

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE 1897 AIRSHIP

By Jerome Clark

To publish this vitally important article in its impact that, despite its length, it has been decided to present it in its entirety. Accordingly our popular contributor's article The Greatest Flap Yet?—Pt. IV. has been held over for a later issue of the REVIEW.

It began in November 1896 in Northern California. All that month and into December, Western newspapers, publishing a confused conglomeration of truths, half-truths and outright falsehoods, gave sensational treatment to the appearances of—what, no one really knew, though just about everyone had an opinion. Those who had not seen it considered it proof that a great many of their fellow citizens were quite mad. Those who **had** seen it, understandably feeling that they were better qualified to judge their own sanity, called it “the airship”. The “airship”, they maintained, was a piloted craft of some kind, carrying brilliant searchlights and human-like passengers, capable of flying against the wind, landing and taking off when approached.

After December, there were no more reports. With no UFO enthusiasts to keep interest alive, the public quickly dismissed the stories from consciousness and went on to what it fancied more pressing concerns—temporarily.

For in March 1897 the airship—or airships—reappeared, this time all over the Midwestern and Western United States, in large numbers and in the presences of thousands of witnesses. By the time the phenomenon had left—in May—one of the most revealing, and neglected, chapters of the UFO saga had concluded.

What I wish to emphasize in the article that follows is not so much the *fact* of the airship as its meaning in relation to the whole UFO problem. Although the reports I and several others have uncovered to date constitute only a fairly small proportion of all the published incidents of 1897 (it is hoped that a more definitive, greatly expanded work can be published in the future), it is evident that continued probing into the mystery serves only to confirm the existence of a highly important pattern, the significance of which we turn to after we have examined some of the sighting reports. In this pattern, I suspect, we shall see the crux of the entire UFO situation—*present* as well as *past*.

The airship reappeared over Kansas and Nebraska in late March 1897. Sightings did not begin gradually, as they often do in the early stages of modern UFO “flaps”, and there certainly is no justification for the view, expressed by a correspondent of mine, that the airship worked its way eastwards from California after December 1896. There simply were no reports of airships between January and mid-March; but afterwards reports suddenly began to be made in almost staggering numbers.

The first recorded sighting, so far as we know, was made from Belleville, Kansas, on March 25, where at 10 p.m. a “mysterious airship” (not described) passed over the town and was seen by “at least 50 citizens”, according to newspaper accounts. (It appeared on the two following nights as well.) Previous to this, however, it seems to have been observed by ranchers and farmers mostly in northern Kansas and southern Nebraska, but Iowa may have received at least one visitation, if the testimony of Robert Hibbard is to be credited.

Hibbard, who farmed 15 miles north of Sioux City, claimed that one night late in March an “anchor” hanging from a drag rope attached to the rear of an airship caught him in the slack of his trousers and dragged him several dozen feet. When finally his trousers ripped, he said, he fell to the ground. “His reputation for truth-telling has never been bad”, one newspaper noted, “and the general opinion is that he either ‘had ’em’ or dreamed his remarkable experience”.

Another source refers to sightings at Lincoln, Beatrice, “and other Nebraska points,” and at Marysville, Washington, and Hadham, Kansas.

On the night of the 29th, worshippers leaving an Omaha, Nebraska, church saw a strange object pass through the sky, hover and fly away again. It was visible to them for half an hour. Shortly thereafter, residents of the south-east portion of Omaha viewed the ship, seeing a large bright light, “too big for a balloon”. Travelling slowly

and close to the ground, it disappeared in the north-west behind a series of bluffs just outside the city.

Some of the best reports of the flap were made on the night of April 1, when sightings occurred in both Missouri and Kansas. At 8.15, at Kansas City (in the first state), "thousands of people", claimed the city's newspaper, "saw the mysterious light", as it moved from west to north to south, then back to north. Its altitude varied: it would descend close to the ground, only then to rise rapidly away.

According to the *Kansas City Times*, "The light seemed about the size of a big street light and didn't seem to be as high as the clouds. It shot out a beam of light very much like a search-light. Some of the time the light was white, and then it changed to a bright red. Its general course was towards the north-west, but several times it reversed and travelled for awhile in the opposite direction. It moved with a regular motion, not comet-like. Some said they watched it go out of sight over the northern horizon".

Citizens of Everest, Kansas, watched the airship for an hour and twenty minutes the same night and got a particularly detailed view of the phenomenon.

"For five minutes at one time the airship seemed to skirt the lowest edges of a cloud that hung low down in the heavens and it was then that the powerful lights on board were reflected on the clouds and the outlines of the ship were clearly distinguished.

"The basket or car seemed to be 25 to 30 feet long, shaped like an Indian canoe. Four light wings extended from the car, two wings were triangular. A large dark hulk was discernible immediately above the car and was generally supposed by the watchers to be an inflated gas-bag. That the same power that furnished the light was used for lifting the ship was evident from the fact that the lights grew dim as the ship went upward, and as the ship came nearer the earth, the light was as bright as the light of a locomotive. One observer claimed a blue colour appeared, other than white and red."

Someone, an anonymous 1897 Menzel, had an explanation: the "airship" was not that at all—it was the planet Venus. Upon hearing so, a witness snorted "Venus does not dodge around, fly swiftly across the horizon, swoop rapidly toward the earth, and then soar away until lost in the southern sky".

The same night a guard at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas reported seeing the airship, only to be warned that he would be subject to possible dismissal on grounds of mental illness if he continued to talk about it. But most other Kansans seemed

much more open-minded about the mysterious craft, and it became a favourite subject of conversation among them. An engineer at Fort Leavenworth, suggesting that airships might be used as weapons one day, remarked, "Just think of it—an army corps of soldiers sailing over large cities and shells of every size and description being dropped among the people. The slaughter would be something awful. War now, as compared with war *then*, is mere child's play".

II

Far away from Kansas, in the Upper Midwestern state of Michigan, the airship passed over the village of Galesburg the night of April 1—one of a number of indications that more than one airship was involved in the 1897 flap. Witnesses reported seeing a brilliant light which revealed the vague shape of the machine's main body; from it emanated both an odd "crackling" noise, apparently the sounds of its motor, **and the distinct sounds of human voices.**

Four days later, hundreds of Omaha natives sighted a steel cigar-shaped object cruising at an altitude of about three-fourths of a mile. Visible for five minutes, it flew against the wind into clouds, reappeared briefly, and disappeared, moving at a high speed and still against the wind, into the northern sky.

A rash of airship sightings broke out on the nights of the 9th and the 10th, in three states. To mention some of the localities reporting visitations:

Norman, Oklahoma, April 9. Mr. T. J. Wiggins, assistant cashier of the Norman State Bank—"a sober man and a devout church member"—saw a long dark object carrying a very bright light on its end and flashing red lights along its sides. (Two nights later, nearly 400 persons in Norman claimed to have sighted an identical phenomenon.)

Illinois. A brilliantly-lighted construction appeared low in the sky over a lake near Evanston, then flew erratically over the city on a westward course. It was observed at the same time, though at a greater distance, at Niles Center and Schermer-ville.

At 9.30, South Chicagoans watched the airship cross the lake, fly inland, turn slowly to the north-west, and disappear in the darkness. According to the *Chicago Tribune* for April 10.

"At several points the moving wonder was observed by persons equipped with small telescopes or powerful field glasses, and these persons claimed to have described the outlines of the structure bearing lights, the consensus, on the uncertain basis for estimating dimensions of bodies moving through the air at unknown distances, is that the

main body of the night flyer was about 70 feet in length, of slender proportions and fragile construction.

"To this body, it is reported, were attached the movable headlight and the other lights . . . A few observers claim they also saw, a short distance above the body, lateral structures resembling wings or sails. These appeared to be about 20 feet in width, and as they were seen from one side, their length could not be accurately estimated."

One of the first witnesses, a young jeweller, maintained that the airship was actually two cigar-shaped bodies attached together by girders. Since this sighting occurred apparently in the dusk, while most of the others took place in the dark, it should be taken seriously, in my opinion, as perhaps a more accurate description of the ship's appearance.

If estimates of the object's length are to be accepted literally, an airship, but a smaller one than its Evanston-South Chicago counterpart cruised over Mt. Carroll, Illinois, at 8.40 p.m. Coming out of the north-east, it crossed the city, turned west, and flashed away "at a terrific speed". Witnesses said the phenomenon was about 8 or 10 feet in length and no more than two or three feet high. It was "oblong" in shape and carried a large red light.

Iowa, April 10. At Newton at 8 p.m., 2000 citizens viewed an airship as it hovered over the southwest part of the city for forty minutes. Heading north-west it dropped what looked like a parachute with a light attached to it. Some observers thought this might be a message from the craft's occupants and went out to retrieve it, but newspaper accounts do not say whether the searchers found anything.

The airship also appeared briefly over Eldon at 7.25, Ottumwa at 7.40, and Albia at 8.10.

Illinois. A mysterious object carrying an intense white light took 15 minutes to fly over Galesburg. Viewers who watched it through binoculars estimated it to be at an altitude of three-fourths of a mile.

All of this activity caused Professor George Hough, an astronomer from North-western University, to smile. "Alpha Orionis has been roaming through its regular course in the firmament ten million years", he said, "and why it should have been settled upon in the last three weeks, and pointed out as the headlight of a mysterious aerial vessel, is a hard thing to explain" Not that Professor Hough had ever seen what his "gullible" fellow countrymen called an "airship", of course. He had better things to do, he said.

Joseph Piersen of Evanston sighted red, green and white lights which reflected off two cigar-

shaped bodies. The object—or objects—gave off a "hissing" sound. "This phenomenon," he emphasised, presumably with tongue in check, "took a course entirely out of the route of Alpha Orionis."

III

An airship followed a train all the way from Howard to Artesian, South Dakota, on the night of the 15th. Conductor Joe Wright told a reporter for the Madison (South Dakota) *Sentinel* that the object appeared just after dusk and flew progressively closer to the ground until it had "passed out of view", i.e., apparently landed.

Another airship was seen at 9.00 p.m. the same night by observers at Eureka, Kansas. Yet another reportedly approached the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C., at an altitude of 600 feet, then sailed for Georgetown and disappeared behind hills back of the city.

Twenty-four hours later, half a dozen Texas cities saw a craft "shaped like a Mexican cigar, large in the middle, and small at both ends, with great wings, resembling those of enormous butterfly. It was brilliantly illuminated by the rays of two great searchlights, and was sailing in a southeasterly direction, with the velocity of wind, presenting a magnificent appearance". (*New York Sun*.)

Three days afterwards, at about 9 p.m. a gigantic object flashed searchlight beams along the ground at Sistersville, West Virginia. According to a reporter, "An examination with strong glasses left an impression of a huge cone-shaped arrangement 180 feet long, with large fins on either side."

IV

April 19 produced two of the most interesting reports of the flap. The first is the well-known Sistersville incident (see above), described in more detail in Keyhoe's *The Flying Saucers Are Real*. The second is the until-recently unpublicised "operator" report from LeRoy, Kansas, clearly one of the best such stories in the annals of the UFO saga. The witness seems to have been a highly reliable man, and moreover, I have been able, through the efforts of a Kansas correspondent, to obtain further substantiation for the claim.

The Yates Center, Kansas *Farmers' Advocate* for April 23, 1887, reported, "Hon. Alexander Hamilton of Vernon came to town last Wednesday [April 21] and created quite an excitement by announcing that he had been having some experience with the much-talked-of airship. Mr. Hamilton is an old settler, was a member of the legislature in the early days and is known all over Woodson,

Allen, Coffey, and Anderson counties." Hamilton told the following story to the newspaper :

"Last Monday night about half past ten o'clock we were awakened by a noise among the cattle. I arose, thinking perhaps my bulldog was performing some pranks, but upon going to the door, saw to my utter amazement, an airship slowly descending over my cow lot about forty rods from the house.

"Calling Gid Heslip, my tenant, and my son, Wall, we seized some axes and ran to the corral. Meanwhile the ship had been gently descending until it was not more than 30 feet above the ground and we came up to within 50 yards of it. It consisted of a great cigar-shaped portion possibly 300 feet long with a carriage underneath.

"The carriage was made of panels of glass or other transparent substance, alternating with a narrow strip of some other material. It was brilliantly lighted within and everything was clearly visible. There were three lights : one like an immense searchlight and two smaller, one red the other green. The large one was susceptible of being turned in every direction.

"It was occupied by six of the strangest beings I ever saw. There were two men, a woman, and three children. They were jabbering together but we could not understand a syllable they said. Every part of the vessel which was not transparent was of a dark reddish colour.

"We stood mute in wonder and fright, when some noise attracted their attention and they turned their light directly upon us. Immediately upon catching sight of us, they turned on some unknown power, and a great turbine wheel about 30 feet in diameter, which was slowly revolving below the craft, began to buzz, sounding precisely like the cylinder of a separator, and the vessel rose as lightly as a bird.

"When about 30 feet above us, it seemed to pause, and hover directly over a three-year-old heifer which was bawling and jumping, apparently fast in the fence. Going to her, we found a cable about half an inch in thickness, made of the same red material, fastened in a slip knot around her neck, one end passing up to the vessel and tangled in the wire.

"We tried to get it off but could not, so we cut the wire loose, and stood in amazement to see ship, cow and all rise slowly and sail off, disappearing in the north-west. We went home but I was so frightened I could not sleep but arose Tuesday morning, mounted my horse and started out to find some trace of my cow, but coming back to LeRoy in the evening found that Lank Thomas, who lives in Coffee county about three or four

miles west of LeRoy, had found the hide, legs and head in his field that day.

"He thinking someone had butchered a stolen beast and thrown the hide away, had brought it to town for identification but was greatly mystified in not being able to find a track of any kind on the soft ground. I went home last night but every time I would drop to sleep, I would see the cursed thing with its big lights and hideous people. I don't know whether they are devils or angels or what but we all saw them and my whole family saw the ship and I don't want any more to do with them."

"Mr. Hamilton looked as if he had not entirely recovered from the shock and every one who knew him was convinced he was sincere in every word," the *Advocate* concluded. It published the testimony of prominent citizens who knew Hamilton well :

"As there are now, always have been, and always will be, sceptics and unbelievers, whenever the truth of anything bordering on the improbable is presented, and knowing that some ignorant or suspicious people will doubt the truthfulness of the above statement, now.

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, do hereby make the following affidavit.

"That we have known Alex Hamilton from 15 to 30 years and that for truth and veracity we have never heard his word questioned and that we do verily believe his statement to be true and correct.

E. V. Wharton, State Oil Inspector
H. H. Winter, Banker
H. S. Johnson, Pharmacist
Alex Stewart, Justice of Peace
F. W. Butler, Druggist
H. C. Rollins, Postmaster
M. E. Hunt, Sheriff
E. K. Kellenberser, M. D.
J. H. Sticher, Attorney
H. Waymire, Druggist
Jas. L. Martin, Register of Deeds

"Subscribed and sworn to before me this 21st day of April, 1897. W. C. Willie, Notary Public."

After copying Hamilton's story, the Burlington *Daily News* printed another affidavit.

"We, the undersigned, residents of Burlington, Kansas, do hereby certify that we have known Mr. Alexander Hamilton ever since he was chased out of Missouri in 1855 [apparently a reference to Hamilton's possible involvements with pro- and anti-slavery elements then in conflict in Missouri and Kansas]; that he was the first County Clerk of the Coffee county; that he is in all respects a

perfectly truthful and reliable man. And no lover of truth will ever question any statement made by him

“J. M. Lane, H. E. Cowgill, Orson Kent, Wm. Manson, M. E. Grimes, J. M. Baldwin, David Grimes.

“Subscribed and sworn to before me this 29th day of April, 1897. H. B. Cheney, Notary Public.

A final piece of evidence for Hamilton's veracity is given by his granddaughters, (the daughters of Wallace Hamilton—identified as “Wall” in the narrative), who were interviewed late in 1965 by Mr. Harry Fleenor of Topeka, Kansas. Both women told Mr. Harry Fleenor that the story was a well-known one in their family, and that their grandfather had maintained until his death (in 1912) that he had seen a strange craft and its equally peculiar occupants take off with a heifer calf. Their father, perhaps fearing ridicule, refused to discuss the subject.

V

The next “operator” story which allegedly occurred about the same time (we have been unable to determine the exact date), is less easy to judge because we have less information concerning the witness's character. The man appears to have been fairly prominent, however, and news-references to him are universally favourable. Even the *Arkansas Gazette*, which previously had ridiculed much more “mundane” airship sightings, termed this the “most authentic story printed”.

The speaker is Captain James Hooton, described as “the well-known Iron Mountain railroad conductor”.

“Of course I saw the airship. There is no doubt in the world about it and you will be safe in banking on what I tell you. It came about in this way :

“I had gone down to Texarkana to bring back a special, and knowing that I would have some eight to ten hours to spare at Texarkana, I went to Homan [Arkansas] to do a little hunting. It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon when I reached that place. The sport was good, and before I knew it, it was after 6 o'clock when I started to make my way back toward the railroad station. As I was tramping through the bush my attention was attracted by a familiar sound, a sound for all the world like the working of an air pump on a locomotive.

“I went at once in the direction of the sound, and there in an open space of some five or six acres, I saw the object making the noise. To say that I was astonished would but feebly express my feelings. I decided at once that this was the

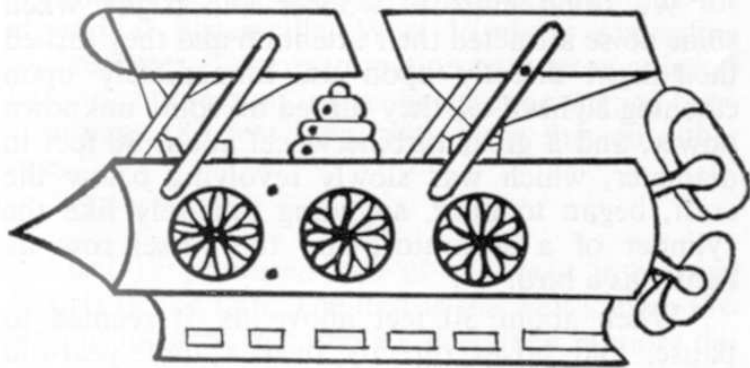
famous airship seen by so many people about the country.

“There was a medium-sized looking man aboard and I noticed that he was wearing smoked glasses. He was tinkering around what seemed to be the back end of the ship, and as I approached I was too dumbfounded to speak. He looked at me in surprise, and said: ‘Good day, sir; good day.’ I asked: ‘Is this the airship?’ and he replied: ‘Yes, sir’, whereupon three or four other men came out of what was apparently the keel of the ship.

“A close examination showed that the keel was divided into two parts terminating in front like the sharp edge of a knife-like edge, while the sides of the ship bulged gradually toward the middle, and then receded. There were three large wheels upon each side made of some bending metal and arranged so that they became concave as they moved forward.

“‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ I said, ‘the noise sounds a good deal like a Westinghouse air brake.’ ‘Perhaps it does, my friend; we are using condensed air and aeroplanes, but you will know more later on.’

“‘All ready, sir,’ some one called out, when the party all disappeared below. I observed that just in front of each wheel a two-inch tube began to



Captain Hooton's picture of the airship

spurt air on the wheels and they commenced revolving. The ship gradually arose with a hissing sound. The aeroplanes suddenly sprang forward, turning their sharp ends skyward, then the rudders at the end of the ship began to veer to one side and the wheels revolved so fast that one could scarcely see the blades. In less time than it takes to tell you, the ship had gone out of sight.

“This drawing I have made you is the best I can do under the circumstances. I consider I was

fortunate in seeing the ship. You may add that she pumped while standing still like the air pump of an engine. One particular feature I remember is that what I would call the cowcatcher was sharp as the blade of a knife and almost as pointed as a needle. There was no bell or bell rope about the ship that I could discover, like I should think every well regulated air locomotive should have."

The airship Hooton sketched strikes one as being ridiculously improbable in appearance and may constitute a barrier to full acceptance of the story. On the other hand, it may offer circumstantial evidence for it. Somewhat similar ships had been reported before (see particularly the South Chicago airship description), and the fan-shaped wheels on the side figured prominently in some 1896 California sightings with which it is unlikely Hooton was familiar. Alexander Hamilton, remember, reported the presence of a "wheel" connected with the propulsion mechanism, although this one was larger and *beneath* the craft rather than on its side. Further, Hooton's airship bears a definite resemblance to the mysterious machine that crossed New Mexico in 1880. (See Lucius Farish's *An 1880 UFO, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW*, May/June 1965.)

VI

The 1897 flap had definitely reached its peak after the third week of April, although scattered sightings continued to be made into May. Only one is worth mentioning in detail.

The testimony below is that of two Hot Springs, Arkansas, law officers, Constable Sumpter and Deputy Sheriff McLemore who were on an official duty when they allegedly encountered an airship and its passengers.

"While riding north-west from this city on the night of May 6, 1897, we noticed a brilliant light high in the heavens. Suddenly it disappeared and we said nothing about it, as we were looking for parties and did not want to make any noise. After riding four or five miles around through the hills we again saw the light, which now appeared to be much nearer the earth. We stopped our horses and watched it coming down, until all at once it disappeared behind another hill. We rode on about half a mile further, when our horses refused to go further. About a hundred yards distant we saw two persons moving around with lights. Drawing our Winchesters—for we were now thoroughly aroused to the importance of the situation—we demanded: 'Who is that, and what are you doing?'

"A man with a long dark beard came forth with a lantern in his hand, and on being informed who we were proceeded to tell us that he and the

others—a young man and a woman—were traveling through the country in an airship. We could plainly distinguish the outlines of the vessel, which was cigar-shaped and about sixty feet long, and looking just like the cuts that have appeared in the papers recently. It was dark and raining and the young man was filling a big sack with water about thirty yards away, and the woman was particular to keep back in the dark. She was holding an umbrella over her head. The man with the whiskers invited us to take a ride, saying that he could take us where it was not raining. We told him we believed we preferred to get wet.

"Asking the man why the brilliant light was turned on and off so much, he replied that the light was so powerful that it consumed a great deal of his motive power. He said he would like to stop off in Hot Springs for a few days and take the hot baths, but his time was limited and he could not. He said they were going to wind up at Nashville, Tenn., after thoroughly seeing the country. Being in a hurry we left and upon our return, about forty minutes later, nothing was to be seen. We did not hear or see the airship when it departed.

"John J. Sumpter, Jr.

"John McLemore.

"Subscribed and sworn to before me this 8th day of May, 1897.

"C. G. Bush, J.P."

The Fort Smith *Daily News Record* noted that while Sumpter and McLemore were subjected to a great deal of ridicule, "they, however, most seriously maintain that it is absolutely true, and their earnestness is puzzling many, who, while unable to accept the story as a fact, yet see that the men are not jesting". The *Arkansas Gazette* added, "As both are men of undoubted integrity, their statement can be fully relied upon as being true".

Especial attention should be paid to one detail in the last paragraph of the affidavit: the relationship between the ship's light and its motive power. We have already seen that independent witnesses had commented that **whenever the ship accelerated its light dimmed**. If Sumpter and McLemore were lying, then, we must conclude that they were quite familiar with other sightings, even those in newspapers that may have been inaccessible to them. (By coincidence or otherwise, in mid-April Illinois farmhands claimed to have come upon an airship also piloted by two men and a woman.)

VII

Among those who accepted the existence of the airship, there was little doubt that the craft was piloted by terrestrials, presumably American inventors. Except for an editorialist in the *Colony*,

Kansas, *Free Press* (who theorised it was a spaceship from Mars), it does not seem to have occurred to anyone that the phenomenon could have been anything more than that. (For an elaboration of this point, see my article *A Contact Claim* in the January/February 1965 FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.) **This may be the single most important fact of the 1897 flap.**

It should be evident that the events of 1897 are not "typical" of UFO activity as we know it today. Indeed, I have even refrained from referring to the airship as a "UFO", for while that is what it was *in the literal sense*, it is not at all like that which we call a "UFO" today. The phenomenon seen in the United States in 1880, 1896 and 1897 (and Wales and New Zealand in 1909 and South Africa in 1914) was an *airship*, a kind of heavier-than-air construction built for limited flights through the immediate atmosphere. It was most decidedly *not* any sort of spacecraft, as modern "flying saucers" appear to be.

In every contact claim of the period, the idea that the ship was a terrestrial construction was bolstered in varying ways conveniently supporting the technology and temperament of the times. It was widely believed that, with the relatively rapid advances in science then being made, an aircraft of some sort would be invented in the near future (just as now interplanetary spaceships are expected in the next few years). Every action of the airship could conceivably have been predicted by Americans of the late Nineteenth Century. Here there were no concepts beyond their comprehension: no UFOs powered by "anti-gravity", no craft of highly advanced design, no "little men" or golden-haired Venusians. Nothing, in short, *we* who today grant the reality of UFOs have come to expect.

The 1897 contacts were inevitable, if one accepts the premise that limited contact can and does occur. Because of the peculiar nature of the airship, contact could not have been anything other than what it was: reinforced belief in a terrestrial construction. If the operators had been unconcerned with the human reaction to their appearance, they would presumably have flown machines of more advanced design, rather than the almost ludicrous creations cited in contemporary newspapers.

Studying the 1897 reports, one noted ufologist has concluded—and will so argue in a forthcoming book—that the airship was invented by an American scientist. While I do not know whether he has special information which leads him to this conclusion, I rather suspect that his idea is based upon a superficial, somewhat incomplete examination

of the existing data. Certainly, almost everyone who has studied the period at one time or another wonders if terrestrials were completely responsible—there were enough rumours published in the press to confuse anyone. But eventually one must conclude, as Thomas Edison did, that "it is absolutely impossible to imagine that a man could construct a successful airship and keep the matter a secret".

Moreover, to accept this researcher's view, we must believe that our anonymous inventor—and the dozens of persons who would have had to pilot the airships—appeared in New Mexico in 1880, California in 1896, the entire United States in 1897, Wales and New Zealand in 1909, and South Africa in 1914. We must also believe that all this was carried out in virtually complete secrecy—and that since that time nothing has come to light to discredit the role of the Wright Brothers in the creation of the first heavier-than-air machine.

I submit that the truth is more likely to be, as I have assumed throughout this paper, that the airship was extramundane (though not necessarily interplanetary) in origin. Making these assumptions, we suggest that the mystery can be understood if we theorise that the intelligences behind the UFOs (1) wish to mislead us or (2) wish to present themselves **within the context of the observer's environment**. These points may overlap, but they are based upon opposite presumptions about the ufonaut's purpose.

In the first case, we envision a long-term mission carried out by beings from Elsewhere; though not necessarily hostile, these beings do not care to have us know what their identity and purpose are, and so have contrived (through subtlety, their more obvious activities, the messages imparted in contact) to give us false ideas about them. (For a more detailed discussion, see my *The Meaning of Contact*, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, September/October 1965.) What they **are** doing here is not particularly relevant in the formation of this hypothesis though I hope to discuss this subject in a later article.

To mislead us, the ufonauts assume a character easiest for us both to believe and to understand. In ancient times the superstitious called them gods or wizards, and we have an odd story, cited by W. R. Drake (*Spacemen in Norman Times*, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW March/April, 1966), in which beings announce they are from "Magonia" or "Magus"—"magic land". Paul Misraki (Paul Thomas) in his excellent *Flying Saucers through the Ages* (Neville Spearman, 1965), argues that the angels of the Bible were actually UFO entities. Today, in the "Space Age" we are led to believe that "flying saucers" are spacecraft. In April 1897, then—six and a half years before Kitty

Hawk—what more logical than a terrestrial aircraft?

In the second theory we follow much of the same reasoning, but we take a less suspicious view of the motives of our visitors. Perhaps, we speculate, the UFO beings **cannot** make extensive contact with us, by reason of the very nature of the UFO. Unable to land and prove conclusively their existence, they attempt to make themselves known by showing themselves in forms that witnesses are able to comprehend—airships in 1897, spaceships in 1947. If they appeared in their **true** form, they might well be so strange that we might not recognise them at all. Presumably, as in the passing of time human knowledge and consciousness expand, the UFO mystery will continue to evolve until at last we understand what it really means.

Admittedly, here we are involved in speculation of a grand order. I should make clear, however that these latter suggestions are not generally original with me, but with a ufologist whose writings, under the name "Peter Kor", have appeared

in several American UFO magazines. Kor, in creating a series of highly complex hypotheses relative to the UFO problem, has argued that researchers have completely misinterpreted the significance of the mystery they are dealing with. While he is not always totally convincing, Kor is mapping out important new territory that we would do well to explore, and we must not ignore him.

At any rate, whatever the truth may ultimately prove to be, I submit that the 1897 wave indicates the futility of any attempt to divorce flying objects from the general situation in which they operate. It may well be, as Kor has written, that individual reports only hinder our understanding of the enigma. Perhaps saucers in particular mean very little, saucers in general everything.

The airship, then, may be one of the greatest clues to the enigma. Its lesson for researchers into the Post-Arnold period should be obvious. Whether we are being duped intentionally or whether the UFOs simply cannot meet us on their terms, they have created a much deeper mystery than most of us are willing to concede.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Speaking as an aeronautical historian who specialises in the periods before 1910, I can say with certainty that the only airborne vehicles, carrying passengers, which could possibly have been seen anywhere in North America in 1897 were free flying spherical balloons, and it is highly unlikely for these to be mistaken for anything else. No form of dirigible (i.e. a gasbag propelled by an airscrew) or heavier-than-air flying machine was flying—or indeed **could** fly—at this time in America.

Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, M.A., F.M.A.,
Hon. Companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society.

JOINING THE TEAM...

The Editor is pleased to announce that Mr. R. H. B. Winder, C.Eng. B.Sc., A.M.I.M.E., has accepted an invitation to act as engineering consultant to the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.

Mr. Winder, who obtained his honours B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering at Leeds University in 1944, has devoted his career to mechanical research and design, with emphasis on advanced concepts and automation. His early interest in the UFO mystery fell dormant about 1952, but was re-awakened in 1960 after reading the Ruppelt and Keyhoe books, and "discovering" the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.