

• *It may be a flying bedstead OR—*

THE FIRST FLYING

SAUCER

says FRANK SHAW

B **BRITAIN'S** latest, queerest, and most revolutionary aircraft—the Flying Bedstead—could be a stepping stone to the world's first authentic flying saucer.

For it has the for vertical ascent necessary attributes and acute changes of flight direction.

Additional facts about the strange craft are leaking out to aviation correspondents since the initial announcement by the British Supply Minis-

the British Supply Minister, Mr. Duncan Sandys, on the eve of this year's great air show at Farnborough.

Mr. Sandys' blunt statement merely said his department was experimenting with a new type of machine which comprised a couple of engines lashed to a metal frame.

"It is really no more than a couple of jets with a pilot mounted on top," he said.

But the pilot of the bedstead, Rolls Royce's Capt. Ronald Shepherd, probably looked the strangest pilot ever and his machine more strange than the magic carpet.

The bedstead is Britain's first VTO (vertical take-off) aircraft

Initial flight

It follows recent experimental models being made in the US by Convair and Douglas, which

vair and Douglas, which, however, look more orthodox and include a fuselage, wings, and a cruciform tailpiece.

The British job consists of two Rolls Royce Nene engines set end to end and fixed to a tubular steel framework with a platform and bucket seat for the pilot on top.

The jet exhausts point straight down so that upward movement depends on the thrust directly applied to the solid concrete runway.

Controls consist of a small dashboard of instruments, a joystick and foot pedals, as in a conventional machine.

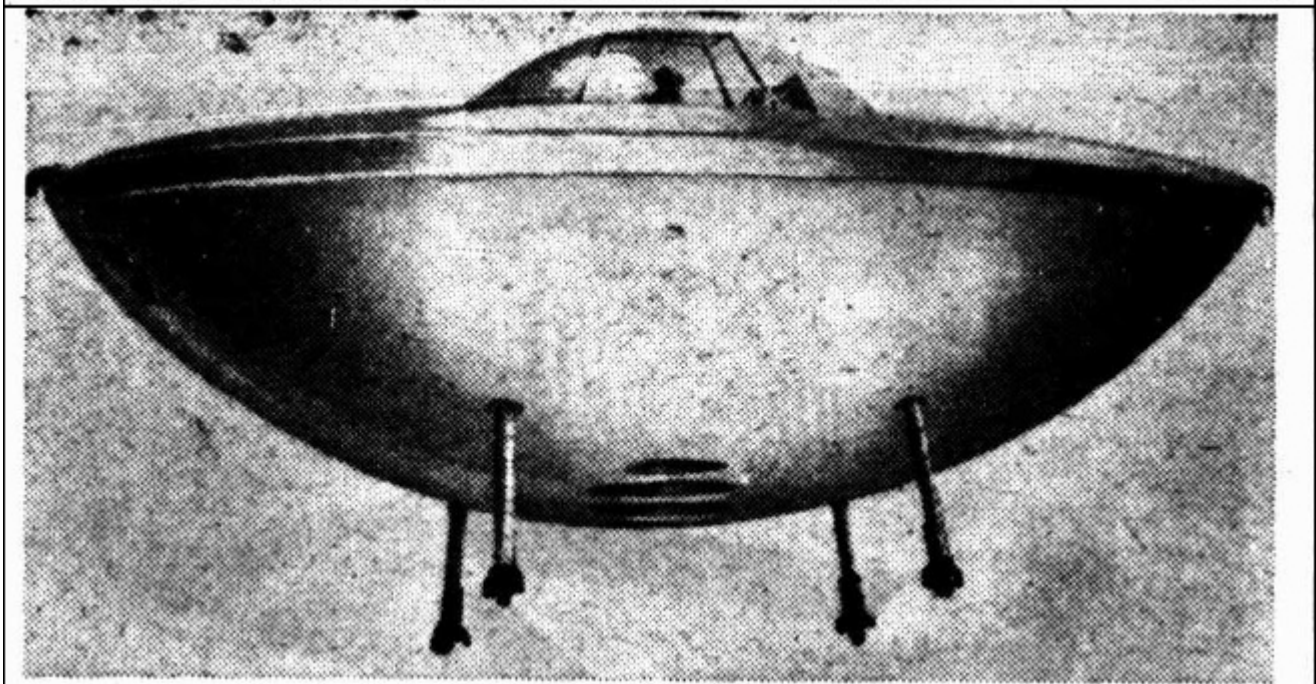
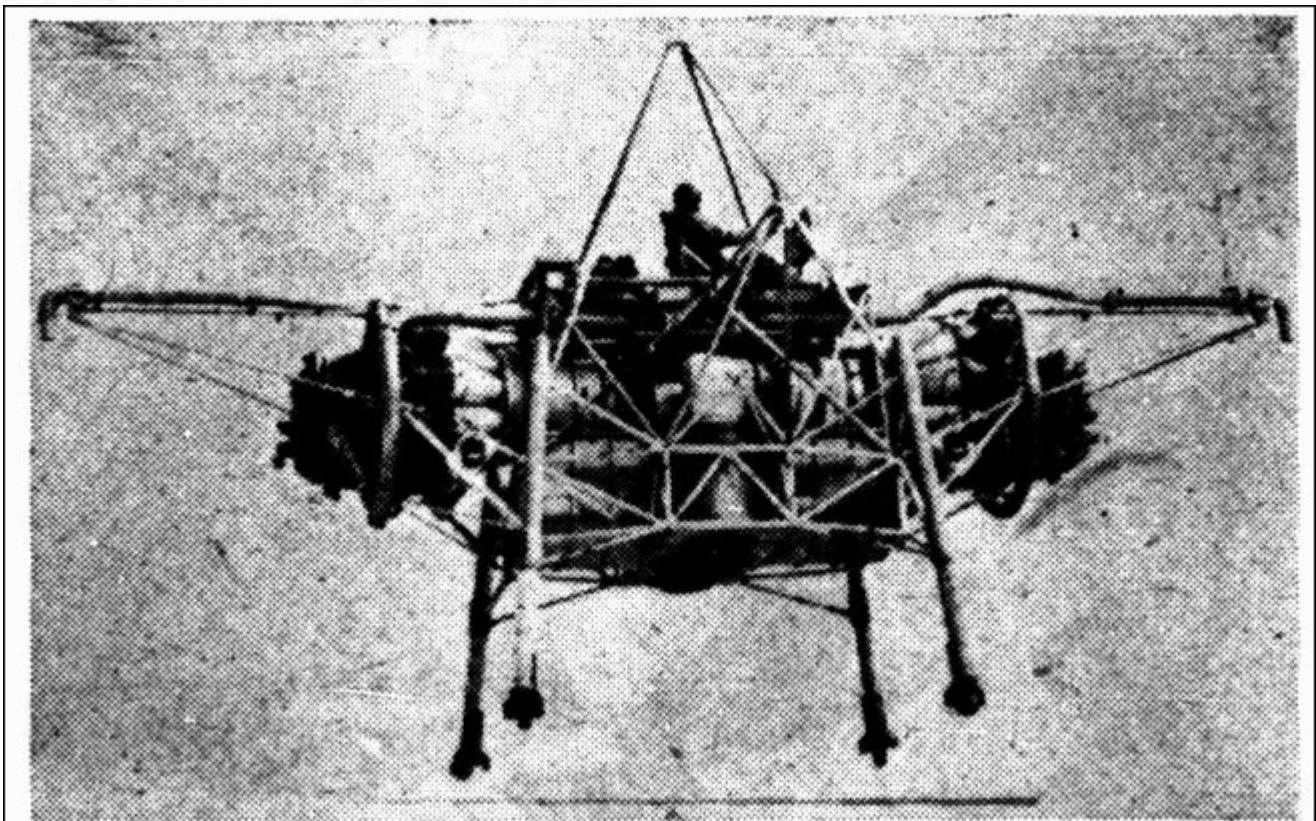
On the initial flight six weeks ago, Capt. Shepherd, a greying, 51-year-old World War I pilot, had the machine tethered securely with steel cables.

Two years' work

It was the culmination of two years' top-secret work at Rolls Royce, Hucknall (Nottinghamshire) plant.

The screaming noise of

The screaming noise of naked jets caused watchers to block their ears as



ABOVE: The "flying bedstead" in flight is an ungainly, ugly contraption but—BELOW: This is how artist Frank Benier sees it taking off as a streamlined flying saucer. The undercarriage has not yet been

Shepherd stepped up the boost to take-off pitch. The undercarriage has not yet been retracted.

Shepherd stepped up the boost to take-off pitch.

Slowly it rose, almost inch by inch according to observers, to a few feet above ground level, and held that position for 10 seconds.

Fifty years ago, at Kittyhawk, North Carolina, Orville Wright made the world's first successful flight in a heavier-than-air, powered machine. That flight lasted 12 seconds.

When Shepherd brought the machine down again he had to leave it via a gangplank.

The specially reinforced concrete runway had begun to glow a bright red from the intense heat of the jet blasts.

It brought designers hard up with a new and immediate problem. The aim of the machine is to do away with vast runways and aerodromes, but it looks as though a tougher type of concrete will have to be found for take-off purposes. Steel and timber, of course, are right out.

right out.

Could be prophets

A dozen or more flights free of any ground restraints have since been made. On one flight it rose to more than 100 ft. and nearby villagers who saw it rang the local police with tales of a flying saucer hovering above the district.

They could be prophets.

For, once airborne, the idea is to deflect the exhaust jet fore or aft for lateral flight.

Assuming that it matters little which is front and which is rear of a machine which can rise vertically, what better design for a cabin or housing for crew than a circular shape?

Such a design would enable the machine to be flying in one direction one moment and in reverse the next without the entire machine making a 180 deg. turn.

A snag to be overcome, of course, will be the gravity effect on a pilot subjected to such violent manouevring. Scientists all over the world have long been working on means of overcoming "g" effects and they are not expected to be insurmountable.

To build a flying saucer, of course, is not the immediate aim of the flying bedstead designers, any more than was it the aim of Whittle to invent a jet engine purely for military purposes.

There is no doubt that military requirements will come first and it is quite likely that it will be in a military aircraft that the

principles proved in the early tests will be put to practical use.

Already some authorities see it as making

present-day aircraft carriers obsolete. But others see it applied to giant airliners and reducing miles-square aerodromes to the size of cricket pitches.

Undoubtedly there is a tremendous future for the machine, whatever its role.

And just as history records the 10 seconds' flight at Kittyhawk as marking a new era in travel, so may future historians record the 10 seconds' flight at Hucknall.
