

# CLAIMANTS, RIDICULE AND A PIECE OF CAKE

## A PLEA FOR AN OPEN MIND

by WAVENEY GIRVAN

**I** MAKE no apology for returning to the subject of the contact claims. If I had to explain my persistence in this matter I would say that the whole future of our subject is bound up with them: sooner or later we shall have to take a balanced view about the claimants. At the moment, the reaction to them all seems to be more emotional than rational.

In the November-December, 1960, issue of the REVIEW, I invited readers to send in evidence of extra-terrestrials in our midst. Several readers responded and in my opinion (and this opinion was shared by many others) the most important contribution concerned that semi-legendary, though actually very real, character known as Springheel Jack<sup>1</sup>. It was important for a number of reasons. First, if further research could establish beyond doubt that this high-leaping ray-gunning mystery man could not have been of this earth, then we have the perfect answer to those who, while believing in flying saucers, will not openly admit that they contain, or have contained, pilots in human or in any other form.

Springheel Jack—assuming his extra-terrestrial origin—would also confound a number of other sceptics. For instance, his first recorded appearance was in England in 1837. Now, even Dr. Jung would have to admit that in the immediate post-Napoleonic era in England no calmer period in her history could be imagined. People were not looking to the skies for salvation. It was a period of economic difficulties, the sequel to a lengthy struggle for the balance of power in Europe. But in 1837 and onwards no threat of war, of sudden attack or even of shock clouded the skies for the English people. And yet they saw Springheel Jack. Furthermore, he came in no evangelist guise and those whom he confronted wished he hadn't. Another point in favour of the Springheel

Jack story is that it is comparatively modern: it occurred in the times of our grandfathers and not in a remote past which is beyond our challenging. What is more, both heavier-than-air flight and saucers were unthought-of. The contemporary newspapers are there to be consulted and so are passing references to him in more than one Victorian novel. Wherever he came from, he certainly existed. I have a feeling that exhaustive research into this character could be one of the most rewarding branches of saucer studies. It is something of a tragedy, however, that those who are best equipped to investigate the mystery of the flying saucers will have nothing whatever to do with the contact stories. My remarks are prompted by the April-May issue of the *UFO Investigator*, issued by the American National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, of which Donald E. Keyhoe is Director.

### The purpose of NICAP

It should be explained that the committee, known as NICAP for short, acts as a sort of pressure group directing its efforts primarily to the purpose of forcing the United States Air Force into an admission that the UFOs are inter-planetary. NICAP maintains that the U.S. Air Force has on its files evidence that so far it has refused to release while maintaining publicly that all sightings can be explained away in conventional terms. Now, anyone who lectures on the subject of flying saucers, particularly to uncommitted members of the public, knows full well that even if he tries to dodge the question of the contact claimants (perhaps because his time is limited) he will find that at question time his audience wants one enquiry above all other satisfied: "Have any of the occupants been seen?" So if NICAP were to succeed in its aims and the

U.S. Air Force were to admit that saucers were inter-planetary, the question of the contact claims would immediately assume first importance. They could be dodged no longer. But why dodge them at all?

The answer to that last question is—fear of ridicule. Most pioneers in our study—Donald E. Keyhoe among them—faced ridicule in an acute form when they first wrote and spoke about flying saucers in the early years. Those who fear ridicule had better even now study something safer. It is, therefore, hard to believe that Major Keyhoe is really afraid of ridicule, and I would prefer to believe that his inhibition about contact claims is due to the method he has adopted in his attempt to break the story: the putting of pressure on a government department to reveal the truth. In this role he must remain respectable and “scientific.” The contact claims are not respectable. It is therefore safer to ignore them, to destroy them, even, rather than to be associated with such disreputable heresies. Two unfortunate results follow. NICAP puts itself into the same position as the U.S. Air Force, which feels about sightings exactly what Major Keyhoe feels about contact claims. He cannot complain that the contact claims have attracted hoaxers and must therefore be ignored: the U.S. Air Force can make the same comment about some of the sightings. But what is sadder is that one of the most efficient investigative bodies in the world is perhaps throwing away its greatest chance of solving the whole saucer mystery. Respectability is very comfortable: a fearless and an open mind brings trials and tribulations, but it is more likely to triumph in the end.

### A challenge

NICAP's attitude to contact claims is well illustrated in the April-May issue of its bulletin, to which I have already referred. Before I quote from it, I would like to make it clear that I am all for the exposing of fakes. In previous articles I have invited *proof* that this or that claimant was a liar: I issued an open invitation to Major Keyhoe himself to say what he liked about one very famous claim. The only reply came in an indirect form and consisted of a reiteration that the claim was known to be false. Well, if it is known to be false, why cannot a detailed exposure be made? Believing is not demonstration: an assertion that a man is a liar is not enough.

The *UFO Investigator* refers to three contact claims, but not directly. The first concerns Reinhold Schmidt, who in November, 1957, claimed that he had been invited aboard a flying saucer

near Kearney, Nebraska. Well, he has just been jailed on charges of grand theft. Then there is Dr. Frank E. Stranges, who has been expelled from NICAP. I do not know what ceremony attends such an expulsion: is one drummed out as from a regiment or is one unfrocked like a vicar who has allowed his attentions to stray from strictly parochial matters? Dr. Stranges was a contact claimant but that is not the ostensible reason for his disgrace: he is cast into outer darkness for “misrepresentations of his relationship to NICAP.” Dare one suggest that in future more careful scrutiny be made of new members at the moment of joining? Would a medical be advisable?

### The Eagle River incident

The third case is the most interesting of the three and it concerns the Eagle River incident reported in the July-August issue of the *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW*. According to Joe Simonton, a flying saucer landed in his yard on April 18, and three spacemen gave him some pancakes in exchange for a jug of water. Well, this is all very circumstantial, but what is NICAP's comment? I quote: “In line with our policy, NICAP will evaluate this report for any real evidence of a contact. To date, no such claims have been proven: many are frauds or delusions. This sensational new story will be used by the AF [Air Force] for added ridicule of serious UFO reports. We urge our members to offset any such action by citing the massive documented evidence of UFO reality—and putting unproven contact stories in their proper light.”

Poor Joe Simonton! But note how carefully NICAP has avoided calling him a liar. The smear is by inference only. Furthermore, if the report which was quoted in the local paper and reprinted in the July-August issue of the *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW* is correct, one of the three cakes was sent by a friend of Joe's to NICAP for investigation. Why isn't this fact mentioned? Is there no sub-committee competent to taste the cake and issue a report? “Scrumptious!” might have been one verdict: “Heavenly!” (perhaps nearer the mark) another. Joe himself said his cake tasted like cardboard (we know of cakes like this on earth, not at all like those that mother used to bake). But, seriously, would it not have been possible for NICAP to have examined the cake and told us all about it? Why couldn't Joe Simonton have been interviewed by juridical experts?—NICAP must surely have such people on its Board. And if they failed either to corroborate or to break his story, could it not have admitted.

just for once, that they didn't know the answer? After all, the Eagle River incident could be true: I have an idea that it is.

If all contact claims are thus to be dismissed, then the purpose for which NICAP was formed will be aborted—to the very grave loss to our

subject and its students. Might we remind NICAP that those who fear ridicule most are often the first to attract it?

<sup>1</sup> See article "The Mystery of Springheel Jack," by J. Vyner, in the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, May-June, 1961, issue.

## WHY CONTACTS ARE SO FEW

### The Space Administration Explains

**I**N our May-June issue there appeared an article "Danger from the Stars" which commented on a report from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration of the U.S.A. This report warned that unless we were prepared for the discovery that intelligent beings existed on other stars the shock that such a realisation would bring might be severe enough to cause a collapse of earth civilisation.

The Space Administration included a significant postscript to this warning. In its new report it devotes considerable attention to the possibility that spacemen might be visiting the earth but avoiding contact with us. "It is

possible," the report maintains "that if the intelligence of these creatures were sufficiently superior to ours, they would choose to have little if any contact with us. On the face of it, there is no reason to believe that we might learn a great deal from them, especially if their physiology and psychology were substantially different from ours."

There is no doubt at all that the infrequency of the contacts (or the absence of any contacts at all, in the sceptics' view) is a very powerful reason why our subject is not more generally accepted. One possible reason for the lack of contact is referred to in the leading article in our pre-

vious issue: several others will no doubt occur to our readers. However, if it is held that visitors from other planets have been arriving here for hundreds and even thousands of years, it is necessary to answer the sceptics question: "Why don't they do more to convince us of their existence?" Also, if the purpose of the visitors is to survey the scenery of earth—and perhaps its geology as well—then the longer the period over which the survey has been conducted, the more pointless it appears. If the visitors wish to avoid meeting us, why do they want to come here at all? The Space Administration seems to have no answer to that question.

## ***Sighting reports . . .***

WORLD ROUND-UP has a high proportion of sightings over GREAT BRITAIN as a result of the remarkable series of visitations during the summer

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