

GHOST ROCKETS: A moment of history

by Jacques Vallée

ON Friday, April 24, 1964, the alleged landing of a flying saucer in Socorro, New Mexico, shows that the UFO phenomenon is still with us. The Socorro incident was no hoax and no weather balloon: the witness, a policeman, has been known for 16 years by scientists at the University of New Mexico, and has favourably impressed the special consultants of the Air Force immediately sent to investigate. This is another sighting added to many thousands: but this continuous accumulation of incidents shows that we are faced with a phenomenon of a formidable sociological impact.

Yet, no survey of this phenomenon has been made by historians or sociologists. No complete documentation is available, and only very few scientists have had an opportunity to see the really meaningful reports: the majority of them have been discouraged by the "sensational" interpretation of the facts presented in the newspapers, and by the number of obvious misinterpretations and hoaxes, among which the true nature of the phenomenon seems to be very difficult to find. These intelligent reports, however, do exist: about 10 to 40 per cent of the 8,000 American sightings kept up-to-date in Dayton by the Air Technical Intelligence Centre are, if not always inexplicable, yet truly intriguing, to say the least. It is the opinion of this writer that their accumulation constitutes a true phenomenon in itself, well worth a detailed and extensive scientific study.

A detailed analysis

Everyone seems to consider the famous sighting by Kenneth Arnold over Mount Rainier in June 1947 as marking the beginning of the UFO legend. But a more detailed analysis shows that reality is very much different. The point remains to be decided whether or not UFOs were seen, or imagined, during preceding centuries, the Middle Ages or even in Biblical and legendary times. Their modern epic seems to have started some time during the war, with numerous pilots reporting strange lights, apparently under intelligent control. But the first great peak of sightings took place after the war, one year before the Mount Rainier incident and the 1947 wave in the United States. This first wave reached its maximum by mid-July 1946, and affected the Northern regions of Europe.

The object of this article is to help clarify the incidents of that period, from reports in the French Press, and kindly communicated by the active French researcher Aimé Michel.

The first account we have been able to find comes from the newspaper *Resistance* of July 19, 1946. The article said:

"During the last few months the populations of the Southern part of Sweden, and those of the Northern part, have been somewhat disturbed: from time to time, especially at night, bright meteors, travelling at fantastic speeds, cross their skies. Within fractions of seconds, these bolides appear and disappear, vanishing into the deepness of space with an infernal roaring . . ."

This first description evokes immediately the idea of ordinary meteors, misinterpreted by people still very much under the stress of a terrible war. But *L'Aurore* of July 27 gives more precise details:

"More than five-hundred rocket-propelled projectiles are said to have been seen over Sweden since the beginning of July. According to some sources, the projectiles that streak across the Swedish sky look like jet planes, but make less noise than usual aircraft. Others describe them as like 'sea-gulls without heads'. On the map, the projectiles do not show uniform trajectories. They go towards the west as well as the south and so leads to the idea that they are guided by remote control of some sort. It has been impossible to get hold of any of these 'V-1s': all of them have fallen into the lakes."

A complex situation

We are already far from the meteor explanation: the objects are interpreted by the witnesses as material and as products of human technology. The reference to the German V weapons is very indicative of the psychology prevailing in Europe at that time: we will see that at no time during the whole "wave" will the hypothesis of the extra-terrestrial origin of the objects be made by the witnesses or by the newspapers. It seemed evident to everybody that the observed objects were a new type of aircraft or rocket. It is interesting to remember that this opinion was also the official reaction of scientists in the United States in the period 1947-1950; however, the situation will soon

become more complicated. We read in *L'Etoile*, August 8:

"In an official statement made public on August 6 in Stockholm, General Nils Ahlgren, Chief of the Swedish Air Defence, has announced that some of the objects have been seen at low altitude, that more than three hundred have been reported between July 9 and July 12, that they manoeuvred in half-circles and appeared to come from the South most of the time. One of the objects is said to have fallen into Lake Oeverkalix, in Northern Sweden."

In *Le Monde*, August 9:

"Lieutenant Lennart Nackman, of the Swedish Air Defence, has seen one of the objects as a sphere of fire surrounded by flames of a light yellow. The object was flying at an altitude of about 1,000 metres and its speed, despite the height, yet allowed the eye to follow its course. According to experts, the meteoric hypothesis is absolutely rejected. Thousands of letters reporting the objects have arrived from all over Sweden."

In *Liberation-Soir*, same day:

"They generally arrive from the South and do not follow a straight trajectory. Some of them change direction, either slowly or abruptly. The longest trajectory recorded by Swedish observers is 1,000 kilometres long, which is three times the range of the German V-rockets. Many of them come from the South, follow the Baltic coast, then curve their path towards Northern Russia."

Etoile-Soir, August 14:

"The mystery deepens since it has been impossible to find fragments of the rocket-shells recently reported. It has been officially announced in Marieham, capital of the Aaland Islands, midway from Sweden and Finland, that luminous phenomena have been observed there on Sunday night, for the first time."

The same day, in *Paris-Presse*:

"Everyone speaks about it in Stockholm: in the streets, in the restaurants and at home, the only discussion is about the luminous bombs which fly mysteriously over Sweden at low altitude. Popular imagination is stricken. Fantastic descriptions of the phenomenon are circulating. Between July 19 and July 30, three hundred reports have been submitted to military authorities. Others still arrive every day."

Does not that sound familiar? The meteors of the first days have become "flying bombs" or "luminous spheres" flying at low altitude, able to change direction, leaving no fragment and exciting popular imaginations. Their range is fantastic, compared with the technological state of development of the time. Still the idea of war is so present and so strong that all descriptions are made in

terms of destructive technology: bombs, shells, rockets. The terminology, however, will slowly change.

La Depeche de Paris, August 17:

"Copenhagen, August 16: According to the Danish Press, a new rocket has been seen last night by numerous witnesses over Copenhagen."

Le Figaro:

"London, August 16: a rocket-projectile has exploded over the island of Malmoe. A large number of glass windows have been broken."

The day before, the newspaper *Le Monde* had described a similar phenomenon over Finland:

"Helsinki has announced that a flying bomb had exploded on Tuesday afternoon over the city of Tammersfors, in western Finland. Witnesses heard a loud explosion, then saw a cloud of smoke in the centre of which appeared a luminous phenomenon. Another rocket has been seen over Helsinki on Tuesday night."

Liberation Soir, August 28:

"The Swedish military authority continues to receive numerous reports about the mysterious projectiles which fly over the country. The following facts have been found: 1. There are two kinds of projectiles, those which have a level flight at 800 kilometres per hour with a bright light in the rear, and those which fall vertically from a greater height with a superior speed (. . .) 2. None of these projectiles has exploded on the ground. No one has been wounded and no damage has been caused. Some of the projectiles may have exploded in the air, but no fragment has been found."

After this date, the situation becomes more confusing, because of the obvious futility of the explanations officially used (flying bombs, projectiles, rockets) but the facts become more like what we have observed in recent years, i.e., a phenomenon involving objects apparently material, commonly interpreted by the witnesses as a new type of aircraft, yet displaying manoeuvres in contradiction to the technology of the time. An important fact, in our opinion, is the report of *landings* as can be seen from the following account:

Epoque, August 28:

"Some of the objects are said to change their direction of flight after landing, when they go back towards their place of origin, according to the results of an investigation made by the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* in Stockholm."

Another important fact is the extension of the "wave" to other regions of the world:

Epoque, August 29:

"Other objects have been reported from Switzerland and, a few days ago, from Waterford, Ireland. The objects seen in Sweden left a trail of fire similar to the tail of a comet. Others, on the

contrary, have a light in front. The American General James Doolittle has just arrived in Stockholm, officially on a business trip for the Shell Company. In reality he is to conduct an investigation along with the Swedish authorities."

L'Aurore, September 4: the article reports that these "extraordinary craft" have been seen more and more frequently over Sweden, Belgium and even France. But more complete information is to be found in *Le Figaro* of September 5:

"More than 2,000 ghost-rockets have been reported during the past few months over Sweden. Our English contemporary, the *Daily Mail*, has instructed its reporter, Alexander Clifford, to conduct an investigation on the subject. We reproduce here the more important part of his conclusions: According to a message from Stockholm sent by the English reporter, scientists are puzzled by the phenomena: in some circles they are attributed to mass-hallucination. Others think they are due only to meteors or luminous balloons used in meteorological experiments. They are a subject of jokes on the music-hall stage, but the Swedish and Danish military staff are taking the matter seriously and have opened an information . . .

Mr. Clifford reports that a fairly large number of the 2,000 luminous balloons have been seen by reliable witnesses. These are, he says, the facts on which almost all of them agree:

- 1 The projectiles are in the shape of cigars.
- 2 Flames are projected out of their tail. The colour is orange but some people have said they were green.
- 3 They travel at an altitude of 300 to 1,000 metres.
- 4 Their speed is about that of an airplane. Some say a rather slow airplane . . .
- 5 They do not make any noise, except a slight whistling.

"Nobody has mentioned wings, but some have said they saw fins. And this is where Science comes in to say that the thing is impossible: no wingless projectile could fly so slowly, especially in silence. Mr. Clifford mentions that, during a certain period, these flying bombs seemed to travel from south-east to north-west, but the first ones have been reported in May last from the extreme north of Scandinavia and, generally speaking, their lines of travel have slowly shifted towards the South. The more recent of them have been observed over Denmark. The strange thing is that no physical evidence has been found. Where explosions have taken place, researches, and excavations have been made, but nothing has been found."

The strange phenomenon of the UFOs, so puzzling to the scientific mind, had thus scared the

populations of Northern Europe long before the famous reports of 1947 by American military and civilian pilots. And who knows what the future will bring?

SOUTHEND-ROVIGO LINE

by P. K. Haythornthwaite

One of Aimé Michel's straight lines involved an English sighting at Southend (October 15, 1954). This article gives details for its extension.

Longitude East (Degrees)	E	Latitude North	W	Longitude West (Degrees)
0	+	51° 56'	-	180
10	+	46° 15'	-	170
20	+	38° 9'	-	160
30	+	26° 29'	-	150
40	+	11° 15'	-	140
50	-	4° 48'	+	130
60	-	22° 8'	+	120
70	-	35° 2'	+	110
80	-	44° 6'	+	100
90	-	50° 25'	+	90
100	-	54° 43'	+	80
110	-	57° 34'	+	70
120	-	59° 19'	+	60
130	-	60° 13'	+	50
140	-	60° 19'	+	40
150	-	59° 41'	+	30
160	-	58° 10'	+	20
170	-	55° 44'	+	10
180	-	51° 56'	+	0

This great circle cuts the equator at Longitude 46° 32' E., and its plane makes an angle of 60° 33' with the equatorial plane.

BAVIC (the Bayonne-Vichy line of September 24, 1954) cuts the equator at Longitude 42° 5' W., and its plane makes an angle at 55° 33' with the equatorial plane.

The two circles cut the equator 88½° apart—i.e., very nearly a right-angle. The slopes of the circles do not bear any very obvious relation with each other, or the earth's axis, etc. However, it is interesting to note that the plane of our Galaxy (the Milky Way) cuts the equator at an angle of 62°.

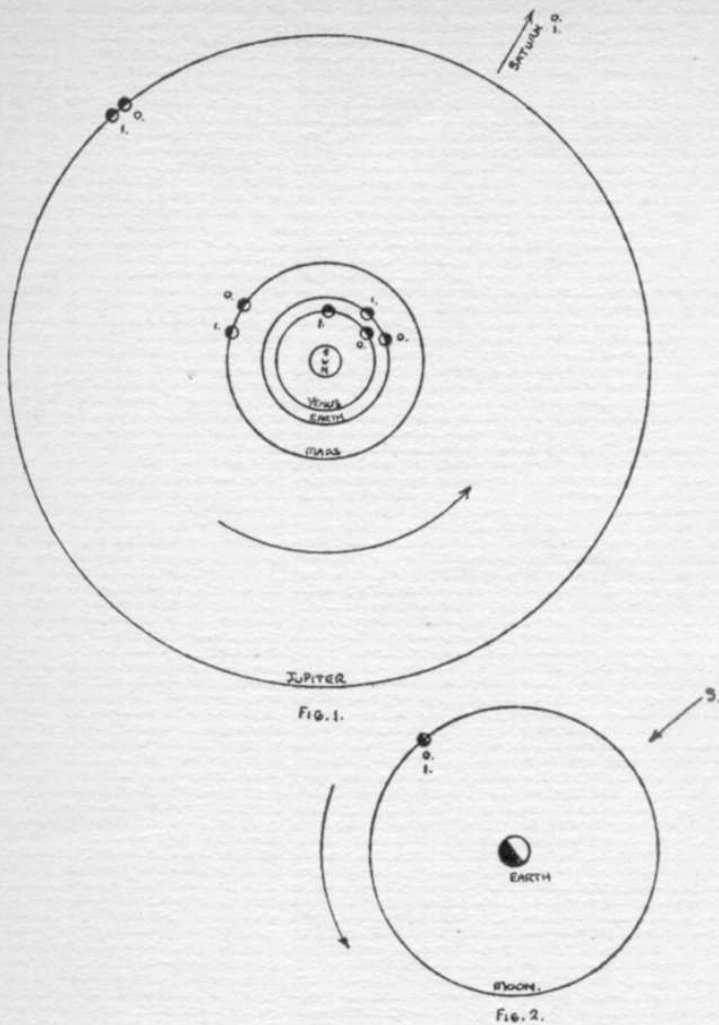
PERSONAL COLUMN

THE BRITISH U.F.O. RESEARCH ASSOCIATION comprises the twelve main British UFO societies. For details of membership and Journal, write to: Mrs. Lloyd, Hon. Sec., 9 Guilford Street, London, W.C.1.

VORTEXCRAFT IDEA, submitted to the Patent Office and Inventor's Club, may need support. 41 Roma Road, E.17.

"REPORT FROM EUROPE" Edited by Major Hans Petersen (Danish Air Force), Leader, Scandinavian UFO Information (SUFOI). Over 200 pages. 30/- inc. post. U.K. Order from Ronald Caswell, 309 Carters Mead, Harlow, Essex.

SPACE REVIEW publishes current news on astronomy and space research, including Fortean phenomena. Single copies 2s. 4d. (40c.), post free. From Miss S. Stebbing, 2 Station Road, Frimley, Surrey.



Figs. 1 and 2:

1. The Moon and Planets for mid-July 1964.
2. The Moon and Planets for mid-August 1964.

N.B.

Venus reaches Greatest Elongation West on August 29; this is to say that Venus has moved out to its farthest point from the Sun's Western limb. It is at this time, as it was for the Eastern Elongation, that Venus theoretically is at half phase.

On July 26 Venus will again be at Greatest Brilliancy, and will be very bright in the sky; except that this time Venus will be shining in the morning sky.

Opposition of Saturn will occur on August 24: for explanation see issue for July-August, 1963.

ALLEN'S BOOK SHELF

407 Chestnut Street,
P.O. Box 475,
Mt. Shasta,
California, U.S.A.

Agent for *Flying Saucer Review* and
recommended supplier of books on
UFO and kindred subjects

Write for free catalogue