

Seeking Truth On "Flying Saucers"

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.

IT is the identity of these objects in the flying saucer controversy, recurrently waxing and waning for the past seven years, that now causes the sharpest division of opinion.

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.

But 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

ways pilot is one of the examples that brings the whole subject nearer home.

Cautious

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.

In addition to sober sightings of objects that cannot be identified or explained, there is a certain amount of mass hysteria and optical illusion, and of psychological aberration prompted by natural phenomena.

But 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 meteorolo-

that they are meteorological devices about which there is no mystery.

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 at 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."

Ridicule

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,"

the scientific reader, Sir Harold said, "will jettison 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 the 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 advise is, forget all about them."

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.

U.S. View

A corresponding line has been taken by Dr. Donald H. Menzel, Harvard professor of astro-physics. Nobody, he says, should be ashamed of seeing flying saucers and of reporting them. He has seen them himself.

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.

No Conclusions

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 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.

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Investigation

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 sparks or have a glowing tail?"

28 Reports

Twenty-eight strange reports have come to the committee from all over Aus-

mittee from all over Australia since it was formed last February. The 28th was the report by veteran ANA pilot Capt. 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.

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

Questionnaires

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 21 of the sights they have investigated are inexplicable.

Journalist Donald Thomson, chairman of the committee, says: "There's some-

thing 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.

Discs

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 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

run away by the committee secretary. his witness "rating" is described as "good."

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