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THE EXPERIMENT BEGINS



•The vehicle
vanished in a rainstorm,
dissolving in the
water like a spoonful of salt. •

ANTI MATTER

It was one in the afternoon on June 6, the story goes, when something roared out of the sky in Dundy County, Nebraska. It looked like an immense, blazing meteor, but when it hit the ground, it skipped over the earth for about half a mile before it disappeared into a draw.

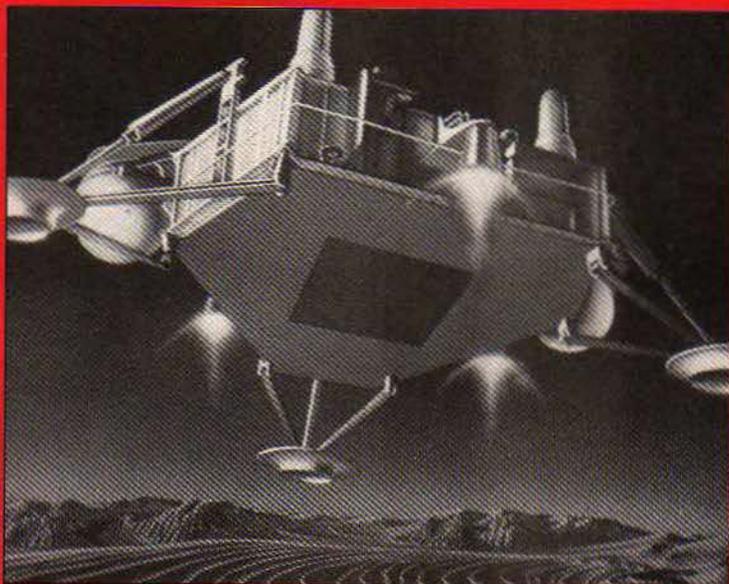
Local cowboy John Ellis and his crew rode furiously toward the mysterious object. And as they approached, legend has it, they saw pieces of machinery scattered along the path. The pieces were so hot, they claimed, that the surrounding grass was scorched, preventing the cowboys from getting anywhere near the site.

One newspaper account even stated that where the object touched the earth, the ground was sandy and bare of grass. "The sand was fused to an unknown depth over a space about twenty feet wide by eighty feet long," the story claimed, "and the melted stuff was still bubbling and hissing." Even more incredible, the story went, when cowboy Alf Williamson stared at the object his face blistered, and his hair was singed to a crisp.

The next day investigators allegedly came to the site and found one object resembling the blade of a propeller screw and another resembling a wheel. The vehicle itself proved to be cylindrical, 10 feet in diameter and 50 feet long. It was composed of a remarkably light but tough metal.

Another crashed-saucer story? Perhaps.

But what makes this one so remarkable is that it is supposed to have taken place in 1884. The story appeared in a June 1884 issue of the *Nebraska Nugget*, a weekly news-



UFO UPDATE

paper published in Holdrege. The same story was reprinted in the *Lincoln Daily Journal* on June 8. The editor of that paper even went so far as to suggest that the object was a "vessel belonging originally to another planet."

Did it actually happen? Inez Tecker, eighty-two and president of the Dundy County Historical Society, says there was a John Ellis and that she knew him long ago. But she has no idea whether the story with which his name has long been associated is true.

Ida Toler, eighty-eight, a lifelong resident of the county and

a keen student of its history, first heard the story about 20 years ago and recently interviewed several old-timers to find out what, if anything, they knew about it. The result of her investigations: "Most people just thought that it was too far-fetched to be real."

Betty Loudon, a research associate at the Nebraska State Historical Society, agrees. Researching the yarn, Loudon found a follow-up story in the June 10, 1884, issue of the *Daily State Journal*. What remained of the vehicle vanished in a "tremendous rainstorm," the newspaper reported. It dissolved in water "like a spoonful of salt."

And that is precisely the substance with which we should take the story. University of Nebraska folklorist Roger Welsh, who investigated the incident, says, "It made little dent in the county's historical memory."

He sums it up this way: "It was a very long time ago. It was a remote place. There's just no way anyone can know exactly what did or did not take place." —JEROME CLARK