

THE AIRSHIP . . . FACT AND FICTION

Donald B. Hanlon

IN an important book, *Mysteries of the Skies* by Gordon Lore, Jr., and Harold Deneault, Jr., the authors devote themselves to a review of pre-1947 UFO sightings and in so doing have presented much new and significant material.

Of particular interest are the first two chapters which deal with the 1896-97 airship sightings. The authors are apparently totally unaware of the discussions of these sightings which have been presented in the pages of this REVIEW since 1965. This is indeed unfortunate since much of their material complements and in many cases substantiates that which has been presented here.

In their "Appendix C" the authors have included a chart of bright planet positions for November 1896-June 1897 which I have found most helpful in eliminating a number of "sightings" possibly caused by astronomical bodies. It was found that Venus could have been a major culprit.

Also included is a list of towns and cities¹ from which the authors have found reports. As a result of my researches into the mid-western states I might add the following locations²:

Illinois	Minonk
Arcola	Moline
Arrowsmith	Mt. Morris
Cabery	Nashville
Downs	Paris
El Paso	Quincy
Greenfield	Rock Island
Hillsboro	Springfield
Lake Forrest	Vandalia
Indiana	Hope
Anderson	Muncie
Batesville	Wabash
Gas City	Winamac
Iowa	
Belle Plain	Linn Grove
Cedar Rapids	Northwood
Green Island	Reinbeck
Jefferson	Solon
Kansas	Haddam
Belleville	Kiowa
Emporia	Leavenworth
Eureka	Marysville
Everest	Washington
Nebraska	
Beatrice	Kearney
Hastings	Quovale
Grand Island	York

Wisconsin
Darlington
Eau Claire
Fond du Lac
Grand Rapids
Lodi

Manitowoc
Palmyra
Rio
Sheboygan
West Superior

Michigan
Ann Arbor

Battle Creek

As I have stated previously,³ there were a number of factors at work at that period which hinder the evaluation of the reports. Aside from misidentification due to astronomical causes, there were:

1. Entirely mythical accounts written by journalists for publication as actual fact (Lore and Deneault quote newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst to this effect).

2. A considerable number of admitted hoaxes, including what could be termed the first fake "UFO" photograph in the history of the subject (*Chicago Chronicle*, April 13, 1897).

3. Spurious claims by several individuals of having "invented the airship" (this particular hindrance has been brought into focus as Lore and Deneault have published two patents for an airship taken from the files of the U.S. Patent Office for 1896-97).

An excellent example of an admitted hoax which, incidentally, Lore and Deneault have apparently taken at face value and treated as an authentic landing, is described in the April 17, 1897, edition of the *Chicago Record*:

"Waterloo, Iowa—April 17—Waterloo made the discovery early this morning that an airship was anchored on the west bank of the Cedar river, just inside the city limits, and the citizens thronged to the spot. The ship was constructed of canvas, heavily painted and tightly stitched to a light framework of wood. The principal parts of the concern were two large cigar-shaped balloons, each 36ft. in length, and about 8ft. in diameter at the swell. These lay side by side and slightly elevated between them was the cabin, and inside of this were the compressors and generators with which the man guarding the machine seemed to be perfectly familiar. No opportunity was given anyone to inspect the machinery, and any attempt to cross the rope fence which he had erected was met by an order to stay out.

"Visitors came hastening from all parts of the city, as the news spread rapidly. It was but a few moments until the telephone and telegraph wires were busy receiving messages from outside towns asking for information on the latest airship. So well did the man guard his treasure, and so clearly did he tell the story of how he, in company with a Mr. Stormont, left San Francisco on March 20, and gave every detail up to the time of landing, that fully half of the 5,000 people who visited the place today doubted the truth of the

matter when it leaked out this afternoon. The affair was built by a practical joker who has spent more than a week constructing it, and when completed and placed on the ground in the night not half a dozen persons beside the inventor knew anything about it. The grounds around it are crowded tonight, and people are coming in from a distance expecting to see the 'airship' continue on its journey. When told that one man had fallen overboard just before landing a searching party was organised by some of the more credulous, and a start was made at dragging the river for his remains, when it was discovered that the entire affair was a joke."

It will be seen that pranksters in 1897 were prepared to go to elaborate lengths to have their fun.

The patents, and the newspaper stories concerning one of them, discovered by the authors are anything but convincing.⁴ Such patents in the "Machine Age" were a dime a dozen, and no individual has ever stepped forward with conclusive proof that he had mastered heavier-than-air flight. Among the various individuals in the Midwest who claimed to have invented "the airship" we have an A. C. Clinton who claimed he would give a demonstration of his machine at the trans-Mississippi exposition on April 17; he never showed up. A certain Mr. Carr made a deal with the famous Ringling Brothers' circus to demonstrate the airship designed by one F. Meyer at a ticketed performance. At the time agreed upon neither Mr. Carr nor the airship could be located.

A more interesting story of an inventor's claim was reported or *concocted* by a correspondent in the April 11, 1897, *Chicago Chronicle*:

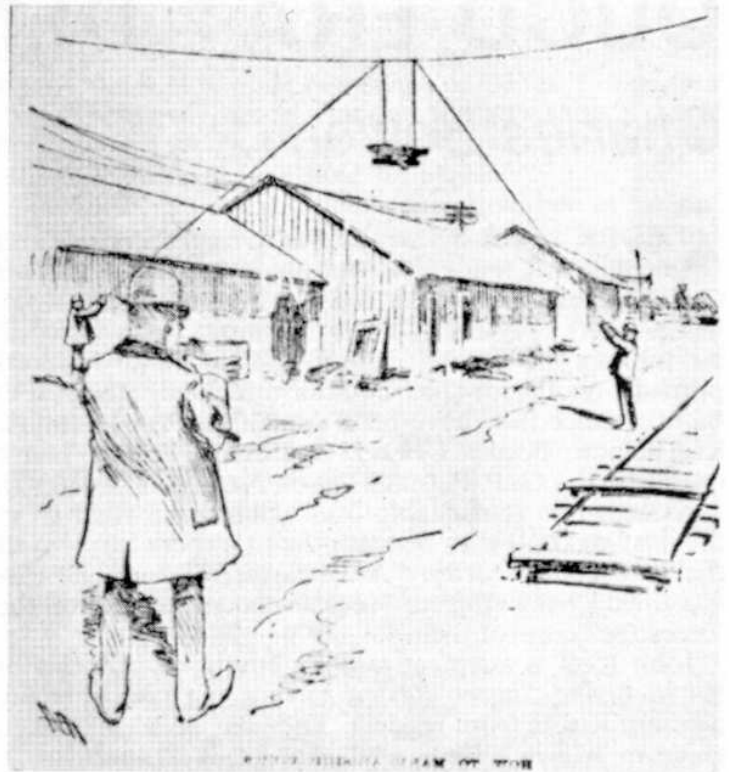
"Taylors Falls, Minnesota, April 10—The famous airship has been found near here. Upon receipt of a bulletin from Minneapolis, your correspondent hastened to the thick woods south of town. He penetrated them with great care. Moving cautiously he came to the edge of a considerable clearing in which he saw lying an immense and curiously shaped object, which looked like a whale at a distance of five feet. At first I feared that it might be some animate thing of terrible proportions. A little observation assured me that it was something of metal and wood. Suddenly a door opened and two men came out of the ship's side. They were reading daily papers and laughing at the surprise and wonder their ship had created. At that moment I rushed out at them. Seeing me they came at me like wild beasts, but I drew a revolver and warned them to stand and deliver their secret. Thereupon one of them introduced himself as J. S. McMasters of Chicago and admitted that he was the inventor of the craft that had excited so much wonder.

"'There she is,' he said. 'There remain some little things to perfect before we make our discovery known. We will never reveal the secret, but we will soon put on lines of airships between all the principal points in the world. Each trip serves to correct some defect.

"'All that I can say to you is that the principle on which our invention rests is that of *negative gravity*' (my italics, D.B.H.) 'as opposed to the positive kind with which we are all familiar.'

"While I was asking him some question the wheels on the thing began to revolve, great winglike projections unfolded, and some mysterious force drew the men into the car on the lower side and before my eyes the thing rose and sailed away down the St. Croix.

"The town is full of farmers who saw the mysterious object and came into town to discuss it. The prevailing belief is that it is the devil's own creation. When I told them my story they all said I was crazy and locked me up. I am writing this from the jail, but I am as sane as any man and never write a fake any more than Sioux City and Omaha reporters."



Preparing the 1897 fake!

These are typical of the spurious claims which were rampant at this period. However we do have some evidence that a serious attempt to emulate the behaviour of the real and quite mysterious airship by certain responsible inventors on the West Coast. In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, April 10, Max L. Harmar, Secretary of the Chicago Aeronautical Association (whose president was aviation pioneer Octave Chanute), claimed to have a good idea of what was behind the mysterious sightings.

He claimed that Chanute was at that time in California as he was one of a number of wealthy men who were financing the building of an airship. The craft was said to have started a cross-country journey with the eventual destination being Washington, D.C. It was to land in Chicago, however, for purposes of registration, and a reception was being planned by Mr. Harmar. Needless to say, Mr. Harmar was disappointed as the craft observed in that area showed no signs of landing for the festivities. Later it was learned that the California airship that Mr. Chanute had been backing crashed after a very unsuccessful attempt at aerial navigation.

After sifting through data such as the above, one is left with a hard core of sightings (now over 200) of a rather unlikely looking aerial craft which created much commotion among the observers. The only detectable effect which the sightings left on the society of 1896-97 is exactly the same as that left by the modern UFO phenomenon—a psychological impact.

It is clear that the origin of the airship is still very much an open issue. It is also clear that the mystery surrounding its appearance at that particular time in history has deepened.

NOTES

¹ Lore and Deneault: *Mysteries from the Skies*, pps. 24-25.

² Refer to map in FSR September/October 1966, p. 9.

³ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴ Lore and Deneault, pps. 16-17, 38-39.

example, from power lines, from automobile electrical systems, from electronic equipment, or even from human beings. No joy in any of this for the regular UFO enthusiasts and cultists, some of whom, while critical of "government censorship," have actually censored cases reported to them because the reported details did not fit their accepted frames of reference.

In support of his case the author cites the words of Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard (Caxton Hall address on May 3, 1969). He points out that if Sir Victor, a member of the Air Council in the late 1940s, understood the parapsychological nature of the phenomenon, it is reasonable to assume that the RAF, the British Government, and the United States Government all do so as well. Consequently, official moves to soft-pedal the subject (e.g. Robertson, 1953; Condon, 1969) begin to make political and economic sense.

A tragic contactee

Indeed, if there is truth in what Keel suggests—that the entities have succeeded in controlling the minds of many humans—then there is no knowing to what extent the "Trojan Horse" operators might deceive their human dupes. He quotes many examples of how contactees, both UFO and "psychic", have been fed, allegedly, with scientific and philosophical gobblede-gook, with near truths, or with startling predictions of future events, and then savagely discarded. A tragic example is that of Dino Kraspedon (Aladino Felix) who, in 1967, forecast on Brazilian TV that Martin Luther King and Senator Robert Kennedy would be assassinated. Kraspedon had gone "dormant" after publishing, in the late 1950s, his book *My Contact with Flying Saucers*, but re-emerged with many 'ufonaut-inspired' prophecies, all of which proved startlingly correct. In 1969 he forecast the outbreak of a wave of violence, murders and armed robberies: the wave got under way, but the police broke up the gang . . . and found that the leader was Dino Kraspedon. Before being taken to prison he announced that the Venusians had promised they would invade Earth to release and avenge him. (Small wonder we hear that the Brazilian authorities are now censoring flying saucer reports, and hampering the activities of UFO investigators.)

Of course, it is possible that Kraspedon may just be mentally ill; that all the other contactees may be mentally ill. If that be the case, then surely the fact that their mental illness prompts them all to blame everything on flying saucers and their operators, is worthy of study. Whether saucer-induced or not, the frame of mind of the "silent contactees" is the thing that should cause most concern. I agree wholeheartedly with John Keel when he warns: "The study and interpretation of all this belongs in the hands of historians, philosophers, psychiatrists and theologians . . . physical scientists can also make a contribution by applying standard scientific methods to the wealth of data, and preparing statistical studies of the events themselves." Which leaves us pretty well as before with a very real job to do!

Among the final points that occur to me are, first, that here and there amid the welter of deceptions, hoaxes and devilry, one glimpses hints that there could be good influences at work. I wish more emphasis could have been placed on this aspect, for heaven knows the

human race needs hope. Gordon Creighton once said to me: "Evil forces would need to be devious because they might have to by-pass protecting good influences." For all our sakes, and quite regardless of UFOs, I hope very much that the good influence "out there" will prevail for it seems, when we look around, that the bad influences have quite a hold on us.

Secondly—and this can hardly be qualified as "hope"—there is always a chance that John Keel himself has been misled. What if the cause of all our problems is the work of extraterrestrials with an advanced technology, incomprehensible and like magic; visitors who spread hallucinatory images among witnesses and contactees, perhaps by some unknown use of radiation, from interlocking solid craft? The purpose? A cover-up to lead humans into believing that UFO entities are nothing more than fairies, or elementals?

I feel, that like the rest of us, Mr. Keel is a long, long way from writing that "Q.E.D." at the end of his dossier. Nevertheless, he has made a clever attempt at understanding it; an attempt, I trust, that will cause millions to stop and think.

NOTES

- ¹ The case of Antônio Villas Boas, which includes an alleged sexual encounter, is recorded in full in the updated hard-cover edition of *The Humanoids* (Neville Spearman Ltd., London).
- ² See "Few and Far Between" in *The Humanoids*; also several issues of FSR through 1968 and 1969.
- ³ C. Maxwell Cade: *A Long Cool Look at Alien Intelligence*, particularly parts 4 and 5 (FSR: Vol. 13, No. 6, and Vol. 14, No. 2).
- ⁴ Q.E.D.—*Quod Erat Demonstrandum*: "which was the thing to be proved" (as in geometrical demonstrations).

ANOTHER BOOK REVIEW

Strange Creatures from Time and Space, by John A. Keel (Fawcett Gold Medal Books paperback No. T 2219, U.S.\$0.75, Fawcett Publications Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut, 1970).

As was recently announced, the large, long awaited, and very important new book by John Keel proved to be too much for one volume and has therefore been divided into two books, namely *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (published by Putnams), and this fascinating paperback with its wealth of condensed information about some of the more "erratic" elements in our subject—the extraordinary creatures which have been turning up in such numbers lately and which may possibly be emerging from the unseen worlds around us rather than from any other planets, far or near.

Both these books will take their place beside Dr. Jacques Vallée's *Passport to Magonia* and the works of Charles Fort as classics and indispensables for all those true researchers who desire to look at all aspects of the problems of "Ufology" and parapsychology, and who do not seek to turn aside when they encounter certain features that are neither prepossessing nor reassuring.

Ambling nightmares, "uglies and nasties", "flying felines", hairy monsters, giants, "cattle-rustlers from the skies", "winged weirdos", "man-birds", "mothmen", phantom killers of people and of livestock, demons and vampires, all are here, and in abundance.

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EERIE NIGHT AT THE CHÂTEAU DES MARTINS

Jean-Claude Baillon

M. Baillon is Secretary of a group, Cercle d'Information des Phénomènes Insolites (CIESPI), of Poitiers. His contribution was translated by Gordon Creighton.

ONE evening in August 1969 I was visiting my brother-in-law, who lives in the Château des Martins at Bignoux, a few miles to the north-east of Poitiers, which lies in the west-central region of France, and we fell to talking about certain extraordinary phenomena in general, and UFOs in particular. In the course of the discussion my sister told me that one night, several months earlier, she had been awakened by the stampeding of the horses in the Château park. They had bolted and were making an infernal din galloping round and round the grounds. This disturbance had gone on for most of the night. She added moreover that the Château caretaker, Monsieur Meingault, had gone out into the park at the time and, so his wife said, he had seen something shining which was chasing the horses.

On learning this I naturally lost no time in asking the caretaker for further details.

At first I had some difficulty in getting a precise date out of him, M.

Meingault not having at all the sort of head for dates. However, by various cross-checks, it was established that it was on a night when my brother-in-law and the owner of the Château were both absent, and I was able thus to determine that the events in question had occurred at the end of the winter, probably during February. It was on a moonless night, and it must have occurred around about February 16, 1969.

That night, which was thus pitch-dark, the caretaker was in his kitchen when he heard the horses (to be precise, three mares and two colts) galloping about in the park. So he went outside, and after walking a few paces at the top of the Château steps, he saw the horses go past at full pelt. Then his attention was caught by a pair of shining eyes, intensely bright, situated at a spot between a clump of bushes and the paddock fence. (See Fig. 2 and photos.)

Deciding to find out what was frightening the horses, he went back

into the Château, armed himself with a gun, and then (with considerable difficulty, owing to the darkness) made a tour right round the Château. Then he caught sight again of the galloping horses, still continuing their mad circus, as they dashed through a thicket which normally they would never have entered owing to the danger of injury to their legs. For a few moments he had the impression—quite fleeting, it is true—that there was a shadow pursuing the horses. Then he fired a few shots into the air to frighten off the “attacker” should there be one. Seeing that the animals still would not settle down, he then finally decided to go back to bed.

Next morning, and my sister has confirmed this to me, the horses were still disturbed. And it was then that the caretaker discovered that considerable damage had been done to the fence around the paddock. The fence in question is a very solid one made of thick posts. It was still in this damaged condition when I was there, so I was

Book Review *Continued from Page 23*

There is also a certain amount of material on the “M.I.B.” problem, and a chapter entitled “The Bedroom Invaders”—a theme to which Jacques Vallée (*Passport to Magonia*) has so far been the only modern writer to devote much attention. It has its unsavoury side, the implications of which we must however face if we wish to make an honest study of these matters. (Mediaeval scholars knew plenty about this subject, of course, and wrote about it at length.)

Keel also has one or two chapters dealing with the evidence for various “terrestrial unknowns” such as the Loch Ness Monster and other lake-dwelling creatures, as well as a number of sub-species of primitive men usually classified under such blanket terms as “Abominable Snowmen”, “Sasquatch”, etc. (Incidentally, readers who are particularly interested in the remarkable recent Soviet discoveries about these primitive men, whose presence in our own day has been detected over wide areas of the USSR, will find the most complete and reliable statement on the whole situation in Miss Odette Tchernine’s second “Snowman” book, due to be issued this autumn by Neville Spearman of London under the title *The Yeti*.)

GORDON CREIGHTON.

Norwegian UFO *Continued from Page 18*

Suddenly the large object’s speed increased tremendously, and in one minute it had disappeared in a northerly direction out the fjord of Kvenangen.

“The colour of the object was metallic, or silver-grey.

“The upper sketch shows the object as I saw it hovering in front of me. It was through the window on the left side, marked X, that the little object was drawn into the larger. The second window from the right, marked Y, was the one from whence the green light beam shone.

“The second drawing represents the object as seen from below, at an angle. Here is seen a detail which is not mentioned in the story: a series of round, funnel-like cups, which I believe must have been movable, because some of them pointed down, while some pointed in other directions. I cannot describe these in more detail, as I only saw them for a few seconds.

“I give my word that this is a true account of a personal experience.”

On the basis of the investigations carried out by TRONDHEIM UFO FORENING, Trondheim, and UFO-INFORMASJON, Oslo, it is considered that this person is reliable, and that the story very likely is true. Mr. Mikalsen has agreed to his account being published.