

MYSTERY AEROPLANES OF THE 1930s Part III – The Landings

John A. Keel

ON Wednesday, January 10, 1934, the Scandinavian “Ghostfliers” reportedly landed in several isolated areas in northern Norway and Sweden, according to *Dagens-Nyheters* (Stockholm) and the other newspapers* which were closely following the wave of mystery aeroplane sightings. Item 20 in our catalogue is datelined January 11, 1934, from Skellefteå, Sweden: “A report was received from the village of Norsjo, Monday evening, describing a bright light which was visible over the entire area. It was exceptionally strong and moved over the southern horizon. A man employed by the Royal Telegraph Service in Norsjo watched the mysterious light over the swamp at Kvammar. He saw it from his car on the highroad. The police searched the swamp during a violent snowstorm but found nothing . . . An unconfirmed rumour from Anderstjarn, south of Norsjo, tells of a landing by the ghostflier on the ice. Some traces were found after the machine was seen.”

The “unconfirmed rumours” were quickly replaced by substantial eyewitness reports which prompted the Norwegian government to dispatch the cruiser *Eagle* to the landing sites.

22. January 11, 1934. Trondheim, Norway. Two landings of ghostfliers were reported from northern Norway, Wednesday evening. One machine landed near the island of Gjeslingen, outside Rorvik, and the other at a place called Kvaloj in the area Namndal. The report from Gjeslingen says that the people there saw a great beam of light and heard the sound of a strong engine. The machine landed and remained on the water quietly for an hour and a half. Its light went out after it landed but the general opinion of the witnesses was that the object was still there. The second ghostflier took off 15 minutes after landing at Kvaloj and vanished southwards.

27. January 13, 1934. Oslo, Norway. An attempt to catch the mysterious flier ended in failure on Friday. One mysterious flier was seen to alight near the island of Sleipskar on Friday evening. The island is only a few kilometres south of Gjeslingen, where one of the machines was seen to land the day before.

Earlier in the evening beams of light and engine roars were reported in the same area. When the aeroplane was seen to land on the water a message was sent immediately to Rorvik. The cruiser *Eagle* was docked there. Unfortunately, a pilot was not available when the message was received. These waters are too dangerous, because of the many reefs, for a ship to sail them without a pilot.

People all over Rorvik saw the mysterious aeroplane between two and three in the morning. It seemed to be heading towards Sweden. Around 10.00 p.m. the plane flew over Isfjorden, near Adalsnas. It was a biplane, equipped with pontoons, and vanished over Romsdaksfjorden. Five persons witnessed its flight. It was at high altitude.

28. January 14, 1934. Rorvik, Norway. Two aeroplanes have landed near Rorvik, reported the police of the state.

One landing place is situated near Vikna, Kvalpsundet, and the other at Oksbosen in Flatanger.

The duty-cruiser *Eagle* left the harbour at high speed for a close investigation, but an accident occurred as the ship neared the landing site. The cruiser ran aground. A salvage vessel was sent from Rorvik but the *Eagle* disentangled itself under its own power.

The search for the aeroplane was futile, but people on the nearby islands still seriously assert that an aeroplane had landed at Vikna.

Futile hunt

The ill-fated *Eagle* never did catch up with the ghostflier. Nor did the Swedish Air Force squadron which was sent to northern Sweden to track the planes down. Police and army units turned out repeatedly in the flap areas in futile attempts to locate the planes and their possible bases. Some of the eyewitnesses said the planes were equipped with pontoons or skis, and several reports described formations of two or three planes.

36. January 15, 1934. Skellefteå. For the past two months a person in Skellefteå has been watching three aeroplanes flying in formation over the area. One plane usually flies in front of the other two and at a slightly higher altitude. It looks, says the observer, as if the lead plane directs the others with light signals. The witness asserted that this has been going on for a couple of months and the aeroplanes' routes follow the railways in the area.

Classic UFO-style “searchlights” were a common feature in many of the reports, and, like modern UFOs, the objects frequently visited rugged mountainous regions. The lights, accompanied by engine noises, were widely seen over the Nedelpad (Sweden) area on Thursday, January 11. One group of witnesses said a phantom plane circled over the mountain of Bykullen that night and the mountain top was “bathed in light”. Approximately thirty minutes later it appeared over Tyndero on the sea coast.

There was a brief lull in the sightings in mid-January 1934. Then, on Sunday, January 22, the planes returned with a vengeance and were widely seen throughout northern Norway and Sweden. At 10.00 a.m. there were daylight sightings over Vindeln and Viriajam. “The plane flew over at low altitude on a course towards Norway. No marks or insignia of any kind were visible,” according to one report. At 6.00 p.m. the busy pilot entertained the people of Bengtsforsen, Jamtland and Indal, circling as he splayed his bright lights about the countryside. At midnight, a group of 30 soldiers near the fort of Boden reported seeing the object. Authorities were upset over the repeated appearances of the ghostflier over the “restricted” Boden area. That same night the residents of Repvag, Norway, “saw an aeroplane

flying in circles at very low altitude."

The next day, January 23, 1934, Finland received its first visits from the ghostflier when he roared over the village of Kemi at 6.00 p.m.

48. January 25, 1934. Vasa, Finland. Two workmen saw a mysterious aeroplane in Laitakaro, near Kemi. It came from the north of Finland following the Kemi-Rowanjemi railway. The workmen had no ideas about the identity of the craft. On Tuesday, two aeroplanes were observed. One of them was visible about Kemi and the other appeared over the little village of Kuivakangas. A blinding light swooped over Kuivakangas for a brief moment and when the machine veered to the right a green light was visible. The plane then flew over Tornealy to Boden on the Swedish side.

The Finnish Air Force dispatched two planes to the Kemi area to search for the ghostflier. Meanwhile, some Finnish witnesses were reporting huge three-engined planes, and the crew of a Norwegian freighter claimed a rare occupant sighting.

Ghostflier pilot observed

53. January 28, 1934. Oslo, Norway. The following report comes from Tromsø on the Norwegian seacoast.

The freighter *Tordenskiold* returned to Tromsø from Kabelvag on Saturday. The Captain, Sigvard Olsen, and a sailor, Olsen, relate the following: "When they had left Tromsø last Tuesday and were on their way home, a plane appeared suddenly in front of the vessel. He was following a course straight towards the ship. When he reached only a few metres from the ship, the plane turned to the right and flew directly over it. A beam of light swooped over the deck, turning darkness into broad daylight for 15-20 seconds."

The plane was a great greyish machine exactly like the French plane *Latham* which Roald Amundsen used on his last expedition. In the cabin of the craft Captain Olsen saw a person, probably the pilot, dressed in some sort of "anorak" [hooded jacket]. He wore big glasses and had a hood over his head. The machine had no marks or insignia. It circled once around the vessel and then vanished.

Despite the fact that the combined armed services of Norway, Sweden and Finland had been mobilised to track them down, the ghostfliers continued to ply regular courses and indulge in blatant manoeuvres at low level over the towns and villages of northern Scandinavia. They were, in fact, *too deliberate*. It was apparent that the planes were meant to be seen. And they flew in the most severe weather, when all conventional planes were grounded.

52. January 28, 1934. Haparanda. The personnel of the Haparanda newspaper watched for several minutes, around midnight Saturday, as an aeroplane flew back and forth several times over the city. Because of the foggy weather, no light could be seen, but the sound of a very powerful engine was heard by everyone on the editorial staff. The aeroplane looked like a giant shadow in the air. One hour earlier, ten persons observed a plane over Haparanda, flying back and forth.

One favourite, though suicidal, stunt of the ghostflier was to cut his engines as he circled low above the witnesses. Among the rash of sightings around Umea, Sweden, on January 11, is this example: "Rortrask, northeast Norsjö, saw the machine . . . People there observed the engine stop three times as it passed directly over them. The machine was flying so low that the whole forest was bathed in its light. It seems that the plane wished to land, but suddenly he increased his speed and followed the Skellefteå river instead."

On January 31, 1934, Lieutenant Colonel Snellman,

chief of the Finnish Air Force, told the press, "There is no longer any reason to doubt the existence of the ghostflier."

Crash in the Norwegian Alps

One of the best-reported incidents of the ghostflier wave was the apparent crash of a plane on top of the "nearly inaccessible" Fager mountain about ten miles from Tromsø, Norway, on Monday, February 5, 1934.

57. February 7, 1934. Oslo, Norway [condensed]. The following message was received by *Dagens-Nyheter* from Tromsø: An unknown aeroplane has crashed or made an emergency landing on Fager Mountain in Malselv, Monday evening. People in the valley watched the machine as it went down on the mountain. The next morning the plane was still there and two men were visible beside it, apparently clearing away the snow. Moments later the machine made two attempts to take off, but without success . . . When the *Dagens-Nyheter* received the message they talked with the head of the county constabulary in Malselv, Valderhaug, and he said he felt the message was reliable. The accident, or the landing, had been seen from both sides of the mountain, he said. Very reliable people had witnessed and reported the occurrence.

When the plane landed on Monday evening no engine sounds were heard but a raging snowstorm at the time may have smothered the sounds. On the other hand, an engine sound was heard from the mountain today. A woman on Mr. Martensson's farm heard the engine this morning as she fed the animals . . . Later other people heard the same sound and that kind of noise is very uncommon up there. That was probably when the plane tried to take off and failed.

Eight men struggled up the mountainside that day and failed to find any trace of the craft. That night, at 10.00 p.m., four persons reported seeing an aeroplane passing over Malselv on a south-west course "straight from the area of the Fager mountain." Three more search parties climbed the mountain the next day and the Norwegian newspaper *Tidens Tegn* reported: "Farmer Martensson of Fugleli said that one of the patrols discovered two parallel traces in the snow 300-400 metres north-west of the point where the aeroplane had been seen. The traces were about 75 metres in length and 80 cms. wide . . . The patrol also found footprints of people around the traces. The search will begin again tomorrow at dawn. Lieutenant Kjaer, a specialist from the Defence Department, will command the operation."

The ghostflier appeared again at midnight on Thursday, February 8, over nearby Sigurfjord, according to the paper *Norlands-Nytt*. "It was approximately 500 metres high and projected a very powerful searchlight

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on both sides of the nearby hilltops. Observers noted a red lantern on the machine before it vanished in a south-westerly direction."

Meanwhile, a lighthouse keeper named Bjornsen was watching a "mysterious vessel" near the Makkauer lighthouse, Vardo, Norway. The ship first appeared on Tuesday afternoon, February 6, pursuing an easterly course. Then it changed directions and moved out of sight toward the west. It reappeared on Wednesday. Bjornsen said it reminded him of the inspection ship *Frithof Nansen* and was approximately the same size. "No foreign ship has requested permission to call at Norwegian harbours," the newspapers noted.

While the stalwart *Eagle* charged up and down the Norwegian seas searching for phantom ships and ghostfliers, the rugged climbers on Fager mountain threw up their hands in disgust. It was impossible, they said, for any plane to land or take off from the high, snowbound plateau. Norway's *Adress-Avisen* had the last word on the incident when it reported on February 10 that "one of the men who took part in the search of Fager mountain said in a telephone interview that the mysterious aeroplane on the plateau was a stone!" Had the long-time residents of the valley mistaken a stone twenty feet long by twelve feet high for an aeroplane?

The ghostflier reports began to trickle out by the middle of February, even though the planes seemed to be getting larger.

71. February 15, 1934. Melbo, Nordland, Norway. Several persons reported watching an aeroplane near Borøy-sund in Melbo at noon Thursday. The machine was flying so close to the water that the witnesses thought it was

going to land. But it did not.

This machine was much bigger than the other planes which had been seen over the community earlier. It was two-winged and followed a course southward . . . The sound of an engine was reported at several places along its route.

Reports became sporadic during the remainder of 1934. But the ghostflier never really went away. The mystery aeroplanes were sighted infrequently throughout the 1930s.

75. April 1, 1934. Oslo, Norway. Five persons have reported seeing a very large aeroplane over Sandnessjoen, according to *Tidens-Tegn*. One witness, a sixteen-year-old boy, said he saw the machine in the brilliant moonlight over Altenfjord. It was a very large aeroplane, he said, and the engines stopped when it suddenly descended towards the water. Eight propellers were observed. Instead of landing, the craft started to move in wide circles so the boy was able to view it from all sides. He noticed that the cabin windows were all lighted.

An eight-propeller-engined aircraft would be a remarkable sight even today.

[*There was the DoX, a twelve-engined (six pull, six push) Dornier flying boat, which was quite a sight in the 1930s—EDITOR.*]

The fourth, and final part of Mr. Keel's article will be published in the next issue of *Flying Saucer Review*.

* Most of the reports in this article are from *Dagens-Nyheter*, Stockholm, except where cited. Other newspapers providing material for this study are named in Part One, FSR, May/June 1970, and Part Two, FSR, July/August 1970.

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