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*These strange sights are nothing new to this airline pilot—  
and they don't scare him any more*

## *The Flying Saucers I've Seen*

By H. A. SHANKLIN

Condensed from *Flying*\*

ONE SUNNY afternoon I was flying a DC-3 airliner along the Wichita-Kansas City airway. I had just turned north toward Topeka, when a silver disk sped across the nose of the ship, moving from the lower right part of the windshield to the upper left corner.

I stiffened in the seat. My hands gripped the control wheel. My eyes, I know, were bulging. At last I had seen one. A flying saucer!

I turned my head slightly to see if the co-pilot had noticed. But he was adjusting the prop controls, so I turned back and waited. In a moment, another disk sailed across in front of us. What was this, I thought, an invasion? I wished desperately for a camera. Lacking one, I resolved to study the things carefully. There would be no vague descriptions, nor doubts as to their size and shape and approximate speeds. I would look them over coolly so that I could give the military authorities concrete information about the space ships.

Breathing as if I were at 20,000 feet with no oxygen, I stared



straight ahead and waited. Two more came into view, following the same course as the others. All seemed to be traveling at the same speeds. I noticed that just before they went out of sight they seemed to pause and then shoot out into space with a terrific burst of speed.

One thing I was certain about now: these mysterious ships belonged to some type of outer-space military group, for the last saucer had a wing man just to his right and rear, a formation common to our Air Force. And comparing the space ships with the background terrain, I judged they were about the size of one of our four-engine airliners. Their shapes were the same as those reported by other observers: flattened saucers, with highly polished metal surfaces.

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Their manner of propulsion puzzled me, for I could see no flames nor any whirling parts.

After the two flying in formation had disappeared, I knew it would be best to tell the co-pilot, so that he could help verify the weird sight. After that I would ring for the hostess, so that she, too, could be a witness.

When the next disk came into view, I leaned over to speak with the co-pilot. When I did, the disk disappeared. Somewhat confounded, I straightened up again. The disk reappeared. I sat there moving from side to side. I know the co-pilot thought that I had blown a cylinder, but I was discovering the origin of my flying saucers.

They were caused by the sun reflecting on the farm ponds or tanks that dotted the land below us. I looked down at the little lakes and saw they were silver disks. The movement of their reflection across the windshield was caused by the speed of the plane passing over or by them.

I also discovered why the disks seemed to pause near the edge of the windshield and then fade with a burst of speed. It was because I unconsciously moved my head slightly to follow their line of flight. My head movement caused the pause and the sudden acceleration.

If we had passed over a cloud deck or I had varied our course a few degrees to either side, I never

would have discovered that my flying saucers were reflected images of farm ponds. I would have gone to my grave swearing by all that was holy that I had seen flying saucers. No argument could have torn that idea from my mind.

The strange part of it is that, although I have flown over 13,000 hours, this was the first time any such combination of sun's rays on water had fooled me. There is no doubt that I was completely convinced, for my co-pilot told me later that my face had turned white and my eyes had a glassy look.

Another windshield reflection so deceived a co-pilot of mine that I honestly believe it gave the lad, who was in his mid-20's, prematurely gray hair. We were flying out of Lubbock, Texas, towards Dallas on a gloomy black night. A high overcast altitude put us on top of scattered clouds. I was flying, and the co-pilot was staring dreamily through the windshield.

About 40 minutes out, I noticed through the wide breaks in the clouds a grass and brush fire just to the north of our course, on my side. There were two lines of fire, and I realized the ranchers were backfiring to halt the main blaze.

That's all I thought of the fire until we had just passed it. Suddenly the co-pilot reared in his seat, and cried, "Look out! Break left!"

As I banked, he whirled in his seat and looked wildly down and back. "It passed right under us,"

he exclaimed, in a quavering voice.

"What passed?" I asked.

"A round saucer with flames shooting out of its sides," he said, his own eyes as big as saucers.

"I'm glad it was round," I told him. "I'd sure hate to meet a square saucer."

What had happened was that his windshield had not been reflecting anything because of the dark landscape and the scattered clouds. Then, all at once, it picked up the two wavering lines of brush fire.

Scanning the skies is to an airman a means of survival. A pilot is like a motorist forever approaching an intersection. Always you look to the left and the right, up and down, sideways. And you don't fly very long before you realize that your eyes, viewing things against the immense backdrop of sky, are unreliable.

Light rays reflected from wisps of clouds, dust layers aloft, and layers of warm air with high moisture content, make you see things that aren't there. Your eyes record the illusions honestly; your imagination gives them substance.

For example, the disks over the Sangre de Cristo mountains of northern New Mexico have been giving my imagination a workout for the last ten years. On the route from Dallas to Denver our course angles us near this range in the vicinity of southern Colorado. One afternoon, when there were lens-shaped clouds over these moun-

tains, and the lower air contained much moisture content, I saw silvery disks fluttering southward.

I quit breathing. These might be space ships sent to watch our atomic installations in New Mexico. I picked up the mike with the thought of warning our company radio operator about the visitors. But just then, from the corner of my eye, I saw a silvery flash from the base of a high cloud. Then another. I put down the mike, knowing that I had been fooled by a reflection. Many times since then, when the moisture content of the air seems to be right, I've watched the disks shooting over the Sangre de Cristo mountains.

I have tried to put port holes on them, jet exhausts, and identification marks. Sometimes I succeed in installing those accessories on the flying disks, especially when my side window is dusty, or I'm tired.

One evening, in that same vicinity, my heart was nearly jarred from its mounts by an awesome sight high in the sky: a red disk traveling eastward at a steady clip. The co-pilot and I rubbed our eyes, and muttered. It was many minutes before we realized that it was a translucent balloon catching the rays of the setting sun.

I don't say there are no flying saucers, either Earth or Mars-made. I've just never seen one. And I do know you can see many things in the sky that look like flying saucers but are not.