

THEY'LL SEND OUT A "SAUCER-QUIZ"

By *DESMOND ZWAR*

TEN men will sit down in a Melbourne office next month to talk seriously about the latest "flying saucer" reports.

They are a banker, four engineers, a journalist, two industrial chemists and two clerks. They are the Australian Flying Saucer Investigation Committee.

If you've seen a "flying saucer" and reported it, you may be asked by the committee to reply to a questionnaire containing 45 questions.

These are some of the questions—practical, factual, probing:

"What time of the day did you see it? How long was it visible? Was there any thunder? Was it a clear day?"

"Did you take good notice of its shape? Was it like a cigar, sausage, saucer or disc?"

"Was it as big as a full moon, or just a pin-point of brilliant light? Did you notice the color?"

"Did it make any noise or was there just silence? Did it emit

noise or was there just silence? Did it emit sparks or have a glowing tail?"

Twenty-eight strange reports have come to the committee from all over Australia since it was formed last February. The 28th was the report by veteran ANA pilot Captain Douglas Barker that he saw "a metallic mushroom-shaped object" flying at high speed over the Yarra Valley in daylight on New Year's Day.

Others have told the committee that they have seen cigar-shaped planes spinning discs

diving sausages rotating saucers in storms, in broad daylight and at dead of night.

The committee was formed when six members of the Astronomical Society of Victoria decided that somebody ought to investigate flying saucer reports.

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Members decided to write to people who had reported having seen saucers and, if possible, to interview them.

Now they're going to ask "witnesses" to fill in questionnaires.

At the end of the report, the interviewer describes the witness's reliability — "good," "fair" or "poor."

The committee say that 71 of the sights they have

investigated are inexplicable.

Journalist Donald Thomson, chairman of the committee, says: "There's something new and strange in the sky — and it's worth looking into.

"If they're space ships from another planet, then they're behaving very strangely.

"If they're just reflections of light, then they're very realistic."

He added: "We have no sufficiently reliable evidence to come to any dogmatic conclusions. But finally, backed by a solid analysis of reports, I think we'll be able to give some opinion."

One of the most striking reports came from an ex-RAAF pilot officer, in Adelaide. One Sunday morning last February, he and his wife were sitting on the verandah of their home.

Suddenly, out of the sky shot two rapidly-revolving discs. They were a short distance apart and

getting closer to the ground. Then they soared and disappeared. The officer got his field-glasses

officer got his field-glasses and a few minutes later they reappeared.

The discs approached each other, almost met, and then one banked into a steep climb. He could watch only one disc at a time, and when the climbing body had sped out of sight he looked for the other, but it had gone.

On his card, filed carefully away by the committee secretary, his witness "rating" is described as "good."

Months later, an Elwood man described the same thing to the committee.

Then a few weeks later, a Brisbane woman saw a cigar-shaped object, with fluorescent lights glowing inside. It passed silently over the skies at 2 a.m. It disappeared.

Many other reports have come to the committee's postal address — Box 5278, at the Melbourne GPO. More are invited.

Sceptics on "saucers"

say . . .

PEOPLE DO SEE THEM BUT—

By a Special Correspondent

PEOPLE DO see flying saucers. They DO see an assorted range of celestial crockery, vegetables and other apparitions. To that extent, scepticism seems to be weakening.

But are they seeing what they think they're seeing? That's the real question.

In the face of expert testimony, it is being more generally admitted in the coldest official quarters that there is no ready explanation for EVERY strange object sighted.

We may have our doubts about some of the

more ornamental reports from the United States, where the competition in sighting flying saucers and little green men is as intense as in other fields of American life.

The observation over the Yarra Valley on New

The observation over the Yarra Valley on New Year's day of a flying mushroom by a veteran Australian National Airways pilot is one of the examples that bring the whole subject nearer home.

And the Civil Aviation Department's cautious: "We do not regard this business as a joke," together with its invitation to the public to report "unidentified aerial objects" without fear of ridicule, is part of the spreading recognition of the incompleteness of knowledge of the skies.

There are scientists of the highest repute to say that these things either have no physical existence, that they are freaks of light and reflection, or that they are meteorological devices about which there is no mystery.



NE of the fore-

ONE of the foremost authoritative sceptics is the British Astronomer Royal, Sir Harold Spencer Jones, FRS.

"There are many natural phenomena which appear mysterious, and for which, in some cases, there is as yet no satisfactory explanation," Sir Harold wrote in the Spectator, London, in 1950, dismissing a book by Gerald Heard on flying saucers.

"The accounts of such appearances given by those who are unfamiliar with them may be strangely unlike the real thing. The aurora borealis, ball-lightning, St. Elmo's fire, mock suns and parhelia, the Brocken spectre, a blue sun or a blue moon, a bright fireball, a slow-moving train of meteors, for instance, are sufficiently far from the normal range of most people's experience to give rise to wonderment.

"I receive many reports of unusual or strange phenomena; but rarely is an account of what was seen sufficiently precise and accurate for a definite opinion to be given as to the cause."

Sir Harold went on to ridicule Mr Heard's suggestion that the flying saucers might have come from Mars, and that the Martians may be large insects, super-bees about two inches in length, and with a highly developed social organisation.

"The scientific reader," Sir Harold said, "will jet-

Sir Harold said, "will jet-tison the whole of this chain of argument. We know enough about Mars and the conditions that prevail there to be confident that no animal life can exist on it.

"As for very big manufacturing plants being in operation on Mars in order to turn out discs in large numbers, as is supposed, it is just fantastic."



THREE years later, the Astronomer Royal still conceded nothing to theories that the flying saucers came from Venus or Mars—or Russia.

Writing in the Evening Standard, London, he said: "I can say with absolute assurance that none of these flying saucers come from other planets. My advice is, forget all about them."

He described as "humbug" reports of "little men" having landed in America from flying saucers. Most of the saucers, he said, were observation or meteorological

balloons. There were natural explanations for most of the others, and there was nothing mysterious about flying saucers.

A corresponding line has been taken by Dr. Donald H. Menzel, Harvard professor of astro-

ward professor of astrophysics. Nobody, he says, should be ashamed of seeing flying saucers and of reporting them. He has seen them himself.

But that, says Dr. Menzel, is not the same thing as believing that they are space-ships manned by intelligent beings from another planet.



LIKE Sir Harold Spencer Jones, he distrusts the detail of most of the reports that have been made, especially on the apparent speed of the saucers, real or imagined.

He added light beams, producing optical 'ghosts,' to the list of factors which might produce the impression of discs moving at dizzy speed and so erratically that, if they were aircraft, the suddenness of their movements would kill any human crew.

Flying saucers have been almost a universal topic of speculation since they were sighted in Idaho in 1947, and then in many other parts of the United States and the rest of the world.

There may never before have been a sustained and widespread "rage," but there is ample evidence of comparable spectacles long before they became a standard subject for popular jest — with a mixture of apprehension encouraged by the age of the atom, the jet, and the

embarked by the age of the atom, the jet, and the rocket.

Notable examples mentioned by Dr. Menzel include the "Unknown Lights of Japan" seen "flying" in a long line, and sometimes changing their formation, by the British warship *Caroline* just south of Korea in 1893.

When the ship's officers reported their discovery at Kobe, they found that the same phenomena had long been observed by Japanese fishermen, and had even been described in Japanese schoolbooks.



THEN there was the "airship" that startled Oakland, California, in 1896, and was reported in other parts of the United States in the following year. It took the form of a huge bird-shaped object with a brilliant light in its nose. As usual, the accounts varied. Some aeronautical fanciers in Chicago were sure it was a dirigible balloon. The astronomers put it down to a freak of starlight.

The serious investigation now carried out has led to no firm or revealed conclusions that the modern saucers are tangible. The use by the United States Navy, for example, of translucent plastic balloons 100 ft. high to carry electronic instruments aloft in parachutes, and left to drift in the intense winds of

in the intense winds of the stratosphere, may well have created alarming spectacles.

Research itself puts into the skies objects almost as strange as those now coming out of planetary fiction. The controversy has stimulated inventive hoaxers.

There may be a rational and harmless explanation for every authenticated peculiarity observed in the seven years since the saucers gripped current popular imagination. But, despite the scepticism of eminent authorities, learned inquiries go on.

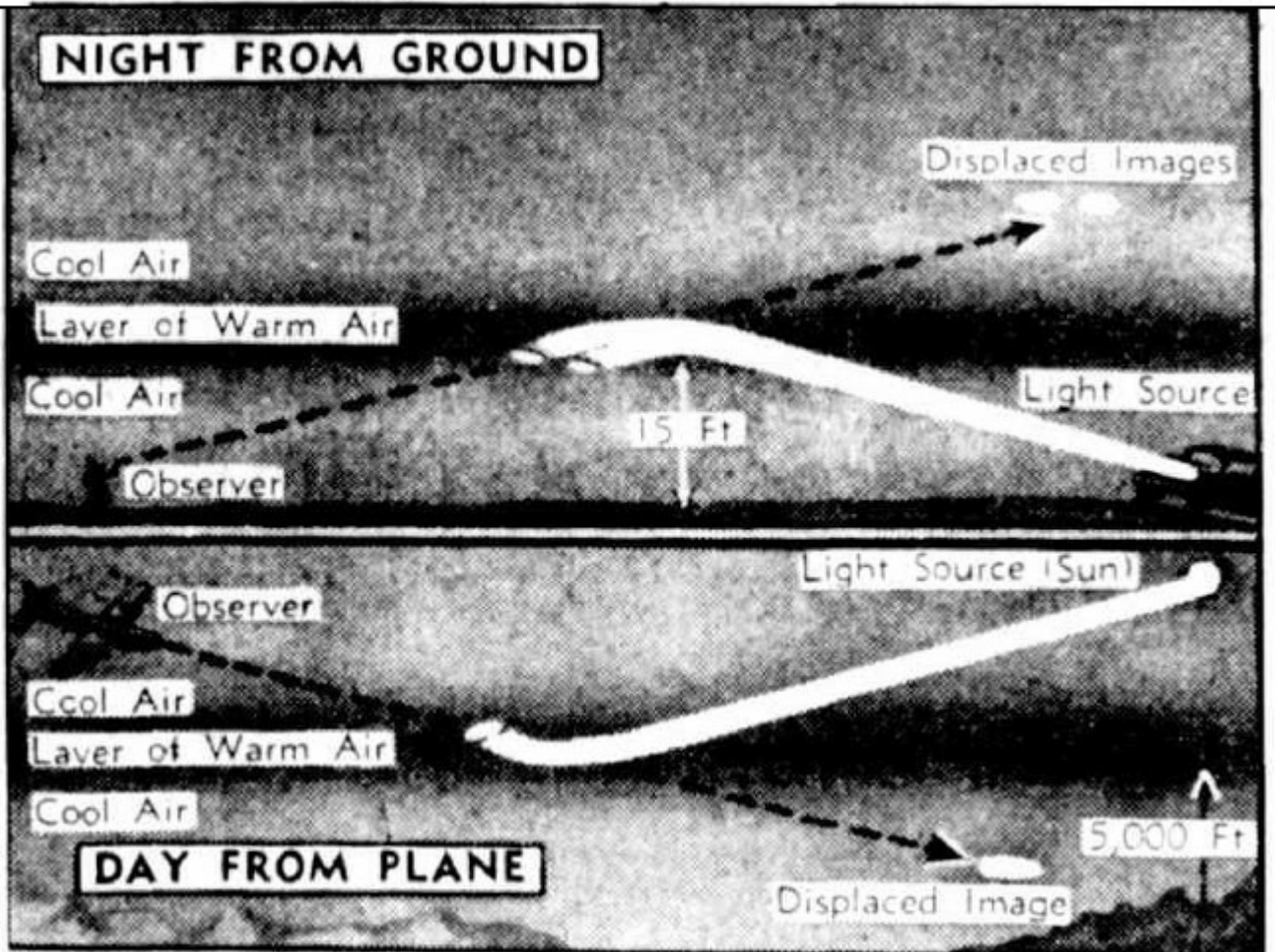
1 JAN 1954

He saw
them
over
airport





ARE these daylight "flying saucers"? They were photographed near a Massachusetts airport by a U.S. coastguard officer. He saw brilliant lights "flying in formation" one morning in 1952.



ARE SOME "saucers" formed like mirages? Dr. Donald Menzel,

ARE SOME saucers formed like mirages? Dr. Donald Menzel, Harvard professor of astrophysics, says a car's headlights may produce two moving "displaced" images, if the light is reflected by a layer of warm air. Similarly, from a plane above a warm air layer, a pilot may see a displaced image of the sun.