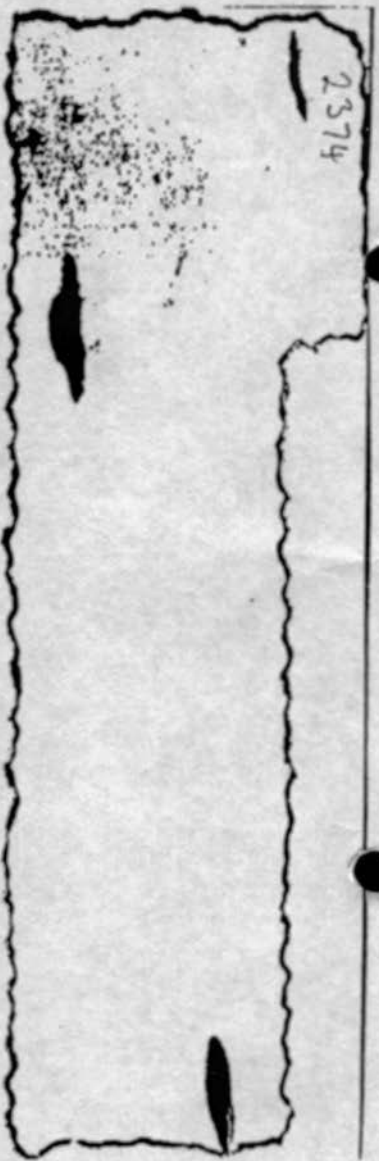


2374



● From the "News" on
November 30.

UFOs on crest of a wave?

THE picture ("News" centerpage, November 30) depicts objects that have every appearance of being wave clouds — caused by standing bar waves set up by the Alps.

These waves are caused by a notable airstream blowing across a hill or mountain range. As their name implies, they are stationary, as are any clouds formed, while the wind blows through them, and can extend to over 15 times the height of the range causing them; a series of them usually extends over the low ground downwind of the range.

Except at lower levels the airflow is generally very smooth and if the air is mostly dry with only one layer just sufficiently moist to become saturated at the top of the wave, there will be formed the classic lenticular (lens-shaped) cloud; in the picture shown the humidity is relatively low so that only in the

strongest parts of the waves is any cloud formed.

The two clouds on the left appear to mark the first two crests of the wave system set up by one group of mountains, while that on the right marks the first (or primary) wave crest caused by another group. The smoothness of the airflow usually makes the clouds appear smooth and laminar, as the one on the right, but in the largest cloud the top layer is becoming slightly unstable: it is a well-known fact that potentially unstable air can become actually unstable on the formation of clouds.

The structure of the clouds is caused by three or four layers of differing humidity with fairly sharp, defined boundaries; the layer with the highest humidity and greatest horizontal extent of cloud; one under this with a lower humidity and

a third with a slightly lower humidity — this fails to reach condensation level in the secondary wave at top left. In addition there is a hint of a very thin moist layer above all three producing a very thin cloud. Above and below all these the air is too dry for any cloud to be formed at all.

Lee waves also occur in England and if there are layers of higher and lower humidity alternating there can appear a "pile of plates" (a pile of lenticular clouds): I have seen this in Yorkshire. No doubt CFI subjects would regard this as a queue of UFOs in a "stack" waiting to land at a busy UFO "airport."

I have always thought that the stories of flying saucers with little green men getting out derive from a combination of lenticular clouds and the Aurora Borealis.

RICHARD F TINDALL
Poplar Cross,
Great Shefford

ATFORD

MAIL

Arnold page

News

1987