

SAUCERS AND SOUTH AFRICA

by Gordon W. Creighton

One of the most astonishing books on the subject of UFOs is surely Edgar Sievers's *Flying Saucer Uber Sudafrika*, published (in German only) by the Sagittarius Verlag of Pretoria in 1955 and unfortunately not yet available in an English language edition. Mr. Sievers himself is understood to be working on the English version, and in the meantime we have received his permission to print the following résumé which has been made from the first chapter.

IT all seems to have started in January, at Pretoria, where a family reported that they had seen a light moving at night over the city. They had at first thought it a star or perhaps a meteor, but soon perceived that it was more like "a powerful searchlight attached to an aeroplane." The thing made a swishing sound as it circled overhead.

Then, on August 20, at Cape Town and nearby places, many people saw two objects "like large pieces of wood" passing overhead at a great height. The things had come in from over the open sea, and disappeared behind Signal Hill. The appearance of these two "aeroplanes" created great excitement in Cape Town and indeed throughout the Union of South Africa.

In the next ten days or so, similar "aeroplanes," flying or hovering, were sighted by many people in a large number of places all over the country, from Cape Town to Mafeking, which lies some 800 miles to the north. Many observers described the craft as being shaped like an airship or a "Zeppelin," and occasionally making rumbling noises and sometimes swishing sounds. Scores of people noted that at night the machines projected down on to the earth one or sometimes two powerful beams of light, "blazing like motor-car headlights," or "like searchlights." And so it went on, over the next few months.

"Well, now," the reader may well ask, "what's so strange about all this? Surely they are familiar with aircraft in South Africa!"

Yes, of course. But there is only one thing. We have omitted to give the date. . . . These things took place in January, August, September, October of . . . 1914.

Mr. Edgar Sievers assures us that it is a categorical fact that in the year 1914 not a single aeroplane in good repair and fit to fly existed anywhere in the whole of the Union of South Africa. There was not a single airfield in the

whole Union. The only landing grounds would have been racecourses, golflinks, and the open veld. There were already a few South Africans who had learnt how to fly. But not one of them would have dared to take a machine over Signal Hill. For no aircraft in existence in the world at that date could have got them beyond the cliff-face of Table Mountain.

Distances in the Union are very great, and the "aircraft" appeared at places far apart. What was the position as regards long-distance flying in the world in the summer of 1914? Well, on July 31 the Norwegian, Lt. Gram, had just set up a record by flying across the North Sea, from Scotland to Stavanger, a distance of 320 miles in 250 minutes. And in South Africa Colonel Alistair Miller, World War ace, was the first long-distance flier. He went from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth (400 miles) in 5½ hours. *But not until November, 1917.*

The first man to fly in South Africa was an Alsatian named Albert Kimmerling, who took off in a French machine at Cape Town and flew over the city on Christmas Day in 1909. In 1910 and 1911 four other men took up flying in South Africa. This state of affairs lasted until 1913 when, with an accident at the Roberts Heights Camp, the last of the few aeroplanes in South Africa came to grief. After that, there was no more flying in South Africa for some time to come. Anyone wanting to learn to fly had to go abroad for his training, as the two or three damaged machines could not be repaired. The result was that when the Army manoeuvres were held at Potchefstroom in the summer of 1913, there were no aeroplanes there to take part.

In 1914 the vast majority of the inhabitants of Piet Retief, Mafeking, Vryburg, Volksrust, Kykoodie, Kraggakama, Clanwilliams, Warmbad, Dundee, Utrecht, Hopefield, Impendhle had never yet had the chance to see an aeroplane.

But plenty of them had occasion during that summer to see something in the sky. "Ah," the critic will say, "but what about *German South-West Africa*!" The distance as the crow flies between Cape Town and the nearest point of what was then this German territory is approximately 400 miles.

In May, 1914, three machines (two biplanes and one "Taube") had arrived in the German colony and, despite various crashes, all three were still operational during that summer, and they took part in the military campaign when the South African forces marched into German South-West Africa in November-December, 1914. But the distances between the border of the German colony and the places in South Africa where the "aeroplanes" were seen were between 400 and 800 miles. It is out of the question that the visiting machines could have been German. One of the four South Africans who took up flying in 1910-11 and tried to popularise it in the Union was a Dr. John Weston, a highly-gifted man still widely remembered in South Africa as the subsequent Admiral Weston. Dr. Weston was at the time the most eminent aviation expert in the Union, and when asked for his views about the reported sightings—he had not seen the "visitors" himself and was therefore certain that the reports were nonsense—said: "There are neither Zeppelins nor other airships either in the Union of South Africa or in South-West Africa, and aeroplanes have not yet reached such a degree of achievement that one should believe these reports of their appearance in our skies."

Incidentally, let us note that many of the South African reports refer to craft seen or heard *at night*. Neither Weston nor Kimmerling nor any of the other few pioneer fliers of South Africa had ever flown at night. (And in any case, let us bear in mind the fact that by the summer of 1914 none of them were flying by day either, since there were no longer any planes to fly.) It is a certainty that in any case none of the pioneer aeroplanes had such lights.

It may be asked, were there *any* British or South African officials who took the reports seriously? Somebody did. In an official proclamation the British Rear-Admiral in command of the British Naval Base at Simonstown called upon all persons "possessing an airship, kite, balloon or aircraft of any kind" to register it.

But this was not the only official proclamation. On August 29 the British Military Authorities in the capital, Pretoria, issued the following singular announcement: "Reports having been made in the Press and elsewhere during recent weeks of aeroplanes having been seen in flight in various

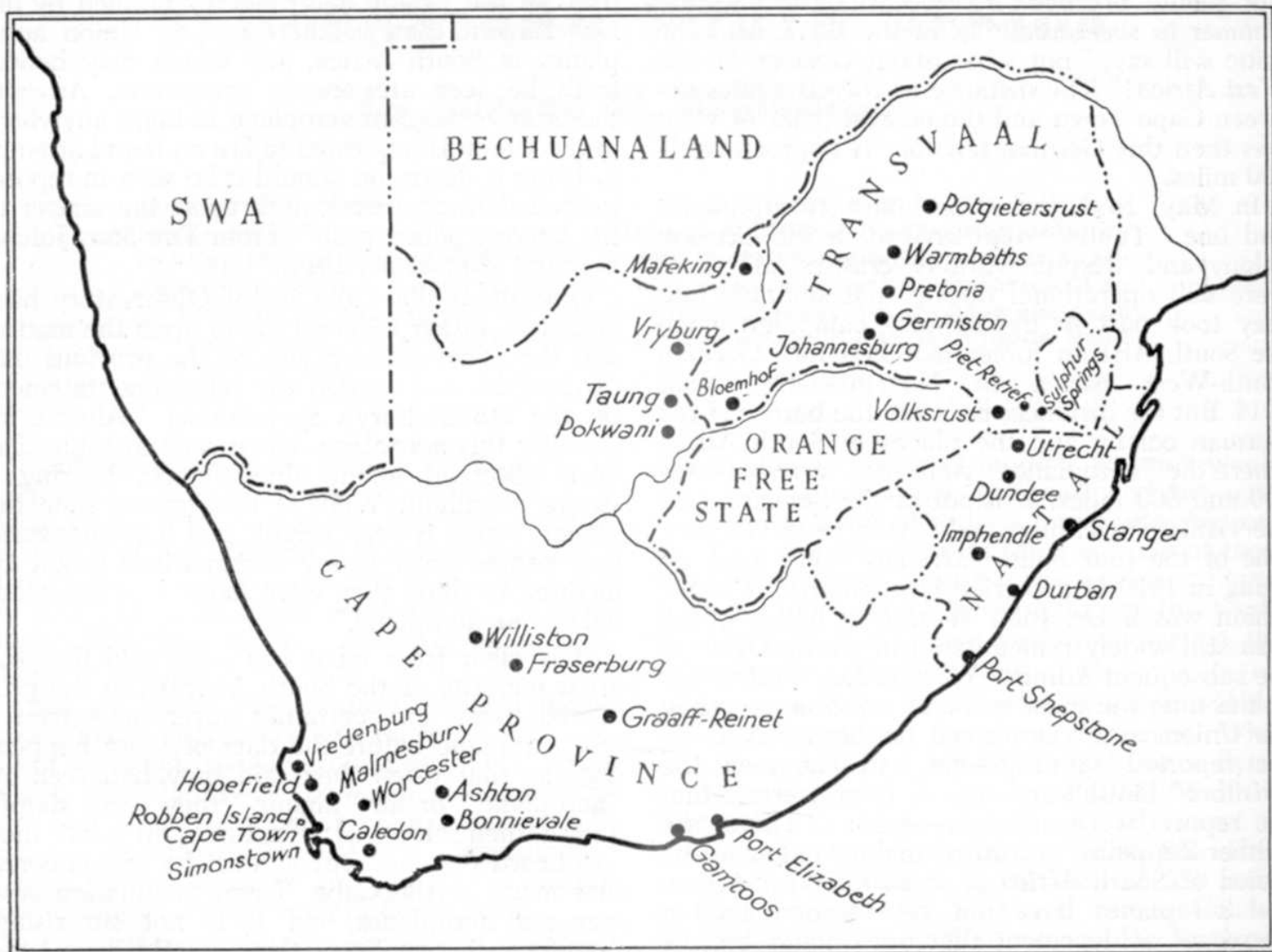
parts of the Union, it is officially notified by the Government that, as there are no Union aeroplanes in South Africa, any which may henceforth be seen are enemy aeroplanes. Anyone, therefore, seeing an aeroplane in flight anywhere in the Union is requested to fire on it and attempt to bring it down, or, should it be seen in repose, is invited to capture it and report the matter to the nearest police post." (From *The Star*, Johannesburg, August 29, 1914.)

Officials at the Cape Royal Observatory had, of course, rather different views upon the matter, and the Johannesburg *Star* of the previous day (August 28) had carried the following statement by the Observatory's spokesman: "Almost invariably this aeroplane, when seen at night, has been observed about nine o'clock, bearing a strong headlight. Well, at the present time the planet Venus is very bright, and it is suggested that people with strong imaginations might be inclined to think they were looking at the headlight of an aeroplane."

It is clear from what has been said that the great majority of the South Africans in the provincial towns can certainly never have seen a real aeroplane before the date of these happenings, so that when they said they had seen an "aeroplane" or an "airship" they were simply basing themselves, as is natural, on what they had heard or read. But it must be remembered that many of the Cape Town population *had* seen real aeroplanes, and it is not surprising, therefore, that many of them should have been decidedly puzzled. They knew perfectly well, for example, that aeroplanes could not *hover*. It was on a Friday afternoon, towards the end of August, while a match was in progress on the Green Point Golf Links between two local women's clubs, that an "unknown object" had made its appearance, and taken up its position over the golfcourse. The word was passed along from an officer from the Fort that the women should quit the course at once, for the guns of the Fort were going to open fire on the thing if it came within range.

There the object hung, now rising, now falling, but always over the same spot. Some said it was a large sea-bird, others said it was a kite. Needless to say, it did not come within range of the guns, and an hour later it vanished in the gathering darkness.

We can assume that before 1914 was over, quite a large official file of reports about these UFO sightings had accumulated. No doubt this file made its way around the various Government departments, nobody knowing what to do with it or about it. At last, the file seems to have ended



Sketch Map of South Africa to illustrate sightings.

up in the Department of Justice, and here, like a fly preserved in amber, we have a most interesting document, which is to be found in Chapter VIII of the Annual Report, for the Calendar Year 1914, of the Secretary of Justice in the Union of South Africa.

The Secretary of Justice reports: "In the interest of psychology, I should mention that I have a sheaf of communications from various districts, received between August and October, 1914, when in the early exciting days of the War those so constituted saw visions and dreamed dreams. . . ."

The title of the chapter is "The Aeroplane Illusion," and it continues: "A mysterious aeroplane was seen at Williston and Fraserburg on August 14 going East, and at Vryburg it was seen on August 18. It was seen flying over Vredenburg and heard flying over Hopefield in the Malmesbury district on August 19.

On August 29 it was again at Vryburg travelling North-East with a strong and brilliant light switched on and off. On the same day it 'hovered' over Graaff-Reinet the whole night. Several persons were only deterred from firing at it for fear it was one of our own aircraft. It was at Vryburg again on September 2, also at Taungs and Pokwani about September 3. On September 14 it was at Impendhle in Natal, where it made a humming noise and cast suspicion on a mission station. Then it was again in the Waterberg district of the Transvaal, at Warmbaths on September 6, where it made a humming noise like a motor-car. Then it hovered over the village of Utrecht on September 11, and shot off in the direction of Dundee with a head-light and a tail-light. At Vryburg it sent two Kaffirs home from their sheep in a fright on September 13. It again appeared at Port Shepstone in Natal on October 27 with a bright light

and a buzzing noise.

"It had a long narrow torpedo shape with planes attached. It was also seen over Pretoria for several evenings. And everyone was quite serious in his belief that he actually saw or heard it."

When Edgar Sievers's book was published in 1955 quite a number of people got in touch with him and confirmed that they had seen the craft. An old farmer from Greytown, Natal, described how, when walking home one September even-

ing across the veld, he had come across one of the "German aircraft" that the papers had been talking about. It was on the veld, quite close to him, and near by, were two of the "German spies" with a pail getting water from a brook.

In conclusion, we may note that all these UFOs appear to have been of the "cigar" type, and some were quite noisy. (Perhaps this indicates that "they," too, have made technical progress since 1914.) There were no reports of discs.

A WARNING TO AMERICA

Sir Bernard Lovell's protest

WRITING in the London *Observer* on May 6, Sir Bernard Lovell, Head of the Jodrell Bank Radio Astronomy Station, warned America of the possible dangers of causing nuclear explosions in space. He reminded us that both Russia and America had subscribed to the recent resolutions of the International Astronomical Union which maintain that no group has a right to change the earth's environment in any significant way without full international study and agreement, and gave clear warning of the grave moral and material consequences which could stem from disregard of the future of astronomical progress. This resolution was stimulated by the American proposal to encircle the earth with millions of pieces of wire to make a screen for military communications (Project Needles).

After asking how such an advanced community like America can go on ignoring the possible damage to astronomical research, he quotes from the published

testimony of the Director of Defence of Research and Engineering in the Department of Defence. Speaking in the House of Representatives on April 10, 1959, and referring to Project Argus (nuclear explosions 300 miles above the South Atlantic), he said: "In the fall of 1957, as we all very acutely know, the Russians launched their first Sputnik. Mr. Christofilos was really personally affected by this as a great many people were, and he was considerably stirred up by the fact that the Russians had pulled off quite an accomplishment and set himself thinking, trying to think up what he could do about this. . . . As I said, he was sort of personally upset by Sputnik and he decided he was going to do something about it and came up with this invention."

Although Sir Bernard Lovell is no friend of the flying saucers, he may unwittingly have explained the root cause of the reluctance by America to admit their existence. If a rivalry between the United States and Soviet Russia

can stir up personal emotions to such an extent, the imagination boggles at the effect of the challenge of a mightier third power from outer space. To have to admit that the two contestants who had imagined themselves to be the only runners in the race to the stars are, in fact, almost non-starters would be to deal a staggering blow to national pride. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same considerations would, of course, apply to the Russians, but as they regard themselves as being ahead in the race, they might feel able to take a more tolerant view of the possibility. Indeed, Russia might even find it advantageous to announce the facts of the saucers as her discovery and one of the first fruits of victory. The Americans would be estopped by their constant denials of the saucers from claiming any share of the credit. As we have pointed out elsewhere, evidence seems to be accumulating that the Russians have already embarked upon the preliminary indoctrination necessary for such a pronouncement.