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20 CENTS

JUNE 9, 1952

# LIFE

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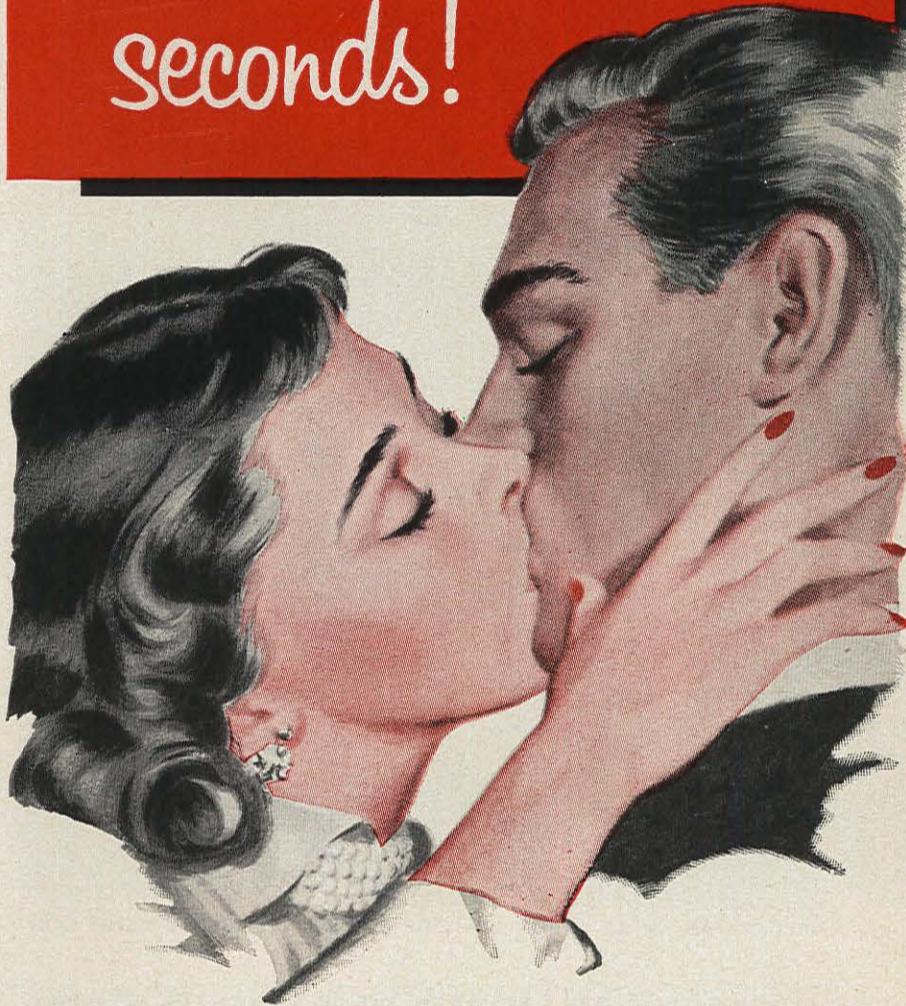
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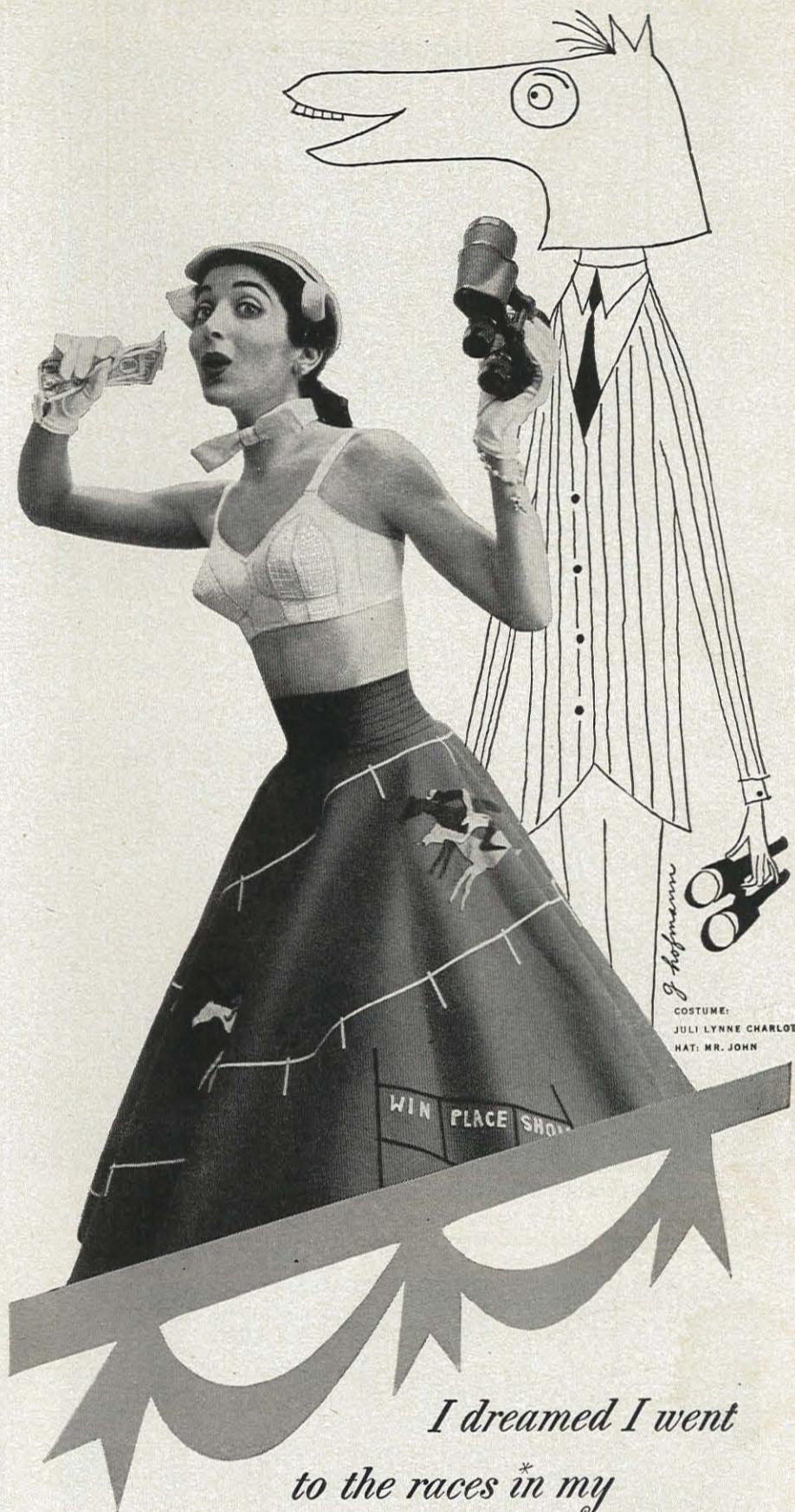
### LIFE'S COVER

This week LIFE departs from its practice of reprinting its cover in the space at left. On the cover, Martha Boss, the country's top bridal model, wears working clothes for a photographic sitting—a nylon tulle and lace gown (William Cahill, \$155), a cap and veil (Robert Brodheim, \$35). At left, she is in the gown she will wear for her own wedding on June 14. Martha, who has been a bride's magazine cover girl three times in the past six months, is prized by the vast U.S. wedding industry (pp. 118-130) for her young, ethereal look. She is 21, will marry Jose Amadeo, who lives in Puerto Rico but is now a student at Jefferson Medical College Hospital.

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PICTURE OF "SAUCERS" was submitted to LIFE by reader of April 7 article. But geophysicist has established it as a special type of cloud formation.

## SAUCER REACTIONS

They range from plausible theories to nonsense

by ROBERT E. GINNA JR.

The April 7, 1952 issue of LIFE, in which Bradford Darrach and I examined "the case for flying saucers," provoked a tremendous barrage of letters. Some have been nonsensical, some philosophical, some have contained provocative and plausible theories. Not only has the story prompted an unprecedented response from the readers, but more and more letters are still coming in.

Many readers are apparently resigned to visitations from space already and expect a landing momentarily. "We should start construction of a suitable landing field for them," declared one reader. Others believe flying saucers to be far more than a study for scientists. "God is trying to tell the world something," says one reader. Another adds darkly, "He has sent the final sign. . . ."

From the chief of the U.S. Air Force's saucer-investigating project the article brought a note of appreciation for helping their investigations. "A considerable number of observers have written to us with valuable information," he wrote, "because they were encouraged by the LIFE article." And the further reports that have since come in will continue to help the project. One in particular concerns the celebrated "Lubbock Lights," which LIFE reported as having been seen racing frequently over Lubbock, Texas. The professors who saw them assumed the altitude was 50,000 feet, noted their rate of change was 30° of arc per second, and accordingly estimated the lights' speed at 18,000 mph. Now Dr. R. S. Underwood, of the Department of Mathematics at Texas Technological College, has written LIFE that he was able to triangulate them on a September night last year and concluded that their altitude was about 2,100 feet. This means that the lights' speed was about 750 mph—a piece of information that may bring the Air Force one more solid piece of evidence.

Another contribution was in the form of a series of photographs which Robert Retzinger took near Palm Springs, Calif. last March. Dr. Ronald Ives, distinguished geophysicist of Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory, studied the pictures and concluded that they showed the generation of a *Cumulus lenticularis*, or lens-shaped cloud. This type of cloud, common in the area, is formed when compressed and heated air pushes up moist air so that it condenses into lens-shaped clouds. The clouds are often sheared into sections by higher winds, as can be seen in the picture at the top of the page. It is easy to see how a cloud like this, reflecting the lights below, might be taken for a flying saucer.

There was, of course, a minority of readers who dissented from the conclusions in the article. Some still argued that the saucers were super-secret U.S. weapons; LIFE's article had dismissed this argument on the ground that the government would hardly allow one branch of the service to spend vast sums of money on a saucer investigation which would have the primary effect of fooling another government branch even more completely than the enemy. Others maintained that the evidence was not precise enough, although the article had pointed out

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25

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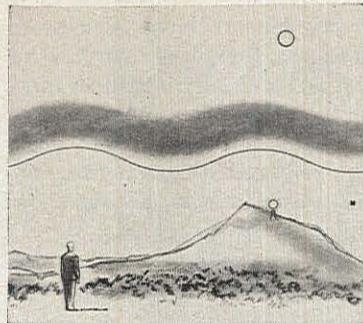


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"MIRAGE" occurs when light on land is reflected by air surfaces and made to appear as a bigger light in sky. But this phenomenon would explain only a few saucer sightings.

**LIFE'S REPORTS** CONTINUED

that nearly all the people who made the measurements LIFE reported were experienced observers. In any case, out of the more than 800 reports in the Air Force files, too many are too convincing to be brushed off.

It is only natural that many theories about the nature and *modus operandi* of the flying saucers have been offered since the article appeared. The greatest temptation, of course, is to explain them by attributing the evidence to natural phenomena. And one of the most interesting of the natural phenomena theories is that of Frank Bryan, a geologist of Groesbeck, Texas. He points out that great strata of air of different temperatures—i.e., inversion layers—occur over the flat, arid plains of West Texas and southeast New Mexico known as the Llano Estacado. It is Mr. Bryan's theory that mirages are caused when light is reflected from an inversion layer as from a great mirror. Actually most authorities agree that mirages are caused by refraction or bending of the light through the layer and over the horizon as if by a series of prisms. At any rate, Mr. Bryan believes that such a layer may be like rolling waves, with concave undersurfaces, which act as reflectors, catching and magnifying the images of certain light sources on the ground or in the sky.

The theory is not a new one; it was mentioned in the April 7 article. But because it sounds so convincing, the reflection and refraction theory has become an extremely popular one with certain of those people who are not yet prepared to believe the evidence of flying saucers.

LIFE took the reflection theory to Dr. Ronald Ives, the Cornell geophysicist who recognized the lens-shaped cloud shown on page 20. Dr. Ives is also one of the nation's outstanding authorities on mirages and has spent many years in the areas of the Southwest where the reports of

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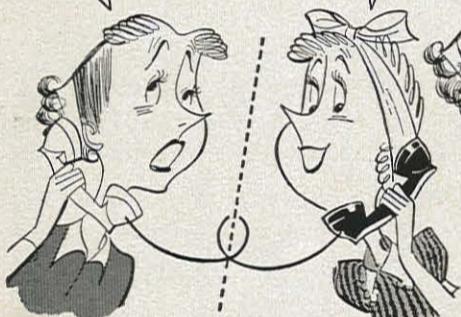
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### LIFE'S REPORTS CONTINUED

flying saucers have been most frequent. He makes clear that he has not seen a flying saucer himself, but he is convinced that reflections or refractions of even the most remarkable nature will not satisfactorily account for many of the sightings.

Dr. Ives points out that the reflectivity of temperature disparities in the air is so slight (much less than 1%) that it reduces the intensity of the light source to a negligible degree—far less bright than the brilliantly luminous objects that have so frequently been seen. Mr. Bryan and a few other dissenters have speculated that these inversion layers may ripple along like the surface of a lake, catching the light from some source like a headlight and making the image appear to race across the sky. But Dr. Ives notes that this would require ideal circumstances. First, assuming that the reflectivity of the layer were great (and it is known to be small) and that a concave reflector effect could be achieved by an exact curving of the layer, the "saucer" would not race by the viewer; it would give an instantaneous flash, and then disappear as soon as the observer or light source moved. The intensely bright light and regular maneuverings of some saucers sighted cannot very well be explained by refraction either.

Strange reflections or refraction mirages have undoubtedly been responsible for a certain number of flying saucer tales, but it is inconceivable that they could satisfactorily explain the 10 sightings that LIFE reported in detail, or most of the still unsolved sightings in the Air Force's bulging files.

The number of reports of new flying saucers did not increase after the LIFE article, but it has not diminished either. Newspapers have since carried the news that unidentified, cigar-shaped objects have been winging over Australia. A similar report came from Arizona. The Air Force has noted other saucer accounts from as far away as Malaya.

Meanwhile the Air Force is continuing its investigation and, in fact, is enlarging it—a considerable change of heart from 2½ years ago when the Air Force announced the project was closed and implied that flying saucers were nonsense. The extent of renewed interest is indicated by the fact that Secretary Finletter had his first briefing on the subject by the project officers only a few weeks ago. To aid in the undertaking LIFE is making its widespread news services available to Air Force Intelligence for the gathering of pertinent data.

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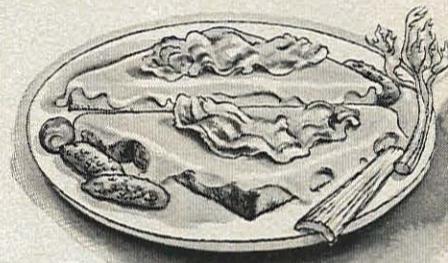
The most interesting of the new reports are accounts of sightings prior to 1947, when the saucer epidemic started. Edwin M. Hudson, an experienced navigator who was in the Merchant Marine during World War II, has offered a detailed description of a remarkable fireball which he observed over Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in July 1943. His description agrees in nearly every respect with the bizarre green fireballs seen in the American Southwest five years later. Assuming that these are not the common variety of noisy, blue-green meteors, it gives pause to those who say that they are American or Soviet weapons. It seems incredible that our technology or Russia's could have produced them by 1943.

LIFE readers can aid the search for the answer to the mystery by reporting the sighting of any strange aerial objects to the nearest Air Force representatives. If you possibly can, photograph any such object you see. At least try to note down all the details you can—color, shape, brightness, kind of motion and direction. If you have time, hold a coin out in front of you until it just hides the object. Measure the distance from the coin to your eye. Try to judge the elevation of the object by moving the coin up to it from the horizon and counting how many coin widths it takes. Note the object's relationship to clouds, and what the clouds look like, and whether the object passes between or in front of any landmarks of a known distance. Try to time how long it takes for the object to pass from one point to another on the horizon. From such notes the Air Force experts may be able to make rough but useful determinations of the size, distance and speed of the object, all of which will help in their effort to find an eventual explanation.



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