

FOO FIGHTERS

by **GORDON W. CREIGHTON**

In many books and articles about flying saucers, there will be found references to the "Foo Fighters" which dogged the paths of allied pilots on operations over enemy territory, both German and Japanese. It is also reported that German and Japanese pilots saw similar objects. Under war conditions the secrecy surrounding our subject was even closer than it is today. The author relates what is known about these objects and we reproduce an early clipping referring to them. The article concludes with some fascinating personal experiences prior to 1947 before the expression "Flying Saucers" had been coined as a result of the classic Kenneth Arnold sighting.

ONE finds among some of the newer converts to the subject today a tendency to think that the current chapter of intensive UFO activity around our planet began only in 1947—two years after the end of the Second World War. Many of the earlier students in this field will, however, recall that there was in fact a preliminary phase, covering the years 1944 to 1945, that is to say while the war was still in progress, and that the sightings during this phase were not so much of what we would now call saucers (though there were certainly some of these about) as of the strange little red or golden or silver discs or balls which the American Air Force dubbed "Foo Fighters" (from the French "feu"), or "Krauts," or "Kraut balls."

Those who wish to learn something about these discs or to refresh their memory cannot do better than refer to Chapter II ("The Coming of the Foo Fighters") of Harold T. Wilkins's book *Flying Saucers on the Moon* (Peter Owen, London, 1954).

Wilkins opens this chapter as follows:

"It was in the war year, 1944, when both British and American pilots had singular experiences; but not a word of it has ever appeared in any British newspaper. In that year, censorship was stringent; but though other mysteries have been revealed since, this one has never had the veil of silence removed from it, so far as Britain is concerned. It is not my business to advance any reason for this silence.

"I happen to know that two British war

pilots reported to Intelligence Officers, after a flight, that strange balls of fire had suddenly appeared while their own 'planes were on high-altitude flights. These mysterious balls had seemed to indulge in a sort of aerial ballet dance and had, so to speak, pirouetted on the wing tips of the 'planes. When the 'planes went into a power dive, these balls followed them down and outdistanced them, despite the fact that the 'planes were biting into the air with a strident scream at the vertiginous speed they were making. Other pilots reported that they had seen strange balls of blazing light flying in precise formation. The crew of one British bomber reported that fifteen or twenty of these balls had followed their bomber at a distance." Wilkins then goes on to describe in detail the first sightings of the "Foo Fighters" by American night-pilots flying over the Rhine, in the area north of Strasbourg, and particularly over the sector of the Allied invasion front between Hagenau and Neustadt. Both these places lie to the west of the Rhine.

It seems that the first encounter occurred at 10 p.m. on November 23, 1944, over the Rhine, near Mainz, when Lieut. Edward Schluter, a fighter-pilot of the U.S. 415th Night-Fighter Squadron based at Dijon, noticed some eight or ten balls of fire, flying in formation at immense speed. The sky was clear, with light clouds, the moon was in the first quarter, and visibility was good. Schluter and his companions, Radar Officer Lieut. Donald J. Meiers and Intelligence Officer Lieut. F. Ringwald, were able to see them with

the greatest of ease, particularly as they themselves were flying with their cockpit darkened in order to eliminate dazzle. Getting in touch at once with one of the American ground radar stations, Schluter reported that he seemed to have about ten German night-fighters chasing him. But the U.S. radar post replied: "You guys must be nuts! Nobody is up there but your own 'plane. 'Aint seein' things, are you?"

Lieut. Schluter and his companions realised that their story would not be believed but would be attributed to hallucinations or neurosis, and so they made no official report about the matter on their return to their base at Dijon.

The next encounters by members of the U.S. 415th Night-Fighter Squadron were on November 27, December 22 and December 24, small numbers of the balls being seen each time, but it was not long before a U.S. pilot, flying a P-47, encountered fifteen of the "Foo Fighters" in broad daylight over Neustadt.

And I have read somewhere or other a detailed account of how on one occasion one of the balls got in through an open hatch on the top of an American bomber and slowly flew up and down inside and then out again, to the astonishment of the crew.

By this time, of course, the pilots had begun to hand in reports of what they had seen, and the Air Force authorities were obliged to sit up and take notice. It was no longer sufficient just to wave the reports aside with a smile or with half-serious references to hallucinations or combat-neurosis. But, nevertheless, the inevitable "explanation" from the experts was soon forthcoming, for in January, 1945, it was stated by American scientists in New York that the red and golden balls were nothing more than St. Elmo's Fire.

The Far East, too

The war in Europe ended, but it was not long before the St. Elmo's Fire began to appear over the Pacific theatre of operations. Over Truk Lagoon, in mid-Pacific, and over Japan, the crews of the American B-29 bombers began to see the balls shooting up from below, hovering over the tails of the bombers, and changing in colour from red to orange and then white and back to red. Here, too, in the Far East, as over Germany, the weird balls were inoffensive, just "nosey" and exploratory. When going all out, at top speed, the B-29s could not outdistance the balls. On one occasion, at night, a B-29 rose up into a cloud in order to shake off one of them, but when it emerged from the cloudbank there was the ball,

still following close behind. The pilot reported later that it had appeared to be about 3½ ft. wide and that it glowed with a strange red phosphorescence. It was spherical, with no signs of any kind of mechanical appendages, such as fins, wings, etc.

Just as, over Germany, the Germans themselves had seen the balls and had thought they must be some new Allied device, so likewise in the Far East bewildered Japanese pilots encountered them and thought they must be secret devices of either the Americans or the Russians.

When the Allies had overrun Germany, however, no more "Foo Fighters" were seen there. And when the German experimental stations were seized, and their secrets examined, nothing so far as we know was ever found to indicate that the Germans had hit upon so astonishing an invention as glowing red or silver or golden balls which could fly for hours in formation and could be made invisible and then visible again in an instant. If the "Foo Fighters" were German or Japanese or Allied devices, why has nothing more been heard of them in the past fifteen years? Whoever heard of any secrets remaining secrets for so long as that!

An early report

Now, of course, it has been suggested to me more than once that all this is mere hearsay, purveyed to us only by Harold Wilkins. Why, I have been asked, was nothing ever published about it in the papers? According to Wilkins, it was not until January 1, 1945, that the U.S. press heard about the "Foo Fighters," while in the British press, still heavily censored, nothing appeared until later in the same year, when the Reuter ticker tapes did begin to carry brief reports about UFOs, *but not about "Foo Fighters"* (And these UFO reports, he adds, soon vanished as suddenly as they had appeared, from which one may deduce that the censorship was at work.)

It so happens, however, that I had by that time been transferred to the United States, where I was in charge of the British Consulate-General at New Orleans in the years 1944 and 1945, and I can show that, although Wilkins is not entirely accurate when he says that the first American press references were on January 1 and 2, 1945, for I still have in my files the original clipping which I cut from the *New Orleans Item* of December 13, 1944, nevertheless Wilkins's story is entirely correct in substance. Here is my clipping of December 13, 1944:

"(Associated Press) Paris, Dec. 13. As the Allied Armies ground out new gains on the

Silver Balls Floating in Air Nazis' Newest War Device

(The Associated Press)

1944

Paris, Dec. 13.—As the Allied armies ground out new gains on the western front today, the Germans were disclosed to have thrown a new "device" into the war—mysterious silvery balls which float in the air.

Pilots report seeing these objects, both individually and in clusters, during forays over the Reich.

(The purpose of the floaters was not immediately evident. It is possible that they represent a new anti-aircraft defense instrument or weapon.)

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Photostat of actual clipping.

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According to Wilkins, the following is the official release which appeared in the *New York Herald-Tribune* for January 2, 1945:

"(From a U.S. Night-Fighter Base in France.)

On December 13, 1944, newspapermen were told that the Germans had thrown silvery balls into the air against day raiders. Pilots then reported that they had seen these balls, both individually and in clusters, during forays over the Rhine. Now, it seems, the Nazis have thrown something new into the night skies over Germany. It is the weird, mysterious "Foo Fighter" balls which race alongside the wings of Beaufighters flying intruder missions over Germany. Pilots have been encountering this eerie weapon for more than a month in their night flights. No-one apparently knows what this sky weapon is. The balls of fire appear suddenly and accompany the planes for miles. They seem to be radio-controlled from the ground, so official intelligence reports reveal.

"There are three kinds of these lights we call 'Foo Fighters,'" said Lieutenant Donald Meiers, of Chicago. 'One is a red ball which appears off our wing tips and flies along with us. No. 2 is a vertical row of three balls of fire, flying in front of us. No. 3 is a group of about fifteen lights which appear in the distance, like

a Christmas tree up in the air, and flicker on and off.

"The pilots of this night-fighter squadron, in operation since September, 1943, find these fiery balls the weirdest thing they have yet met. They are convinced that these "Foo Fighters" are designed to be a psychological weapon, as well as military; although it is not the nature of the balls to attack a plane. . . .

"A 'Foo Fighter' picked me up recently, at 700 ft., and chased me 20 miles down the valley of the Rhine," says Meiers. 'I turned to starboard, and two balls of fire turned with me. We were going at 260 miles an hour, and the balls were keeping right up with us. On another occasion, when a 'Foo Fighter' picked us up, I dived at 360 miles an hour. It kept right off our wing tips for a while, and then zoomed up into the sky. When I first saw the things off my wing tips, I had the horrible thought that a German, on the ground, was ready to press a button, and explode them. But they don't explode, or attack us. They just seem to follow us, like wills-o'-the-wisp!'"

Such, then, were the first press reports in America about the balls, and it seems probable that, had it not been so heavily censored, my clipping from the *New Orleans Item* of December 13, 1944, would have turned out to be identical with this statement that was finally released on January 2, 1945.

Other explanations

At this point we may pause to note that, just as happened later with all the saucers, we are given by the pundits entirely different and mutually exclusive explanations of what the things are. "St. Elmo's Fire," say the New York scientists. "Psychological weapons," says this American night-fighter radar officer, doubtless because that is what his own authorities have told him to think. (The Germans, as we know, are eminently capable and practical people, and ruthless fighters when it comes to it, and I cannot for the life of me imagine them wasting their time and energy on so completely innocuous a device as this, without putting their brilliant invention to some more concrete use against the enemy.) And how much these explanations remind us of what was to happen later in connection with some of the saucer sightings, where one and the same UFO would be solemnly talked away as Venus, a weather-balloon, the illuminated nose-cone of an aircraft and a high-flying bird!

It may well be that my clipping of December 13, 1944, and the *Herald-Tribune* story of

January 2, 1945, are in fact the only press reports that ever did get out on the subject of the "Foo Fighters." And readers of the REVIEW will be interested to see the photostatic copy of my clipping, which appears on page 13. It is possible that there is no other copy to match it anywhere in amateur UFOlogists' files. At any rate, it is the only one that I have ever seen.

Readers of the REVIEW may wonder why it is that I extracted my clipping in the first place. The answer is simple. I had already seen a flying saucer, in daylight, fly over Chungking, Chiang Kai-Shek's wartime capital, in the autumn of 1941, when I was serving in the British Embassy there. I did not, of course, say to myself: "There goes a flying saucer!" But I did make a mental note of the fact that I had just observed something paranormal, something "out of this world." When, in the U.S.A. three years later, I read the story of the silver balls in the New Orleans paper, it rang a bell in my memory. And when, three years later still, I was stationed in N.E. Brazil, at H.M. Consulate in Recife (Pernambuco) and I began to read in the Brazilian papers of the wave of saucer-sightings over the U.S.A. in 1947, it rang another bell. The result is that I have accumulated, over the years, a stack of saucer files which is now more than a foot deep. The north-eastern part of Brazil dealt with in Dr. Olavo Fontes's fascinating account (FLYING SAUCER REVIEW for July-August, 1961) lay within my Consular district. Although the really intensive UFO activity over Brazil has taken place in the years since I left that country, I would like to take this opportunity to confirm that the circumstances, such as place-names, etc., given in Dr. Fontes's articles seem to me to be meticulously correct, and that I give the fullest credence to his accounts of what has been happening over Brazil, because, although I saw no actual Brazilian press reports of UFOs at that time, I did hear several stories of sightings in the interior before I left that country in 1950.

A Chinese sighting

My glimpse of a saucer in 1941 over the medieval city of Chungking, in the remote hinterland of China and not far from Tibet, was to have a rather strange sequel, and because I think that readers of the REVIEW will find the episode interesting, I will end this article with a word or two about it, without being so indiscreet as to reveal more than I should.

It happened that, a good many years after I had seen that saucer in China, some friends of mine, indulgent as always towards the queer interests which I seemed to pick for myself, hap-

pened to tell an officer of the American Air Force that they knew a madman named G. W. Creighton who was so far gone that he even believed in flying saucers. The officer, who at the time occupied an important position, said that that was indeed interesting, and he enquired—to their surprise—where he might find me. This officer did in fact go to some trouble to look me up, and I spent a very pleasant half-hour chatting with him. He wanted to know everything about the saucer that I claimed to have seen, and I obliged. But he seemed disappointed when he learnt that it had been so long ago as 1941. He then told me that he had seen one, too. It had been a small fiery disc, which dived at the aircraft that he was bringing in to land on an airfield in Japan during the Korean War. When close to him, the disc had suddenly exploded, and although the terrain below was gone over very carefully by a large number of people, not a scrap of it was ever found. (We have, of course, heard of many sightings of these small and evidently expendable discs, though I do not know whether it has ever been established that they are identical with the "Foo Fighters." Personally I think that they *are* identical, and that they are some type of sensitive tele-monitoring device which for all we know may include not only some sort of television but also a method of reading our minds.)

An American's curiosity

The American officer then asked me what I thought about the saucers, and I replied without hesitation that I saw no alternative to accepting them as extra-terrestrial craft. He was naturally careful not to commit himself by any expression of opinion. It is true that he did not produce any forms to fill in, but I have the feeling that, had my sighting been more recent and had it taken place nearer home, he might have done so. For, you see, I know a young Englishman to whom this did happen not so long ago here in this country. He saw a saucer near an airfield, and when he told the American authorities about it, they at once sent a man to interview him—with forms to fill in.

Perhaps what is significant in my story is that the American officer went out of his way to hear a madman's tale.

Postscript. Since the above article was written, we have been able to discover another newspaper reference to "Foo Fighters" (though with a different spelling). The London *Daily Telegraph* on January 2, 1945, reported as follows: "Alsace, Monday (January 1, 1945). NOW THE PHOO FIGHTER. Phoo fighters are the big topic among

our intruder pilots. These are strange orange lights which follow their planes, sometimes flying in formation with them and eventually peeling off and climbing. Some have come within a few yards and have been shot out. Another type of phoo fighter appears under the wings, making a series of dull flashes. (Express News Service.)"

A very early report has reached us through the courtesy of Miss O. M. Beaton, of Vancouver. Pilot Officer Roman Sobinski, later Captain of a bomber aircraft in 301 R.A.F. Squadron and now living in Richmond, British Columbia, states that on March 25, 1942, at midnight he saw for about

five minutes a round disc or sphere that was following his aircraft over the Zuider Zee, Holland, when returning from a bombing raid on Essen. His tail gunner reported it first and when Sobinski had confirmed the sighting and saw that the object was closing in on his aircraft fast he gave instructions to fire on it. Several rounds appeared to enter the object, but made no impression on it. The object was of a glowing-orange colour. It appeared at 15,000 feet about 100 to 200 yards away. Its speed was estimated at 180 m.p.h., but disappeared at an estimated speed of 1,000 m.p.m.—Editor.

DR. LEON DAVIDSON'S CIRCULAR LETTER

WAVENEY GIRVAN writes: "I have heard from Dr. Davidson that he would like to withdraw his allegation that the publication of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* was assisted by agents of the U.S.A. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In the January-February issue I explained that as the original publisher of the book I was in the best position to deny the truth of his assertion.

"Dr. Davidson now wishes to amend his original

remarks and to substitute 'publicise' for 'publish.' This new statement is equally false and must be similarly denied. The publicity in England was organised solely by myself and my assistants: in America it was organised by the British Book Centre. They, too, received no help from the CIA or from any other similar government agency. Dr. Davidson's attempt to evade my charge of one inaccuracy has merely led him into another."

Sighting reports . . .

From ENGLAND, SCOTLAND,

SOUTH and EAST AFRICA

and the UNITED STATES

. . . in this issue