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See by the Papers

## A Confederate Woman's UFO Sighting

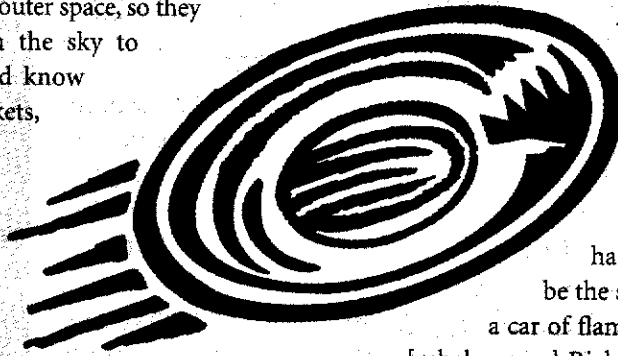
People are apt to identify unidentified flying objects as whatever are the commonly thought of flying objects at the time of the sighting. In the 1860s, people did not commonly think about flying saucers from outer space, so they attributed unknown lights in the sky to unusual flying things they did know about: avenging angels, or rockets, or spirits ascending.

Lucy Gilmer Breckinridge was a young woman living during the Civil War on a plantation in Grove Hill in southwestern Virginia. On Wednesday, September 3, 1862 (after the Second Battle of Bull Run and before the Battle of Antietam), she recorded this in her diary:

"After supper we started to church. As we were riding in the lane I looked out at the sky where the sun had just set, and saw what first looked like Venus, the evening star, flying, but became every moment larger and more brilliant, and finally exploded and disappeared. It lasted long enough

for me to show it to Eliza and Miss Fannie, and we all agreed that it was the most beautiful thing we ever saw in the heavens, and indulged in many conjectures as to what it could be.

Eliza thought it might be a ball of fire sent from an avenging God to destroy Washington. Miss Fannie said it might be a rocket McClellan [Union commander, Army of the Potomac] had sent up; and I thought it might be the spirit of some hero ascending on a car of flame — General Ewell, for instance [rebel general Richard S. Ewell had been seriously wounded at the Second Battle of Bull Run several days before, but he did not die of his wound] or probably a piece of the sun, which had lingered and lost the tract."



— by Andrew Lutes. Source: Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl, 1862-1864, Mary D. Robertson, ed., Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994. Reprinted with permission.

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