

# The Greatest Flap Yet?

*By Jerome Clark*

“I WAS a disbeliever, but I saw something up there tonight . . .” So spoke one witness, a policeman, as he reported one of what were to be countless sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects all over the United States beginning the evening of Sunday, August 1, 1965—a date that future UFO historians may regard nearly as important as June 24, 1947. For on August 1 commenced what has already been termed greater than the Great Flap of 1952, a sudden and unprecedented wave of reports so numerous as literally to stagger the imagination.

It is impossible even now, three months later, to judge exactly what happened that evening. All we know is that the skies of middle America, ordinarily tranquil during the late summer, suddenly and (even to UFO students) unexpectedly produced a vast series of strange phenomena described variously as “multi-coloured lights,” “eggs,” and “diamonds”. Some of the objects even seemed to shatter apart. According to one observer, the lights he saw “were red and exploded in a shower of sparks.” Another, Deputy Sheriff Dan Carter of Canyon, Texas, said, “I thought at first a plane had exploded in the air. The object appeared to go south, then disintegrated in all colours.”

As the night progressed, sightings spread to Arkansas, Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Wyoming and Washington. At Wichita, in Kansas, weatherman John Shockley reported that he had tracked several unidentified objects on the Weather Bureau’s radar; the craft, if that is what they were, flew at altitudes between 6,000 and 9,000 feet and, by Shockley’s account, appeared “mostly on the south side of the city.” Assistant Ellis Pike noted that the blips “looked much the same as an airplane’s night.” They were “small and rather diffused,” and brightened and dimmed on the screen. Their speed Pike estimated at 45 miles an hour.

At the same time, P. H. Messner, head of Air Traffic Control Installations for the Federal Aviation Agency, denied that any UFOs were tracked on FAA radar. In confirming the statement, a spokesman at McConnell Air Force Base, also in Wichita, cautioned that, while the Weather Bureau’s radar covers most of Kansas, the FAA’s covers only a 30-mile radius.

Meanwhile, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol was reporting that Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City had tracked UFOs—sometimes as many as

four at a time—on its radar. According to the Patrol, several of the objects had dropped from 22,000 to 4,000 feet in a matter of seconds, but the Air Force refused to confirm or deny the report.

Sightings made during the early morning hours of August 2 are so numerous (and so repetitive) that we shall mention briefly only a few:

One of the clearest reports Sunday night came from an Air Force weather observer who asked to remain anonymous because of the service’s stand on the UFO question. The object he saw over Norman, Oklahoma, was, in his words, “no mirage”. Alternatively viewing through 10-power binoculars and a 40-power telescope, he watched a mysterious machine follow an orbital path across the sky. “It was tilted at about 45 degrees,” he said, “and then straightened out so I got a good look at it. It looked like Saturn with a flat top and flat bottom. It was not a true sphere. There were two rings around it and the rings were a part of the main body; they were not separated from it . . . [It was] at least twice the size of a Boeing 707.” He repeated emphatically that “this was no mirage. The impression was too clear—there was no mistiness, no shimmering, no wavering motion. It was a distinct image—as clear as a person’s face.”

Bob Campbell, a news photographer for KXWI-TV in Sherman, Texas, was listening to his short wave radio set in his home in Bells, Texas, when he heard a conversation between Oklahoma and Texas Highway Patrolmen that a UFO, traced on Oklahoma radar, was streaking toward the Texas border. Jumping into his car, Campbell located Police Chief Peter McCollum, and the two of them drove out into the country, where 13 miles east of Sherman and one mile east of Bells they sighted the saucer hovering in the northeast sky. As they watched it, Campbell set up his camera and took four time-exposure photographs. Developed later, they showed a brilliant, ball-shaped light, which, it was later discovered, had been seen at the same time by a police witness in Durant (30 miles north of Bells) and a state employee seven miles south of Sherman.

In another incident, two rookie police officers at Caldwell, Kansas—notified that flying objects had been observed moving toward the Caldwell Airport—sped toward the area to find an egg-shaped machine about 100 yards long hovering over the ground. Shocked, the men tried to get closer to it, but it disappeared behind a hedge row

and apparently shut its lights off, for they could no longer see it. When they returned the next morning, the officers examined the area looking for traces where they thought the UFO had landed, but found nothing.

By daylight, reports had subsided, and the Air Force already had an explanation: What had been seen were not spaceships but certain astronomical bodies—the planet Jupiter or the stars Rigel, Capella, Betelgeux, or Aldebaran. “The azimuth and elevations of the reported sightings support this conclusion,” a spokesman announced.

So patently preposterous were the Air Force’s claims that even a presumably neutral reporter for United Press International, writing out of Wichita, felt constrained to comment, “Ordinary radar does not pick up planets or stars.” Robert Risser, director of the Oklahoma Science and Art Foundation Planetarium in Oklahoma City, put it more strongly. “That is as far from the truth as you can get,” he said, referring to the Air Force allegations. “These stars and planets are on the opposite side of the earth from Oklahoma City at this time of year.”

Curiously, sightings during the first few days of the flap came almost exclusively at night. So far as I can determine, few if any UFOs chose to operate in the daylight, almost as though the ufonauts were carefully refraining from producing undue alarm on the part of terrestrials. Considering the fright and hysteria evinced by some witnesses, this action may well have been justified. As a somewhat alarmed NICAP writer pointed out at the time, “In the last few months, there has been a disturbing increase in public fear of UFOs. Suddenly confronted with these strange objects, [even] veteran policemen, formerly skeptics, have panicked and fled.”<sup>2</sup>

One reason for the new national unease concerning UFOs may have been due to a widespread distrust of the Air Force’s somewhat heavy-handed dismissal of the many apparently reliable reports made on August 1 and throughout the week. Certainly it is not often that so much of the press and the scientific community has reacted so unfavourable to the glib “explanations” the service has offered for the phenomena. The Fort Worth, Texas, *Star-Telegram* spoke for a large number of Americans when it opined, “They can stop kidding us now about there being no such things as ‘flying saucers’. Too many people of obviously sound mind saw and reported them independently from too many separate localities. Their descriptions of what they saw were too similar to one another, and too unlike any familiar object. And it’s going to take more than a statistical report on how many reported ‘saucers’ have turned

out to be jets and weather balloons to convince us otherwise.”

UFOs were back the next evening, this time concentrating upon the Upper Midwest—particularly Wyoming, Nebraska, the Oakotas, Iowa, and Minnesota. At 9.30 a large machine carrying white and red lights, “moving swiftly and silently,” was reported flying over Sioux City, Iowa. “It wasn’t a star,” said one witness, “and it wasn’t an airplane.” Agreeing, a high school teacher who had watched the object added, “Anyone who would say this is a star would be out of his mind.”

The biggest share of sightings, however, fell over the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, where the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office disclosed, “Nearly every one of more than 50 police and sheriff squad cars on the road between 12.20 a.m. and 2.30 a.m. [August 3] called in to report seeing . . . objects.”

Descriptions were essentially the same. The phenomena appeared usually as lights only, with no shape visible. One officer radioed that “we saw three different objects. They looked like white stars with green and red flashing lights.” Another said he sighted a “bright white” object that dipped “through the bucket stars in the Big Dipper.”

Patrolmen spotted seven or eight objects hovering and darting over Lake Minnetonka, and described them as “spotted green on both sides, with a bright red light on top and white on the bottom.”

A Hennepin County radio dispatcher expressed astonishment at the number of calls he had received from policemen and others sighting strange objects. “One guy I can see going off the deep end,” he said. “But all these squads . . .”

Jerry Kirshenbaum, a staff writer for the Minneapolis *Tribune*, visited with several officers who claimed to have seen UFOs that night. As they talked, Long Lake Police Chief Bill Kearin pointed to two objects that, in Kirshenbaum’s words, “seemed to bob and twinkle in red-and-green.”

Strangely enough, none of the UFO showed up on radar. “We didn’t have a single thing on that we could say was unaccountable,” a spokesman at the Minneapolis–St Paul International Airport told the Minneapolis *Star*. He suggested that the sightings had been caused by stars and by B-52 aircraft passing over the area. This explanation hardly accounted for the manoeuvres the objects reportedly went through, one astronomer noted. Sherman W. Shultz, Jr., director of the Macalaster College Planetarium and Observatory and ordinarily a UFO sceptic, commented, “There were no special meteorological conditions that would have made stars or planets appear to shimmer or jump.

People would have to be pretty stupid to mistake stars or planets for flying objects, if they go through the zippedy-do-da motions they say they do."

Even though centered over the Twin Cities, UFOs by no means ignored other parts of mid-America. A Cheyenne, Wyoming, newspaper reporter named Gary Harvey saw one of the objects at 11 p.m., writing later, "At first it looked just like another twinkling star, but then I noticed it was flashing, not like a twinkling star, more like a three-colour aircraft beacon that's hundreds of miles away. It was red, then blue, then white, then red again and blue and white and continued to change colours as I watched."

In northern Texas, near Justin and Ponder, residents reported seeing a flying saucer land near a highway. Authorities investigated but were unable to find any traces that might have been left by the object.

Nebraska was deluged with reports of red, blue, and white lights which hovered and darted over Valentine, Ainsworth, North Platte, Scottsbluff and Sidney. In perhaps the last report of the morning, at 6.15, a couple in Culbertson sighted a strange craft shaped like a long cigar and coloured silver moving across the skies in a north-westerly direction. One wonders if this could have been the "mother ship" which carried the smaller UFOs seen so widely the night before.

One of the most interesting stories to emerge from the early part of the flap was revealed early Wednesday morning (August 4) by a Beatrice, Nebraska, truck driver named Don Tennopir. In his own words, spoken shortly after the encounter to reporter Ed Corwin of the Abilene, Kansas, *Reflector-Chronicle*:

"I was driving north on Highway 15 about 25 miles south of Abilene. I was carrying a full load of peanuts and was en route to Lincoln, Nebraska. I guess it was about 1.30 a.m. when all of a sudden all of the lights on my truck went out. Then they came back on, then off, then back on again. About this time this thing, UFO, or whatever, went over my truck with a sizzling or wind-like blowing sound. It scared the hell out of me!

"It seemed to almost touch the cab—maybe it was 20 feet in the air—and it just swooped down over the road and hovered there not more than a hundred feet in front of me. I tell you, I was standing on those brakes! I just didn't know what was happening. It looked like it was going to fall right in the middle of the road, but it didn't. I got my rig stopped and about that time this thing raised up a bit and slowly took off to the west and then headed south. I don't know how long it was there. It seemed longer than 20 seconds, but I was

just too damned scared to tell time or anything like that. The thing looked round to me. I'd guess it was about 14 or 15 feet in diameter and sort of orange-coloured. The colour reminded me of those reflectorized jackets worn by highway repair crews. Anyway, this thing was shooting off reddish rays, kind of in spurts. The rays weren't really steady, kind of flashing. The object appeared to be like a disc. I'd guess it was about two feet thick and the edge was round. There was a hump, or something like that, in the middle. This hump stuck up about four feet or so. There was a dark spot in the hump and this might have been a window or something. I just don't know.

"I tell you, I have never been so scared in my life. I've still got a pain in my chest. I regained my senses while this thing was hovering over the road and watched it disappear into the south-west. Where it came from or what it was exactly, I'll be darned if I know. I know this sounds silly, but it looked like a big plate with a cup in the middle. It really did!

"After the thing took off, I thought about getting out and walking around, but then I got to thinking there might be more of these things around. I ground gears, and I haven't done that in years, and got the hell out of there.

"Coming into Abilene, I got to thinking about all of the reports going around recently, and how I'd thought everybody was just seeing things. Brother, I can tell you, these things are for real."

Corwin wrote that Tennopir was still "visibly upset and shaken" as he talked with the reporter, even though he was "obviously a man of stern character." Patrolman Quenton Kessler, to whom Tennopir first related his experience, said that "he was pale, almost white-faced, and his hands were trembling. He appeared to be all shook up, to say the least."

Corwin added that Tennopir did not seem to be a publicity seeker and in fact was somewhat reluctant to discuss the incident at all.

Curiously, at the same time Tennopir was dodging his UFO, a similar series of events was occurring to Harvey Burgman and his family, who were driving near Amarillo, Texas, when "this disc-shaped thing was spotted hovering over the highway in front of us. I stopped the car and got the kids out in a hurry to take a look. I definitely identified the sound of a motor. It had a red light and a green light which then flared up to brilliant colours as it seemed to disappear straight up."

After the object had left, Burgman got back into his car only to discover that it would not start.

"It acted as though the engine had a vapour

lock, and it took about five minutes to start it," he said. "But my lights did not go on and off like those . . . reported on [Tennopir's] truck."

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>A newspaper in Greenville, South Carolina, notified the Denver, Colorado, *Post* that it had received a telephone call from a man at Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, Wyoming, claiming that 30 huge cylinder-shaped machines were hovering over the base. This sighting purportedly took place 5.30 a.m., August 1, which would put it as one of the earliest of the flap. We might even speculate that the machines were carrier craft bringing the smaller craft which were to appear *en masse* the next night. Unfortunately, as Coral Lorenzen points out in *Fate*, the story must be viewed with some scepticism because no other sightings were reported in the area at the time—and 30 large flying machines would certainly attract attention, to put it mildly. The Air Force itself refused comment, stating only that the report was "under investigation".

<sup>2</sup>*The U.F.O. Investigator*, August–September, 1965.

## BOOK REVIEW

**FLYING SAUCERS THROUGH THE AGES** By Paul Thomas. Neville Spearman Ltd., London W1., 192 pages, 21s. This is an English version of *Les Extraterrestres* (Liberairie Plon, 1962), translated from the French by Gavin Gibbons, who reveals, with the author's permission, that 'Paul Thomas' is the pseudonym of musician and composer Paul Misraki. It will be obvious to the reader that the author is also extremely well-versed in Biblical history and in other ancient writings and traditions. The Bible, particularly the copiously annotated French Jerusalem version, is the source of stories and quotations which can be interpreted in terms of the UFO mystery, and in

this book, parallels are drawn with incidents reported by witnesses of recent times.

Accordingly we are presented with an idea of extraterrestrial intervention on this planet commencing in pre-history; of 'gods' and 'angels' and a struggle for power; of a plan to organise a new form of civilised life on Earth; of man's destiny being guided by beings from Space. As an example, we are shown that the story of Yahveh's Pillar of Cloud by day, and Pillar of Fire by night, which led the Israelites towards the Promised land, need be treated neither as something supernatural nor as a legend, but as a very real object. And this object was not unlike the great vertical cigar at Vernon, near Paris, in 1954 (see Aimé Michel's *Flying Saucers and the Straight Line Mystery*) and similar objects frequently reported elsewhere.

Although this is speculation on a grand scale, it is, nevertheless, a serious attempt to discover an alternative basis for long-held and cherished religious beliefs, without denying those beliefs: there is nothing irreverent in the presentation of this hypothesis.

The FLYING SAUCER REVIEW holds that speculation is both valid and necessary, particularly in this subject, for so little is known about the flying saucers. We must welcome any new idea which can help guide our researches to the truth, and accordingly this book is a 'must' for all readers of the REVIEW.

# World round-up

*of news and comment  
about recent sightings*

## ENGLAND

### Ovalloid object off Selsey

A Sussex reader who wishes to remain anonymous has sent the following graphic account of a sighting which he made on September 20, 1965, at about 4 p.m.:

"East Beach, Selsey, Sussex, close to the bird sanctuary, on an unusually brilliant afternoon. It was very clear, and the air *very still*. The tide was low, far out across the flat beach. No sound except the cries of seagulls. The hot sun was immediately behind me, i.e., in the West. I lay on the beach to relax for a moment, having observed an empty sky as I walked there, that being my job as an artist. There were *no clouds* . . . closed my eyes for a minute only, to shut out the glare. Suddenly the thought came to me: 'what a day to see UFOs'. I

opened my eyes, looking up at an angle of 45 degrees. It was then, with a start, that I saw it—perhaps half a mile out to sea—perhaps half mile up—perhaps 400 feet long, an elliptical shape moving at about 100 m.p.h. or more. I gauged the speed from the fact that it took some 30 seconds to travel the 1½ miles or more to a point off Selsey Bill.

"The object was absolutely silent. Not a sound anywhere, for the gulls had vanished, to return immediately afterwards when I could compare the brilliant sunlight full on their white plumage with the still more brilliant light on that machine. The machine, if that is what it was, was clearly defined everywhere except for a slight dusky haze underneath. A faint, wispy cloud was 'pouring' out behind, but clearly defined as sparkling spots close to its stern. The object had no fins—or gondola, as with normal

airships. It had already passed my centre of vision and moved swiftly away southwards, turning a shade away out to sea, when I caught at that moment a brilliant flash of sunlight on metal.

"There was no one else to see it, except a house painter working away behind me, and he had his back to the sea. Later a coastguard looked as if he thought me a mental case. When telling a neighbour about it about one month later, she said that a Farnham girl had reported a sighting to the local press at about the same time, so I suppose it could have come from inland to my left side, and so not have been visible as I walked down to the beach. Well, it might have been a new secret atomic-powered aircraft, but it was **absolutely silent**, and it was certainly **real**."