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BEAR TRAP A New Suspense Novel by **ALAN E. NOURSE**
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EXCITING REPORT by **CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE**

**shapes
in
the
sky**

by **CIVILIAN SAUCER
INTELLIGENCE**

**More sounds in the sky—
sonic booms and skyquakes,
sometimes attributed to
jets—sometimes saucers.**

"WINDOW - SMASHING
BLAST ROCKS L.A.!"
shouted the headlines of the
Los Angeles *Herald-Express*
on May 22, 1957. "Frantic call-
ers last night jammed tele-
phone switchboards at City
Hall and police stations. A
police 'disaster believed pre-
sent' alert was issued and then
cancelled...off-duty officers
stood by...sidewalks were
cracked... Several Hollywood
Hills citizens reported that
they were cut by shattered
glass... The blast was attrib-
uted to a jet plane crashing
the sound barrier." But the
next day's Los Angeles *Times*
reported that this attribution
had had to be withdrawn. It
editorialized: "The roll has
been called of all probable
sources of the mystery blast—
called for convenience 'sonic'
—which hit the city and
many suburbs Tuesday night.
There were no jet planes up,
it is said, no rocket engines
let go, no one mislaid any
dynamite, and so on... Maybe
we will have to attribute the
noise to gremlins in a flying
saucer."

The incident is typical of
hundreds that have taken
place in the last few years.

*The Research Section of Civilian Saucer Intelligence continues to dis-
cuss acoustic phenomena, "sounds in the sky," in their monthly column
on UFO sightings and reports, written specially for this magazine. CSI
publishes a newsletter and has an extensive file of material on Ufology.*

These aerial disturbances called "skyquakes" seem to happen everywhere; but some places are particularly favored—or cursed. Los Angeles is one of them. The May 21st detonation was only one of a series that began March 5th, 1957. The *Herald-Express* of that date gave it two-inch scarlet scareheads: "JET BLAST RIPS L.A.! Homes Damaged By Worst Sonic Shock." CSI member Idabel Epperson told us: "It felt like a huge truck hitting the house—by far the worst we've ever felt. We have had 'sonic blasts' in the past, but they have never covered such a wide area." (The March 5th shock was felt over a circle at least 30 miles in diameter.) There was no explanation. "Investigation of all aircraft manufacturers and military air bases within a 100-mile radius of L. A. was made, without success," reported regional CAA administrator W. P. Plett three weeks later (*Mirror-News*, Mar. 26).

On the evening of May 19th, the area affected was bigger than ever—from Santa Susana in the northwest to Baldwin Park, fifty miles southeast. "Many fled from their homes, thinking that an earthquake had struck." This time, for a change, the shock was not blamed on jet planes, but on rocket-engine testing at Chatsworth (a mere forty miles from Baldwin Park!)

True, replied the Rocketdyne Corp., it was testing engines; but it does this all day long without causing any alarm; the tests that evening were "normal in every respect." The Weather Bureau speculated that "a heavy and very high cloud deck may have acted as a reflecting medium, to step up the noise" but had to add that "locally it was clear. Visibility was excellent." The hypothetical "cloud deck," for which there was no evidence, went into the headlines, as if a fact: "ROCKET BLAST BOUNCES OFF CLOUD, JOLTS L.A." (*Herald-Express*, May 20.)

Two days later came the big May 21st shock. Again, on the morning of the 24th, "hundreds of frightened people ran into the streets," according to the *Herald-Express*; and the irate City Council "Acts To End Sonic Blast Terror"—by demanding an explanation from their local Civil Defense Director, Col. Richard F. Lynch. However, Lynch was unable to furnish any (*L.A. Times*, May 28). "Aside from the physical damage, these sonic blasts could have brought about panic-provoked incidents of serious proportions," fumed Councilman Harold Henry. Not knowing what else to do, the City Council called for a Congressional investigation.

As we see by all this, it is

usually taken for granted nowadays that any unexplained concussion is a "sonic boom" caused by jet aircraft. At first, some other cause may be assumed—local boiler or gas explosions, blasting, earthquakes—but these are easily eliminated by a little checking. The finger of suspicion then customarily points at the jet fighter plane. There are exceptions: "A thundering boom that knocked at least one Florence resident out of bed Friday night was still a mystery... it might have been caused by a floating mine exploding on the beach." (*Portland Oregonian*, Feb. 17, 1957.) And back in the days when there was nothing in the skies to pin the blame on, "subterranean noises" used to be a favored explanation: it was explained then that the sound only seemed to come from the sky.

Some sonic booms are caused by jet aircraft. When a jet plane pulls out of a supersonic dive, the shock wave that piled up in front of it continues on at the speed of sound in the direction of the dive, and strikes the ground with explosive force a few seconds later. The crucial question is: how big are the effects of a plane-caused sonic boom? According to a recent article that Senator Barry Goldwater (R., Ariz.) wrote for the *Aircraft Industries Association of America*,

they are small and localized. They can break windows. But, unless the plane dives to a very low altitude, they cannot crack pavement; they cannot crack plaster walls "installed according to most building codes"; they cannot shake the ground; they cannot "structurally damage even the flimsiest shack." And they are felt over only a rather small area. Goldwater points out that even the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs did no damage outside of a sixteen-mile circle. The 1957 Los Angeles skyquakes, according to residents' claims, cracked plaster over an area two or three times as wide!

Of course, the Goldwater article, written for the aircraft industry, can be expected to minimize the damaging effects of aircraft-caused booms; and the sufferers from a skyquake, with an eye to compensation, can be expected to maximize their sufferings. Nonetheless, it seems quite evident that the effects of these "skyquake" shock waves are on an altogether larger scale than anything present-day aircraft could produce.

It should be noted, however, that even at the epicenter, the damage is never catastrophic. It seems safe to infer from this that these skyquakes must originate at very high altitude.

Several articles have appeared that discuss skyquakes

on the assumption that they are caused by airplanes. According to Corey Ford ("The Truth About The Sonic Boom," *Sat. Eve. Post*, Dec. 4, 1954), plane-caused sonic booms were first noticed in March, 1950. "As soon as the cause was determined, the aviation industry and the U. S. Air Force acted promptly to safeguard the public. The strictest limitations were imposed. Today, supersonic tests are conducted only over the desert or open water. Any eager jet jockey who attempts a sonic buzz job over a populated district is subject to severe disciplinary action." In the same article are cited: Jan. 6, 1951: Los Angeles rocked by mysterious explosion. Dallas, Texas, Feb. 26, 1952: residents scurry into streets; four previous blasts in the same place. San Francisco area, April 8, 1953: frightened residents suspect earthquake. Nassau County, L.I., April 30, 1953: near-panic caused by "thunderous explosion." Chicago, June 24, 1953: mid-morning explosion starts "wild flying-saucer rumors." Tacoma, Wash.: windows smashed. Ottawa, Canada: plaster falls. Van Nuys, Calif.: houses sway, and residents see dark smoke-puff, expanding and turning white. Norfolk, Virginia; Boston, Mass.: are these "populated districts" or not? Ford does not tell us that any of these

skyquakes was traced to an airplane; he merely takes it for granted that this must have been the case—without, apparently, feeling any astonishment at such widespread, flagrant, and persistent transgression of the "strict limitations" on supersonic dives by jet aircraft. In none of these cases does he mention any "severe disciplinary action" being taken; and yet—"what our startled cities had been hearing was the so-called sonic boom—latest phenomenon of the air age we live in." Was it?

The hundreds of instances discourage any attempt to give a representative account of the skyquakes of the last few years. For New Jersey alone, our clipping file—which is by no means complete—shows twenty since February, 1953. For example: At about 10:15 a.m. on April 2, 1957, a "mysterious blast" was heard and felt over a good two-thirds of the 8000 square miles of New Jersey, and in parts of eastern Pennsylvania. According to the *N.Y. Herald Tribune* of April 3, the concussion was felt from Dover, in the north, to Cape May, in the south—a distance of 150 miles. In Trenton, it cracked sidewalks and shook the State House. In Martinsville, a sidewalk and a swimming pool were cracked. Windows were smashed near New Bruns-

wick, and a nightshift printer was thrown out of bed in Whitehouse. "McGuire Air Base denied that any of its jets had been operating." As in Los Angeles, local politicians felt they ought to "do something about it," and Rep. Peter Frelinghuysen Jr. asked the Defense Department to investigate. The result was interesting: "Air Force and Defense Department officials said they conducted all-day investigations but thus far have been unable to uncover anything that might explain the jarring explosion. They added that similar blasts have been occurring all over the country in recent years and *they have never yet been able to determine the cause.*" (Newark Star-Ledger, April 4; our italics.) While we were writing this, the following item appeared: "Sonic Boom Jars Jersey!... A loud noise startled New Jersey shortly before 11 a.m. yesterday. It was heard in five counties. In Elizabeth and Verona, householders rushed outside. In Teaneck, a lady said she was so surprised she fell out of her chair." (N.Y. News, July 24, 1957.) So much for Jersey skyquakes; we can be confident we have not heard the last of them.

The following cases are of some interest because of "something," evidently not a jet plane, seen in the air at the time of the concussion:

Near Burlington, Vermont,

at 11 p.m. on January 29, 1952, two "heavy explosions" were felt; one woman complained that she was nearly shaken out of bed. Two cracks a quarter of an inch wide, one of them a mile long, appeared in the ground in the northern end of the city; yet seismographs recorded no earthquake. According to the N.Y. Times, Jan. 31, "flickering lights" were seen; no details given.

The Troy (N.Y.) Record, Oct. 10, 1952, tells of something being seen in the sky at the time of "a thundering explosion that rocked large portions of the Troy area at 11:25 a.m. yesterday morning... Conjecture likened the double shock to the unexplained jolt reported Wednesday in Poughkeepsie." Many reported that the blast was accompanied by a flash of light. Several people told of seeing a "skywriting plane" which exploded. A policeman saw "heavy black smoke" after the explosion, and a "circling plane, which he thought was in trouble." A cemetery caretaker looked up and saw an object which "had the speed of a jet plane and seemed to be headed east, leaving considerable smoke in its wake."

But it was definitely ascertained that no plane was over the area. Was this a UFO? If the maneuvers reported by the policeman are authentic, it probably was; but the information is too scanty to

rule out conclusively the hypothesis that a bolide exploded over Troy. (For what it is worth, "denials came that a meteor had exploded.")

If skyquakes cannot as a rule be pinned on jet planes, it seems natural to suppose that they might be attributable to flying saucers, making maneuvers at supersonic speed at high altitude. Unfortunately for this idea, investigation shows very little direct evidence in support of it. We know of very few unambiguous reports of a typical UFO being seen in the sky at the time of a typical skyquake. The Troy case just cited was equivocal. That which follows is more definite.

On the morning of January 7, 1954, a little before 4:30, an explosion of tremendous force broke windows in Dieppe, France, and was felt throughout the entire Seine-Inferieure department. Just before the blast, the sky had lit up in a brilliant burst of orange. One might assume that a great meteor had exploded. However, Aime Michel, in his book *The Truth About Flying Saucers*, tells us that a baker in Arras had seen an orange disc "as big as the full moon, but much brighter," which *hovered* for several seconds before describing a semi-circle and taking off toward the coast. A moment later came the brilliant orange light and then

the skyquake that rocked Dieppe.

Another case exhibiting an association between aerial concussions and unorthodox sky objects appeared in Leonard Stringfield's C.R.I.F.O. *Orbit*, Nov. 2, 1956:

On Sept. 12, 1956, at 11:40 a.m., three sharp blasts within twenty seconds were heard in the sky over Corona, California. Houses shook and windows rattled. The sound seemed to come from the southeast. The Corona newspaper, after some fruitless inquiries, concluded that the explosions must have been sonic booms. However, it later developed that County Schools Consultant Dwight Lewis, "an erstwhile scoffer at flying saucer stories," who had been watching a nearby forest fire, had been astonished to see "a glittering oval-shaped aircraft" emerge from the smoke cloud at about 5000 feet altitude. It was "about the size of a close formation of eleven B-29s, cigar-shaped, with one side dark while the other had many spots that glistened like light metal... it was near the smoke, but was engulfed in a black oil-looking smoke of its own." This object "sort of wallowed down the valley...it seemed to be interested in the fires," and when apparently over Elsinore to the southeast, "its smoke seemed to puff in and out about three times or more,

like it was breathing, and there seemed to be an explosion." The time given by Mr. Lewis was 11:30-11:35 a.m.

Even this, it will be noted, leaves room for some doubt as to whether the UFO was really the cause of the Corona skyquake; Mr. Lewis, though near Corona, does not mention hearing any sound after the apparent explosion off to the southeast. (Of course, if it was really several miles away, there would be a lag of a minute or so between seeing the explosion and feeling the blast wave.)

A New Jersey National Guard pilot recently added something extremely important to the Jersey skyquake of April 2nd, 1957—if we could be absolutely positive that it is authentic. The pilot concerned is vouched for by several people as apparently trustworthy, but we have not yet met him personally. According to his story, he was flying a private plane over northern New Jersey on the morning of April 2nd. Just before the widely-felt blast took place, his plane radio picked up a conversation between an unidentified air base and one of their jet pilots on an intercept mission to investigate a "bogey." Then came the crash of the blast. Immediately after the concussion, he heard the pilot tell his base: "I did not—repeat,

not—break the sound barrier. *The object did.*"

It must be admitted that, in the present state of our knowledge, the case for connecting skyquakes with UFOs is not exactly overwhelming. If saucers are responsible for skyquakes at all, it seems that they usually generate the blast at such high altitudes as not to be noticed by ground observers. Perhaps, if we had access to radar data, something more significant might emerge.

But one thing, at least, is certain. Skyquakes may have increased in frequency in the jet age (or, if you prefer to think of it that way, in the "UFO age" that dates from 1947), but they are not a new phenomenon. Mysterious, repetitive explosions in the sky have been known for centuries, under other names. Charles Fort collected hundreds of examples. On Melida (now Mljet), an Adriatic island off what is now Yugoslavia, aerial detonations, some of "tremendous" force, were heard for three years, from March, 1822 to March, 1825; sometimes hundreds were heard in a day. The sounds were in the sky: they could not be heard underground. At Comrie, in Scotland, concussions were felt at intervals from 1597 through July 25, 1921, and likely enough are still continuing; they were originally supposed

to be earthquake shocks, but according to an 1839 resident, "In every case, the sound seemed high in the air," and moreover, on several occasions black powder fell at Comrie after a shock. (This is a concomitant that has not yet been reported in modern skyquakes; but in a city, it would doubtless pass unnoticed.) East Haddam, Connecticut, has had a reputation for mysterious explosive noises since before the white man came; these "Moodus sounds," as the Indians called them, are heard every few years, as at Comrie. On the North Sea coast, such unaccountable explosive sounds are known as "mist-pouffers"; they are frequently heard over the North Sea, especially in misty weather. (See L. Palazzo, *Mistpouffers* (Budapest, 1912), and similar English examples in Fort, pp. 406ff, 438, 472ff.) In Bengal, India, they are known as "Barisal Guns." However, these repetitive concussions are typically muffled and distant-sounding, unlike the modern skyquake. More obviously a skyquake was the "great explosion" that alarmed London, Oct. 6, 1863; since there were then no jet planes to take the blame, when no terrestrial explosion could be found the concussion was called an earthquake. The phenomenon was repeated on Oct. 30, 1868 and again on Nov. 20, 1887. On the latter occasion it was attributed to

the explosion of a bolide, because a few people said there was something in the sky (Fort, p. 447f.) Nov. 16, 1895: two violent explosions heard in London. Nov. 17, 1905: "consternation" caused in Reading, forty miles west of London, by explosive sounds in the sky at 11:30, 1:30, and 3:30 o'clock; attributed to bolides. Morning of Nov. 19, 1912: a terrific explosion heard in the air over Reading, London, and other points in an area at least fifty miles wide; called an "airquake" and attributed to a "meteoric explosion"; but it was repeated, with lesser intensity, over Reading on the 20th at 1:45, and the 21st at 3:30 (Fort, 511f.) (The singular preference of these Reading-London skyquakes for the autumn months is unmistakable, and incomprehensible on any "natural" grounds.) Jan. 12, 1916: buildings in Cincinnati shaken by explosion in sky. Sept. 25, 1919: violent sky explosion over Reading, England—attributed to "an explosion of a natural type up in the air."

None of these pre-1947 skyquakes involved definitely non-meteoritic aerial objects. Here is a case—perhaps not a skyquake in the strict sense—that did.

On July 2, 1907, Burlington, Vermont was jarred by a "terrific" explosion. Several residents said that they had seen a yellow ball of fire come

out of the northern sky and descend into College Street, where it exploded with a "deafening sound." A horse was knocked to the ground by the concussion. One person claimed he saw the fireball "rebound" into the sky again. About a block away, ex-Governor Woodbury was talking with Bishop John S. Michaud when the blast occurred. Looking down College Street, they saw what Michaud described as "a torpedo-shaped body some 300 feet away, suspended in the air about 50 feet above the tops of the buildings. In size, it was about 6 feet long by 8 inches in diameter, the shell or cover having a dark appearance, with here and there tongues of fire issuing from spots on the surface resembling red-hot, unburnished copper. Although stationary when first noticed, this object soon began to move, rather slowly, and disappeared to the southward. As it moved, the covering seemed rupturing in places, and through these the intensely red flames issued." (*Monthly Weather Review*, 1907, p. 310).

Let us sum up our case—such as it is:

(1) Mysterious aerial explosions—not to be explained as meteoric explosions, since they repeat in favoured localities—have long been known.

(2) However, there ~~has~~ ~~been~~

a marked increase in the frequency of such occurrences in the past few years—at least in the cities of the United States.

(3) Although it is rather difficult to distinguish these skyquakes from "sonic booms" caused by supersonic aircraft, the modern ones appear to be definitely larger-scale phenomena than aircraft would be capable of producing.

(4) Moreover, if they are caused by aircraft, this implies that strict military regulations are being violated by jet pilots with extraordinary and scandalous frequency—which seems highly unlikely.

(5) Moreover, we have the statements of the Defense Department itself that in the great majority of cases it is impossible to trace the concussions to aircraft.

(6) There is one piece of direct testimony that a skyquake was caused by a UFO; but this is at present unverified. There is also some suggestive evidence—not a great deal—in support of this hypothesis.

(7) Time, we hope, will tell.

The next article in this series will leave the ear and pass to the nose: we will present some noteworthy examples of Smells From The Sky.