about Skjaervaer lighthouse, which it lighted up with a searchlight. The airship, which had a height of about 700 meters, descended to about 400 meters['] altitude, wherefrom it let the searchlight play on a passing ship. Thereafter it [ascended] again. Between 20 and 30 people watched it simultaneously.

Similar sightings of unidentified "zeppelins" occurred sporadically into 1916.

**Other kinds of UFOs.** It is likely that the sightings recounted above and those that follow are different only in that witnesses to the latter did not characterize what they saw as "airships." After 1913, in any case, references to UFOs as airships—or efforts to cram them into that pigeonhole—fade from printed sources.

Reports that do not mention airships are indistinguishable from sightings from 1947 on. Some examples from the first years of the century:

Perthshire, Scotland, circa 1900: A boy named James Scrimgeour and his sister saw a mysterious light three-quarters of a mile away. It was "proceeding in a westerly direction in zig-zag fashion[;] its speed was far greater than anything on earth at that time except railway trains. [I]t was traveling across fields where there was [sic] no roads and had to cross many fences. . . . [It] seemed to be about the size of an automobile head light but [had] no glare." It was observed against a "background of hills so that it never rose above the horizon or we might have been able to see [the] shape of it against the sky."

Pacific Ocean, off the east coast of Korea, February 28, 1904: At 6:10 a.m. Navy personnel aboard the U.S.S. *Supply* sighted what one of them, Lt. Frank H.

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sort. They made no noise or left any vapor trails. . . . I would say that they were at least 75 to 100 feet in diameter. . . . They were in view for about 10 seconds when they passed behind some trees that were across the street from where I was standing.

Near Mount Pleasant, Iowa, on June 3, 1920, 22-year-old Jesse Clark Linch, fishing on a pond, sighted a soundless, blue, disc-shaped object "of a size like a five-gallon cream can" (approximately the size of a fire hydrant). It emerged from behind a grove of 100-foot-high maple trees, flew across the pond, and landed 15 feet away from Linch. Linch got up and walked toward the object, which then rose up, "slowly lifted over the trees in the west, and disappeared—still no noise."

Gulf Coast, 50 miles north of Freeport, Texas, fall 1920: A fisherman spotted an unusual aerial phenomenon around 3 a.m. C. B. Alves watched a disc approach him, then when 100 yards away veer to the south. Three discs were behind it. "The only noticeable difference was in the light emanating from them. The first and last 'discs' showed a brilliant pink pastel light, and the second and third glowed a pale green that was just as brilliant. . . . These things looked exactly like two big silver plates set edge to edge and appeared to be about 25 feet in diameter and some 10 feet thick at the center." They disappeared in the distance.

Two brothers driving cattle around 10:30 p.m. near Milton, North Dakota, in early November 1928 saw a metallic object like a "soup bowl turned upside down" fly by at low altitude (15 or 20 feet) and high speed. It had four or five lights on the front of it, bright enough to illuminate the ground below it. It made a sound like that of air pouring through a tube.

Other reports were of the sort that in the past had given rise to airship speculations, already fading from memory after the British scare of 1912-1913:

At the British front in World War I, on December 17, 1916, soldier Maurice Philip Tuteur and two sergeants major saw something that "looked like a zep-pelin," Tuteur wrote his parents that day. "This rose straight towards the clouds (in rear of our lines) not like a flying machine, but straight up. . . . After running vertically, it suddenly darted forward at a pace which must have been 200 m.p.h. It then turned around and darted backwards and then suddenly rising, disappeared in the clouds."

At Rich Field, Waco, Texas, in early 1918, soldiers leaving the mess hall were startled to see a 100- to 150-foot-long cigar-shaped object. "It came directly overhead," according to witness Edwin Bauhan, "and was no more than five hundred feet high so we got an excellent view of it. It had no motors, no rigging, it was noiseless. . . . It was . . . a rose or sort of flame color. . . . I could observe no windows. . . . We all experienced the weirdest feeling of our lives, and sat in our tent puzzling over it for some time."

Between Wathena, Kansas, and Rushville, Missouri, on June 8, 1920, two hundred persons saw a large cylindrical object flying at an altitude of no more than

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stopped. The object seemed to be made of a stainless-steel material, with a smooth surface. Underneath the UFO was an attached "gondola," on which four or five illuminated "portholes" suddenly opened. A blue-white light shone through them.

After a time the UFO drifted 100 feet to the right and then stopped again, this time letting down a thin, reflecting line from its bottom section. X thought it might have been a glass rod or pencil-thin pipe or wire. Finally the portholes closed just as they had opened, in an effect rather like that of the "iris shutter of a modern day camera." The object started to rotate again and took off in the same direction from which it had come.

The next day X returned to the site and noticed that the area above which the UFO had hovered looked as if oil had been poured on the ground and had soaked in.

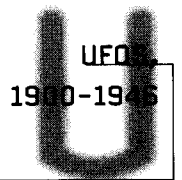
**UFOs in the 1930s.** Hardly had the Kenneth **Arnold sighting** hit the press wires than individuals started coming forward with stories of their own earlier—sometimes, as we have seen, *much* earlier—UFO encounters. Some typical and not-so-typical sightings from the 1930s:

Tasman Sea, June 10, 1931: Francis Chichester, who as Sir Francis Chichester would become famous as an aviator, sailor, and author, looked out the cockpit of his Gypsy Moth aircraft to see a series of flashes as if from several aircraft. Then he saw the "dull, gray-white shape of an airship" which "nosed towards me," he would write, "like an oblong pearl." Chichester glanced off to the left, where the flashes continued. When he looked in front of him again, the airship was gone. Soon another emerged from clouds on his right. It

drew steadily closer until perhaps a mile away when, right under my gaze as it were, it suddenly vanished. . . . But it reappeared close to where it had vanished. . . . It drew closer. I could see the dull gleam of light on nose and back. It came on, but instead of increasing in size, it diminished as it approached! When quite near, it suddenly became its own ghost. For one second I could see clear through it and the next . . . it had vanished. A diminutive cloud formed perfectly to the shape of an airship and then dissolv[ed].

Wattsburg, Pennsylvania, June 1932: In the early evening farmer Reuben Knight

stood looking across the meadow . . . when there appeared out of the scrub woods 400 yards to the south a bright speck of light, which appeared to advance toward me. It grew in size and came up within four feet of where I stood. It was [at] about eye level, a silvery ball, about 14 inches in diameter, brilliant blue. It traveled in a loop when near me and went back into the woods, proceeding at [sic] a steady, straight path, at about 35 or 40 miles per hour. Having disappeared in the woods for about six or eight seconds, it came again and followed



the original route up to me and looped away again. Then I called to my wife, "Come here." She came and I said, "Look, watch," and the silvery ball came again. When it had gone, we waited for it to return, but it did not come back.

Between Humbug Valley and Butt Reservoir Valley, July 31 or August 1, 1933: At about 9:15 p.m. Paul M. Berry, Jr., a high-school science teacher, was sky-watching when he saw two objects shoot across the sky. They were "identical, each more a prolate spheroid than lenticular, with blunt ends. . . . They appeared solid and clearly outlined," Berry recalled, "but this impression was reduced by a dull but considerable green luminescence. . . . There were no detached parts, smoke, trail (which might have been easily visible), [and] brightness changed considerably as they approached zenith and diminished as they approached horizon. . . . I have some reason to believe the distance was in excess of 8-10 miles. The bodies can be compared to the size of a nickel at arm's length or slightly larger." After the first two objects passed from view in five seconds, a third, identical UFO came into view, taking the same path as the first two.

Near Chrysville, Pennsylvania, summer 1933: Among the most fantastic of pre-1947 UFO reports is one told by an anonymous individual to the *Allentown* [Pennsylvania] *Sunday Call-Chronicle* (February 16, 1964). The alleged witness, Y, who desired no publicity, claimed that at 2:30 a.m., as he was on his way to Nazareth, his car had a flat tire. As he was fixing it, he noticed a faint violet glow in a field to his right. Curious, he walked toward it and soon found himself facing a ball-shaped craft 10 feet in diameter and six feet high. The light was coming from a slit in a circular opening that on close examination proved to be slightly ajar. With a push Y opened it and put his head through the one-foot circle to observe the inside. The violet light, emanating, he thought, from the ceiling, made it difficult for him to see, but as his eyes adjusted, he discerned dials, tubing and walls seemingly of a marblelike material as well as a kind of "console" in the center. There were no windows. An ammonia scent permeated the room, which was notably chilly. Y then walked around the object and felt the outside surface, which was slick, metallic, and cold. At no time did Y see the craft's occupants. After 10 minutes he returned to his car, fixed the tire, and drove home.

Panama Canal Zone, 1936: Two members of the Canal Zone Astronomical Society, one of them the instructor, observed a moving orange-red "star"—its appearance comparable to "the lighted end of a cigarette"—in the clear late-evening sky. It was passing from south to north until suddenly it halted. "Then, to our complete consternation," one witness recalled, "it traveled in three small circles—as though someone were writing small e's, only from right to left." A check the next day determined that no weather balloon had been launched the previous day.

**The Los Angeles raid.** Though "flying saucers" would not be called such until 1947, sightings of peculiar aerial phenomena were occurring with ever greater frequency,

and during World War II they were inevitably assumed to be advanced enemy aircraft. Consider, for example, the curious—and, to those who participated in them, alarming—events of February 25, 1942.

The stage had been set two days earlier. At 7:05 that evening a Japanese submarine surfaced 2500 yards off Ellwood, eight miles north of Santa Barbara, California, and fired for 20 uninterrupted minutes on gasoline-storage tanks lining the shore, then slipped away. For all southern Californians knew, an invasion from Japan was imminent.

At 7:18 the following night, the twenty-fourth, blinking lights and flares were observed near defense plants, and an alert was called. When nothing further developed, it was lifted at 10:23. Calm reigned for about four more hours, until 2:15 a.m., when radar tracked an approaching unidentified target 120 miles to the west. A blackout was ordered at 2:21, and four minutes later numerous observers were reporting the presence of an enormous luminous object, larger than an apartment house. Caught in searchlights and photographed, it was subjected to withering anti-aircraft fire, to no effect.

Anti-aircraft batteries also were firing on other, smaller unidentified flying objects. One witness recalled, "The eerie lights were *behaving* strangely. They seemed to be navigating mostly on a level plane at that moment—that is, not rising up from the ground in an arc or trajectory or in a straight line and then falling back to earth, but appearing from nowhere and then zigzagging from side to side. Some disappeared, not diminishing in brilliance or fading away gradually but just vanishing *instantaneously* into the night. Others remained pretty much on the same level and we could only guess their elevation to be around 10,000 feet, but some of them dived earthward only to rise again, mix and play tag with about 30 to 40 others moving so fast that they couldn't be counted accurately." Another witness, an air-raid warden, remembered a "formation of six to nine luminous, white dots in triangular formation . . . visible in the northwest. The formation moved painfully slowly—you might call it leisurely—as if it were oblivious to the whole stampede it had created." A 23-year-old man, also an air-raid warden, sighted a brightly glowing, spherical red object over Hawthorne. "It traveled horizontally a short distance very slowly and then made an abrupt 90-degree [turn] rising abruptly," he said. "Again it stopped and remained motionless." After a few minutes it flew away and was lost in the distance.

The firing continued from 3:16 until 4:14, leaving the streets of Los Angeles and neighboring communities littered with shell casings and thousands of anxious, frightened citizens. Unexploded shells destroyed streets and buildings and killed three persons outright; three others died of heart attacks attributable to the panic.

Three hours later, at 7:21, the unidentified aircraft long gone, the blackout was lifted, and a furious controversy commenced. Those who doubted the "objects" were Japanese airplanes theorized that they were imaginary. Those who thought they were Japanese airplanes charged that traitorous Japanese-Americans had

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flashed signals to them, and in fact 20 such citizens were arrested in the hours after the "raid," though they were later released (*Los Angeles Times*, February 26). Another theory, based on the testimony of an anonymous Army artillery man, held the objects to be hydrogen-filled nickel balloons with attached metal wires. Launched as part of a radar test, they got caught in winds that took them over southern California. No independent evidence supports this interpretation, which in any case is difficult to square with witnesses' descriptions of how the objects looked and behaved.

The objects were not of Japanese origin, and the accusations against Japanese-Americans proved groundless, part of a hysterical—and sadly successful—press campaign to have these loyal citizens placed in concentration camps for the duration of the war. In appearance and behavior the "unidentified aircraft" were, as would become apparent a few years later, classic UFOs.

**Other UFOs of 1940-1946.** The most celebrated aerial anomalies of World War II were the **foo fighters**, a catch-all phrase encompassing a wide variety of flying phenomena reported in both the European and Pacific theaters by Allied and Axis troops. Each side suspected the other had developed extraordinary new military devices. But great numbers of sightings were occurring, albeit with much less public or official attention and concern, in the United States as well. The objects seen fell into patterns that soon would become all too familiar:

Nocturnal lights. Columbus, Mississippi, August 29, 1942: At 7 p.m. Pvt. Michael Solomon, a radio operator at Columbus Army Flying School, was working at the control tower when he spotted a tiny red dot high in the air. It was descending rapidly. Soon the object was "very large" and hovering over the trees 1000 feet past the runway. Then another red dot fell from the sky and took up a position a mile away in the same direction. Solomon and another operator left the tower to get a better view. After six minutes the first object moved upward five degrees. "The next part is hard to describe," Solomon said, because of an odd feeling of sensory dislocation. Then the "object was a blur upon movement . . . [and traveled] way past supersonic speed." As it did so, a "red ring" shot away from it. Washington, D.C., winter 1943: While on his beat between 2 and 3 a.m., a police officer observed a street light up a brilliant purple-blue. "I looked up and to my left I saw these three lights traveling east," he reported. "Each of these lights had rippling lights, such as an air exhaust, coming from its [bottom] side. . . . These exhaust lights seemed to pulsate. They were a greenish red color. While I watched there was another blue-purple flame from the leading object. This flare seemed to puff out the right side and was much longer and briter [sic] than the rippling lights. It went out, down and up in back of the object. . . . As the big flare, which lit up the neighborhood again, died out, I could plainly see smoke mixed with the white lights. These objects were going in a straight line in a V formation and at the same rate of speed."

Discs and cigars. Hinsdale, Illinois, spring 1940: Walking down a street one afternoon, William T. Powers saw five disc-shaped objects in the northern sky. They were traveling together at 100 to 200 mph and disappeared into a cloud from which they did not reemerge. Between Lafayette and Newton, New Jersey, circa August 1942: Three adults saw a huge cigar-shaped object hovering near them. It "had two rows of windows" that "gave off blue, green, white and red fluorescent lights. . . . We watched this object for approximately 10 minutes; then it silently and very slowly took off. From where I stood, I had the impression of hearing laughter or happy voices. . . . As we drove along, I again saw this large cigar-object and suddenly it took off very fast and disappeared." St. Paul, Minnesota, October 1944: Two women about to drive to work sighted what they first thought to be a plane about to crash. Then it abruptly stopped 20 feet above their heads, revealing itself to be a shiny brown bullet-shaped object with a flat end. The object made a crackling noise, turned right, and ascended at a blinding speed.

An October 1943 report from Santa Barbara, California, bears special attention. It is one of those reports—others have already been noted—that tell us what the searchlight-shooting airships of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries really looked like, minus the hysteria and exaggeration of the press accounts, to those who saw them. It also demonstrates that sightings of the particular UFO types that gave rise to airship mythology continued for many years after "airships" as such had been forgotten. The following incident could as easily have occurred in November 1896, when all of California was in the grips of an airship panic.

At 9 p.m., as she gazed out from the balcony of her home facing the Goleta Valley, Wilberta Finley, an air spotter for the Civilian Air Command, noticed a "huge dark aerial object approaching." Moving soundlessly, it barely skimmed over a nearby hill. "From the front of the object a beam of light shot down at an angle toward the earth," she said. "At intervals it swung from side to side as if scanning the hills and homes below. I sat on my balcony, too frozen with terror to move. I realized that the object was flying very low, for it filled my view and seemed just barely to miss hitting our two-story house as it passed overhead. There was no hum of a motor, no windows I was able to see. I was conscious only of the hugeness of the 'thing', its beam of light scanning the earth like an evil eye, and the intense fright which it created in me. I was unable to discern its shape, for it was upon me before I realized it."

1946 was a year rich in reports of discs and cigars. Best known to students of UFO history are the "ghost rockets" whose appearances over the Scandinavian countries sparked unfounded fears of advanced Soviet weapons technology. But in North America, where reports were getting little press attention, the groundwork was being laid for all that would come in 1947 and after. Some examples:

Anima-Nipissing Lake, Ontario, April 25: While ice-fishing, Don Cameron and his family watched 12 to 14 small disc-shaped objects descend at a 45-degree angle 75 feet from them. They came spinning down on the ice, rose two feet into the air,

and came down again. As they continued this curious ritual, Cameron walked toward them. The discs then ascended and shot off at the same angle and in the same direction as on their arrival. They left black marks on the snow and ice.

Lafayette, New York, April or May: Driving in an open convertible, Richard Hill and Stanley Ogdrzyak noticed a gleam in the sky. It turned out to be from the sun reflecting on a metallic cigar-shaped object with sharply pointed ends. It was perfectly smooth, with no protrusions, motionless, 300 to 400 feet long, and at 5000 to 10,000 feet altitude. After two minutes it disappeared instantaneously.

La Grange, Florida, May: A Navy lieutenant on leave was picking oranges at his wife's family's home when he heard a whistling noise. "Directly overhead," he recalled,

I saw a dark "flying football" . . . flying from west to east at about 1000 feet elevation, possibly less, at the speed of a light plane—say 125 mph. It appeared dark against the bright cloud layer which had a ceiling of perhaps 1500 feet—there was no blue sky showing. . . . There was *no* sound of any engine; it had no wings or other appendages, no props, and no trail of smoke in back. It appeared 15 to 20 feet in diameter, perhaps *less*, and as I watched it curved smoothly in an arc to the southeast and vanished forever in a lower cloud bank. My wife and the rest of the family heard this queer [whistling] noise and all rushed out to see what it was, and my wife glimpsed it as it vanished in the clouds.

North of Chicago, August: A witness reported, "I saw three silver disks going from east to west near the lake [Michigan]. . . . I was returning to Great Lakes Training Center [in the suburb of North Chicago] after taking an officer to Chicago. . . . They were flying in [a triangular] formation."

Bruce Peninsula, Canada, November 29, 1944: Around 3 p.m. R. H. Mortimer and his 24-year-old daughter heard a hissing sound behind them and a moment later saw nine large disc-shaped objects pass overhead at approximately 2000 feet. Moving three abreast in a square configuration, they were lost to sight over the lake.

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### ULTRATERRESTRIALS.

→ See Contactees; Paranormal and Occult Theories about UFOs; and Psychosocial Hypothesis.

### UMMO HOAX.

→ See Hoaxes.

## UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO UFO PROJECT

By the late 1950s the U.S. Air Force was ready to shed itself of its UFO burden. To many Americans **Project Blue Book** had lost all credibility. Some thought its explanations for UFO sightings reflected an official desire to "solve" reports at any cost. Others charged that Blue Book was deliberately trying to discredit the subject as part of a scheme to cover up its powerlessness in the face of visitation by advanced intelligences from elsewhere.

Within the project some felt that UFOs were a scientific, not a military, problem and thus not something with which the Air Force ought to concern itself. Yet they also feared a public backlash if they dropped Blue Book precipitously. That left one alternative: the Air Force had to find another agency that would take UFOs off its hands. As it would learn, however, none was interested. Meanwhile, members of Congress were registering occasional expressions of unhappiness with Blue Book, though the project managed to fend off the major congressional hearings the civilian **National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena** (NICAP) sought.