

Another Southampton Flap

By Peter J. Kelly

WHEN the editor of FLYING SAUCER REVIEW asked me to report on the surprising incident of Southampton's "Hot air balloons", it seemed to me that he suspected yet another case of *Randallism*. As luck would have it, I had already investigated, and pricked the Montgolfier balloon theory, so we are left with the UFOs as before! I do not think any Randallistic arrangements had been made by the balloon-flying scoutmaster when he wrote to the *Southern Evening Echo* on November 14: it was just a case of a sceptic writing without first carefully marshalling his facts! However that may be, here is a summary of events in the build-up of the second UFO flap over and around Southampton in the space of twelve months.

Reports of unusual objects in the sky had been coming in at sporadic intervals during the autumn of 1964, as if heralding the sudden burst of activity in the middle of October.

On Saturday, October 10, a disc-shaped object of metallic appearance was seen in broad daylight at 11.30 a.m. by a Mrs. G. Worthington and her daughters June and Sandra, of Testwood, Southampton. The object, which was described as "dinner plate-shaped" and pale golden in colour, was seen moving slowly in the direction of Southampton. As the witnesses watched, the object moved from the vertical, and they could see what appeared to be a dome-shaped superstructure. The object was the size of an aeroplane at "medium" height, but it was certainly not a conventional

aircraft, and no engine noise could be heard. Testwood lies to the west of Southampton.

On Tuesday, October 13, an identical object was seen by Testwood schoolgirl Sandra Janaway. The time was 8 a.m.

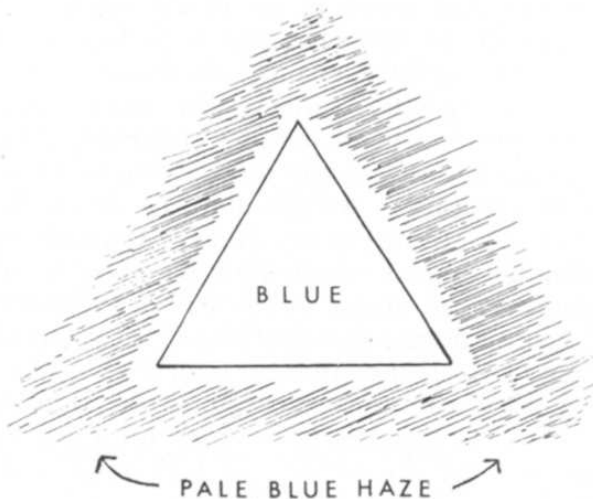
A minor furore

Another sighting took place on the 10th, this time after dark at 10.30 p.m. On this occasion the report came from David Demant, a Totton Grammar School sixth-former, of Wellands Road, Lyndhurst. David saw a clearly defined triangle of blue light, surrounded by a blue haze. This object was observed for about two minutes, and seemed to hang stationary in the sky at an elevation of 35°, slightly north of due east from Lyndhurst (in the direction of Southampton).

Then came the sightings which caused a minor furore. Between 6.30 and 7 p.m. on Monday, October 26, a total of eight bright star-like objects were observed by John McDougall (aged 14) and his friend James Russell (15), both of Totton. The objects appeared singly, and in pairs, and crossed the sky intermittently in an *easterly* direction towards Southampton. Various movements were noted: the second object, for example, was seen to stop at one time, and then go backwards and forward in jerks. At no time was any sound heard from the objects. Mrs. Russell and both Mr. and Mrs. McDougall were called to witness this strange procession of bright objects. All testified to the fact that had the objects been aircraft they certainly would have been low enough to have been heard loud and clear!

By this time, the sightings were receiving publicity in the local press. On Thursday, November 5, the *Southern Evening Echo* published an account of the October 26 sighting, but misleadingly dated it as "Monday" only, thereby inferring that the date of the incident was Monday, November 2. This misrepresentation, however innocent, is important, for we will see later in this article how detractors of the UFO cause jump in at the slightest opportunity and, as in this case, expose themselves unwittingly.

A veritable flood of letters now appeared in the *Letter-box* columns of the *Echo*. Messrs. F. W. Smith (Isle of Wight UFO Investigating Society) and



Object seen by David Demant at Lyndhurst

Norman Toogood (BUFORA investigator) were quick off the mark with appeals to the public for further information. Then, on November 10, a Mr. C. Adderly of Millbrook, Southampton climbed in with his view that the objects were either satellites or balloons—an opinion probably based on non-observation. Balloons, of course, were still a possibility, but the satellite theory was ridiculous.

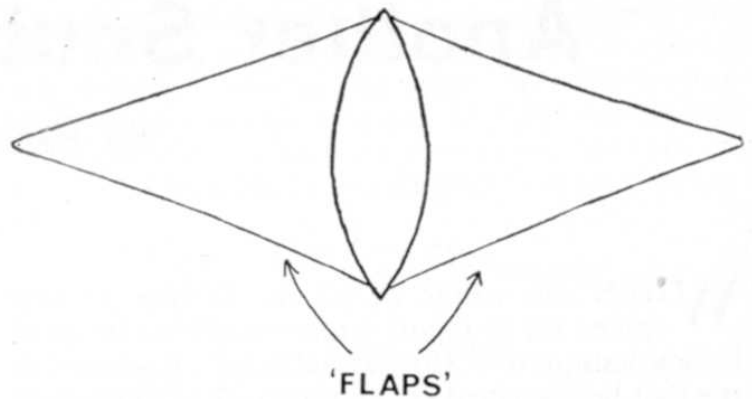
On November 14 came the prize piece, in the form of a letter from a Mr. J. Griffin, a scoutmaster from Southampton. **JUST A LOT OF HOT AIR**, announced the heaviest headline of the whole series. Mr. Griffin disclosed that his scouts had been making hot-air balloons, presumably fashioned in the style of the Montgolfier pioneer balloons of the XVIIIth century, but using polythene bags lifted aloft by convection currents from burning wads of cotton wool soaked in methylated spirit. He added that the boys were experimenting with their balloons on at least two of the nights when the strange lights were reported, namely November 2 and November 9. "These balloons are obviously what had caused all the fuss!" he said, and that is precisely where he leaped before looking, because to the certain knowledge of local investigators, there were no reports at all on November 9, and, as demonstrated earlier, a misleading entry in the *Southern Evening Echo* of November 5 gave readers the impression that the McDougall/Russell sightings had taken place on November 2 instead of the correct date, October 26!

After this, the flap died down for a while, and I was able to unearth further evidence to discount balloon theories relating to the night of the eight-light sightings. Southampton Weather Centre disclosed that on October 26, the wind direction was from South-East to North-West, speed 8 knots. The objects reported by the McDougalls and the Russells were travelling almost exactly from West to East.

A disciple of Menzel

Although the *Southern Evening Echo* gives generous publicity to UFO reports, it also demonstrates its impartiality by presenting the opposite view. Accordingly the next letter on the subject was a rather fatherly epistle from a Mr. D. Penney of Millbrook, who signed as a Senior Member of the British Interplanetary Society. The Penney lecture appeared on November 16, and readers were informed that many sightings of strange lights were easily explained as aircraft, balloons, satellites and fireworks: the remainder which presented a more complex problem to the uninitiated, were *all* due to mirages, or reflections of ground lights in the sky.

There is little doubt that this correspondent is a



Object seen in Brockenhurst vicinity

disciple of the Menzels of this world, and we are surprised that temperature inversions were not thrown in for good measure! What has not occurred to Mr. Penney is that ufologists are concerned with that minority of sightings which remain inexplicable, and do not deny the fact that many sightings can be explained in conventional terms. For instance, we agree that that well-known landmark, the "Fawley Flame", (above one of the great oil refineries in the district), is often seen flickering as though suspended in the sky, quite unconnected with the tower from which it issues. It may well be that this flame and its reflection effect account for the David Demant sighting from Lyndhurst.

Another incident

Mr. Penney, however, showed himself up for the die-hard he must be, when he stated that he is a keen *amateur* astronomer and astronaut, and that he would immediately discount any theory of "visitors from outer space". It is high time he caught up with some of his *professional* brethren, who are now openly saying that it is unreasonable to assume that there is no other intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, *and* with Dr. Hermann Oberth, the great German astronautical expert, who says: "Flying saucers do exist, and are probably coming from another planetary system"!

The flap had seemingly died down, when a lady from Brockenhurst telephoned the Russells (see October 26 sighting) to say that she too had seen an unusual sky object which had flown with an undulating motion about 100 feet above the ground. The accompanying sketch shows it to be one that is familiar to readers of the REVIEW.

As a postscript, I would like to say that Scoutmaster Griffin recently invited me to give a lecture to his boys on the subject of UFOs. I was well received, and Mr. Griffin is now very interested,

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