

assuredly be reported as UFOs. Many of them must be hidden away in our files unrecognised. Where are all these UFO reports?

Theories

There have been many theories to explain ball lightning, but only two stand up to examination. One involves chemical combustion, the other a direct current electrical discharge. The first supposes that a very low concentration of an inflammable gas is in the air, when a lightning discharge ignites it: little balls of flame form and dart about. This theory is inelegant, but it has been demonstrated in the laboratory. The second theory supposes that a highly charged thundercloud has not yet reached the point where it can produce the usual lightning flash. If, beneath it, there is a localised patch of air that is electrically different from the rest, then the

electrical lines of force may preferentially pass through there and cause a localised breakdown of the air. A corona discharge may form in this region—something less than a full-scale spark, but rather similar in principle to a Neon sign. Going into the theory in detail and solving the mathematical equations predicts spherical or ellipsoidal shapes, with characteristics very like those actually observed. The beauty of this theory is that it can account satisfactorily for all the well-established properties of the phenomenon, and can probably be modified slightly if necessary.

Understanding of ball lightning has progressed a long way even since Maxwell Cade wrote about it in these pages. It is beginning to become possible to distinguish several different categories of the phenomenon. It would be a triumph if UFO research could contribute something to a further understanding of ball lightning.

THE 1897 STORY Part 3

Jerome Clark and Lucius Farish

ON April 23, 1897, on a farm in Burton township near Flint, Daniel Gray heard a rumbling, whizzing sound over his head. For a few seconds he could see a dark object flashing away, and then, even before he was able to regain his composure, something fell from the sky and thudded into the ground near him. When he picked it up, he found that it was a Toronto, Canada, newspaper dated October 5, 1896, dry and in almost perfect condition.

An airship was observed at Omer on the 24th, and on the same date the South Haven *Sentinel* noted, "So many people have seen the noted airship that has been flitting for the last two weeks back and forth over South Haven, it would take much space to give all their names."

Cigar-shaped objects

Two residents of Freeland, Leonard and Henry Krause, viewed an unknown object on the evening of the 25th. At Sidaw, a resident related his experience of the 26th to the *Marquette Mining Journal*: "I was taking a short walk before retiring for the night. As a rule, I am a person who retires early, but this night I happened to be out late. It was about 11 o'clock.

"I happened to cast my eyes upward, and to my astonishment I saw three large lights, red, green and white. When I first noticed the strange object, it seemed to be over Booth's mill, and was sailing in a south-easterly direction. It was going, perhaps, sixty miles an hour. I was near the Nester estate warehouse at the time, and before I could get anyone else to the site, the ship had disappeared from view.

"It was a bright night and I could plainly discern a cigar-shaped object and a basket below, somewhat resembling a street car. I should judge it was about 2,000 feet from the ground."

Two Dayton people, returning home at 2 a.m. from staying up with a sick neighbour, were startled by the

appearance of a huge cigar with a lighted basket under it. In the light could be seen the forms of three human-looking occupants.

Occupants, music and a grappling hook!

Occupants also figure in a Holton story. On the night of the 29th, at 11.30, a huge lighted object came out of the north and slowed down, finally hovering over the bridge. People streamed out into the street to hear the sounds of revellers aboard the ship. Loud talk and music, "the like of which never was heard in this place," could be heard all during the craft's 55-minute appearance. The phenomenon itself measured 300ft., plus a 40ft. tail; in width and depth, about 90ft.

Just as the tail started to whirl, the beings dropped a grappling hook which caught one of the viewers on the ground. Then the ship flew away. The captured man returned from White Cloud the next day "and has been talking ever since about aerial navigation."

"Mysterious lights have been seen on Long Lake during the past week," the Grand Traverse *Herald* bit enigmatically informed its readers.

And on May 1 the Saginaw *Evening News* related that a shoe of huge proportions, discovered on the railroad track near O'Donnell, Spencer & Co.'s plant, may have fallen from the airship.

* * * * *

Hints of a whole new dimension to the airship enigma, suggesting that it may have been a world-wide phenomenon rather than solely an American, have been furnished by aviation historian Dale M. Titler. The original manuscript of his *Wings of Mystery* serves as the source for the information which follows.

On July 11, 1897, Swedish aeronaut Salomon Auguste Andree, together with a crew of two, attempted to pilot a balloon from Spitzbergen across the North Pole to a mainland on the other side. In the wake of great public

interest in the venture, a number of sightings of a balloon-like object, believed to be one of Andree's, were made—but it later developed that Andree's balloon had been in none of the areas reporting sightings.

On July 17, a woman in a small Swedish town saw a balloon with drag ropes and a net. She said there was a man in the gondola.

The crew of the steamer *Kong Halfdan*, off Norway between Raugesund and Ryvarden on August 13, sighted a "big balloon" which passed so close that its drag ropes could be seen.

Siberian sighting

At Antsiferona, Siberia, on September 17, observers watched a "round object" for five minutes as it headed northwest.

"The night of September 26th, at half past two in the morning," wrote a Russian engineer, "I observed a balloon drifting rapidly southeast over the town of Yakovlevskaya. . . . The balloon had an electric (phosphorescent) sheen. It was visible for less than three minutes, disappearing rapidly over the horizon."

As Titler comments, "An *electric sheen? Rapidly disappearing?* Surely this wasn't Andree's balloon. But what other aerial craft could the engineer have described?"

What other aerial craft, indeed?

Some time during the summer (the date is not furnished) an Indian youth near Winnipeg, Canada, saw "an object resembling a balloon giving out a considerable amount of light. . . ." In August a woman and her daughter in Caribou, British Columbia, sighted a round object moving from west to east. As it approached, it grew larger and sank lower in the sky. Then the witnesses saw two shapes, one above the other, and the object shot upward over Quesnelle Lake and disappeared from sight.

"None of these last three objects could have been balloons—much less Andree's," Titler concludes. "They were something else."

Comment

1. With specific reference to the American 1897 reports, a word of caution is necessary. Two of the stories are rather suspect, we fear, and before they find a place in the literature of ufology, we feel that we had better outline our reasons for entertaining doubts about them.

First, the Reynolds, Michigan, landing of April 14. Our source is the *Saginaw Courier-Herald* for April 17, but the incident is also described in the *Lansing State Republican* for the same date; only the latter paper gives the date as the 17th (rather than as the 14th) and the location as Williamston. Otherwise, the account is the same, word for word, except where the *Herald* mentions "lots of people . . . from Morley and Howard City," the *Republican* refers to the same "from Okemos and Locke."

All of which leads one to suspect a journalistic hoax something like the Aurora, Texas, fiasco. It may be, however, that an irresponsible editor of the *Republican* got the story and gave it a more local base, changing the date to add to the sensation.

Nonetheless, we must be careful in studying the

report for another reason; the description of the occupant certainly does not tally with those supplied in other accounts of the time. The 1897 ufonauts were quite human-like in appearance and size, and so a "monster" story will naturally be viewed with suspicion.

We do not necessarily urge rejection of the story, only very cautious consideration of it.

Secondly, one cannot help wondering if the Holton "merry-makers" of the 29th were some sort of newspaper joke. The story, which appeared in the April 30 *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, is written in so trivial a manner that it tempts one to classify it with the many other satirical pieces that the airship inspired in contemporary newspapers. Notice, for example, how the writer treats the abduction of a Holton citizen: "But just as [the airship] began to move, a grappling hook was let down and caught one of our most truthful citizens who was instantly hoisted on board and carried away. The truthful citizen came back on the 11.30 train from White Cloud and has been talking ever since about aerial navigation."

Perhaps the reporter heard the story second-hand and simply could not take it seriously. Or perhaps he invented the "abduction" to poke fun at Robert Hibbard's claim (which received wide publicity and with which he could well have been familiar) and the alleged gullibility of airship witnesses and believers.

But we have included the account among the serious reports because of similar testimony about loud noises and music emanating from airships.

2. Since we began digging up some of the 1897 data, we have noted with satisfaction a growing interest in the period. One individual to whom UFO researchers owe a debt of gratitude is Mr. Gary Larreategui, who is responsible for bringing our attention to most of the material we have used in this article. Mr. Larreategui, showing dedication that unfortunately very few ufologists possess, has spent many hours carefully researching the newspapers of his native Michigan, providing us with some of the most revealing accounts yet.

Donald Hanlon, an associate of Jacques Vallée, is in the early stages of putting together a comprehensive study, tentatively titled *Enigma of the Airship*, based upon his own collection of approximately 200 reports. Another American writer, author of a valuable reference work on UFOs, is considering a new book which will use 1897 data. And by the time this article appears in print, Gordon Lore and Harold Deneault's long-awaited volume on the historical sightings, including 1897, should be available. In the meantime ufologists like Charles F. Flood and Ted Bloecher continue quietly to amass information.

Some of us have even begun to expand our efforts to include the 1896 California and 1909-10 Eastern U.S.A. wave, finding material too long ignored. Still, we have barely begun, and there is much, much more to do.

One thing that would greatly facilitate our work, of course, would be the discovery of research contemporary to 1897. John Keel suggested in a personal conversation with Jerome Clark that some enterprising turn-of-the-century journalist may have done a book on the airship scare. If we could locate it somehow, we could be taken

a giant step forward.

For many reasons 1897 is vital to our comprehension of the great UFO riddle. Therefore, we strongly urge readers of the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW to join us in our undertaking. Interested North Americans should study newspaper files of late March, all of April, and early May 1897. West Coast researchers should check the papers of November and December 1896, with spot checks into months before and after.

There is cause to believe as well that 1880, 1883 (in fact the whole 1877-87 period, termed by the late M. K. Jessup "the incredible decade"), 1907-10, and 1913 have something to offer American and Canadian investigators.

Residents of the British Isles might check out the airship flap of 1909, which Fort describes briefly in *Lo!* Ufologists in middle Europe, especially Germany, should study the newspapers and magazines of the late 1850's, and Frenchmen should find the 1860's fertile territory. South Africans should concentrate on 1914.

One last suggestion: Perhaps a Canadian ufologist could go through the Toronto papers of October 5, 1896, to see if there is anything in them of conceivable relevance to our subject. By dropping this specific issue at Dan Gray's feet, the ufonauts may have been trying to tell us something.

20 YEARS BACK

Brinsley le Poer Trench

THE year 1949 was not a vintage one as regards the number of reported sightings. However, two notable incidents occurred and the first of these took place on April 24.

At that time Commander R. B. McLaughlin, a regular Naval officer, was in charge of a team of scientists at White Sands Testing Ground, New Mexico. Actually, during 1948 and 1949 McLaughlin and his team made several UFO sightings, but the April 24, 1949, one is generally considered to be the best one.

At about 10.30 a.m. Commander McLaughlin's team were preparing to send up one of the giant 100-foot diameter Naval Skyhook balloons. The sky was crystal clear. They had already sent aloft a weather balloon to check lower altitude winds. Some of the team under Charles B. Moore, Jr., were busy tracking this balloon at about 10,000ft. when suddenly one man shouted and drew their attention to another object much higher and away to the left of the balloon.

To their astonishment the team of scientists saw an elliptical-shaped UFO which was whitish-silver in colour. One of them swung the theodolite being used to track the weather balloon round on to the UFO and tracked it for a whole minute. The unknown object finally climbed away very fast and was lost to sight in a matter of seconds.

Subsequently, the scientists estimated that the UFO had been at a height of 56 miles when first spotted and travelling at 7 miles per second, that is at 17,000 miles per hour!

The late Edward J. Ruppelt, former head of Project Blue Book, in his book *The Report on Unidentified*

Flying Objects, related how the March 1950 issue of *True* magazine carried an article called "How Scientists tracked Flying Saucers", written by Commander McLaughlin himself.

"I am convinced," McLaughlin wrote, "that it was a flying saucer, and further, that these discs are spaceships from another world, operated by animate, intelligent beings."

For some extraordinary reason his story had been given full clearance by the military, but according to Ruppelt the material in the article was in direct contradiction to all releases made by them during the previous two years. This is another example of the confusion and conflicting views foisted on the public. Hot news and then cold douches repeated alternately all the time.

The impact of the Commander's article in *True* magazine was formidable and many people were convinced that if scientists were seeing UFOs then there was something very real from outer space watching our planet.

The sequel was that Commander McLaughlin suddenly found himself posted from White Sands to the destroyer *Bristol*. Possibly the United States Navy prefers its regular officers to maintain silence over some matters in the same way that our Royal Navy is traditionally known as the silent service.

SOURCES

The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects by Edward J. Ruppelt (Doubleday) 1956.

The Truth about Flying Saucers by Aimé Michel (Criterion Books) 1956.

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