

SATURDAY FEATURES AND BOOK REVIEWS

MARSH GAS, MOONSHINE or SPACEMEN?

THERE can be no doubt that Unidentified Flying Objects — UFOs — are among the

most perplexing phenomena of our era. Sightings have been reported by trained and intelligent individuals: astro-

gent individuals: astronomers, regular army officers, physicians, radar operators, university professors, test pilots and the police.

Many who claim to have seen them were not aware of the phenomenon before making their sightings, and came forward only out of a sense of duty as well as the desire for a rational explanation. In many cases they were ridiculed as a result, and their honest perplexity about what they saw is one of the strongest arguments for the fact that UFOs may exist: sightings have been reported from more than 70 countries.

Last October the US Air Force announced that a thorough investigation of "unidentified flying objects" (UFOs) was to be conducted at the University of Colorado by a team of distinguished scientists headed by Dr Edward Condon, former director of the National Bureau of Standards. At long last, the scientific community is apparently abandoning the stance of the medieval astronomers who refused to look through Galileo's telescope at sun spots because

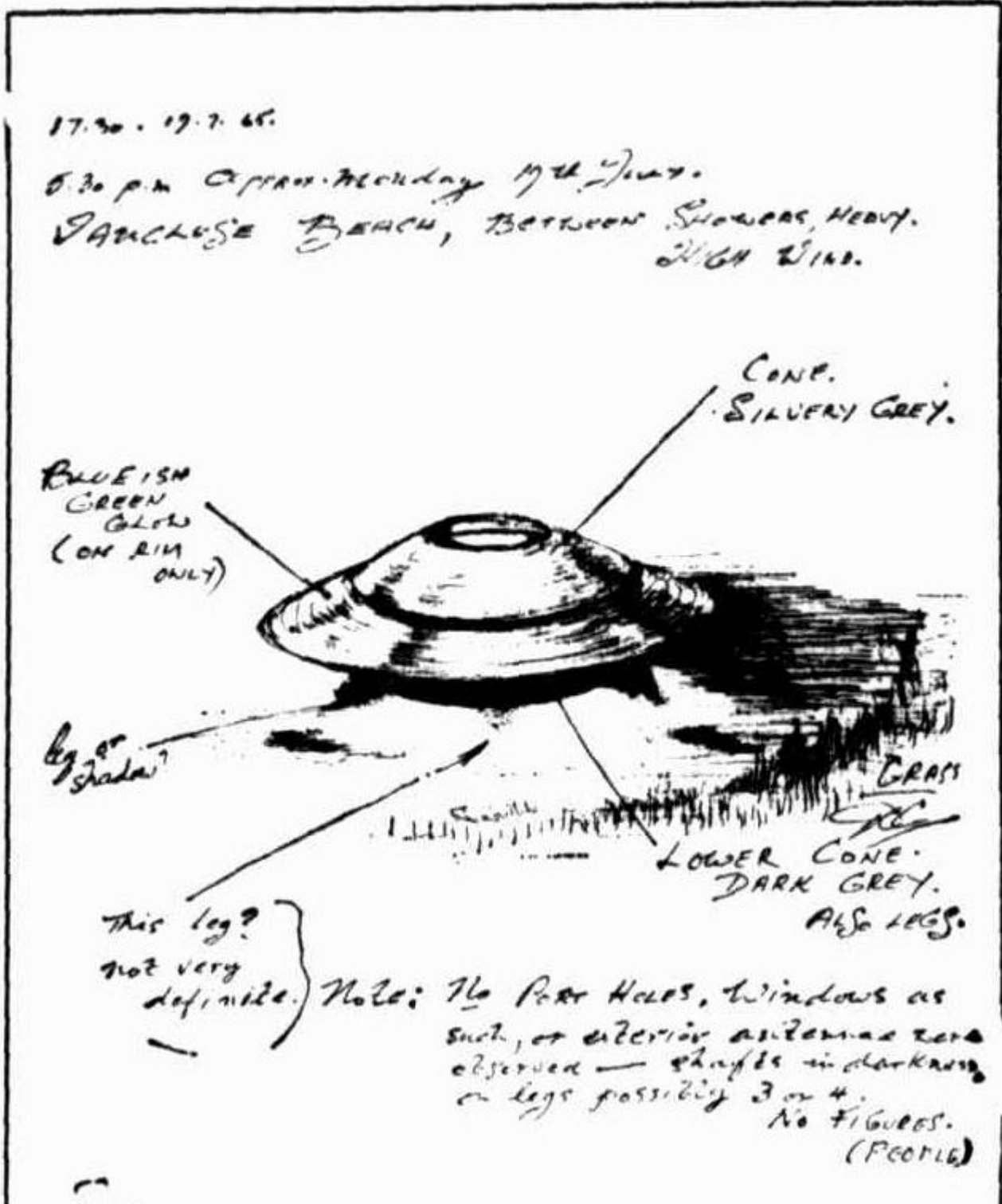
scope at sun spots because "since the sun is perfect, it couldn't have spots, and therefore it is no use looking for them".

Dr Condon has 15 months and \$313,000 with which to arrive at some conclusions about flying saucers. As many as 100 specialists will be consulted, and the National Academy of Science has agreed to review the results of the doctor's work.

Since the announcement of the programme more than 400 letters have arrived on his desk, many of the writers wanting jobs or seeking to assist the project in one way or another. "The important thing is that a lot of people in both the physical and psychological sciences in other universities are interested", Dr Condon says. "There is no tendency to ridicule the project at that level".

One of this scientist's main problems will be to send out investigating teams whenever a new saucer sighting is reported. "Most of these things are so transient and evanescent that you are not likely to be able to get the men there with the equipment you would like them to have", he admits. It's

them to have", he admits. It's not like rushing a medical team to an epidemic area because "an epidemic stays



NOTE

(OUTLINE) DWG. TCC SHARP - W. HOLLIDGE COLLECT MICHEN SNEYR. 1

Sketch by Mr Denis Crowe of flying saucer which he reported having seen on Vaucluse Beach, Sydney, on July 19, 1965. Illustration from *Flying Saucers Over Australia*, by James Holledge (Horwitz Publications Inc.).

there until you get there", he complains. The saucers, like the biggest fish, always seem to get away.

The man who probably knows more about UFOs than any other is J. Allen Hynek, head of the astronomy department at Northwestern University and, since 1948, the US Air Force's official adviser on the subject. For almost 20 years he has been monitoring the UFO situation around the world, devouring thousands of reports and interviewing hundreds of eye witnesses. Although Dr Hynek is loath to make accusations, he feels evidently that the Air Force has, to some degree, tried to sweep the UFO situation under a rug for the past two decades. In 1953 the military hastily assembled a panel of senior scientists under the direction of Howard P. Robertson from the California Institute of

the California Institute of Technology, discussed UFOs for only four days, looked at just 15 reports and concluded that "the evidence presented on unidentified flying objects showed no indication that these phenomena constitute a direct physical threat to national security", and that "there is no evidence that the phenomena indicated a need for revision of current scientific concepts".

Since then, whenever a rash of UFO sightings has occurred, the Air Force has dutifully pointed to the "Robertson Report" as firm evidence that it is nothing serious. Now, all that will be changed. How

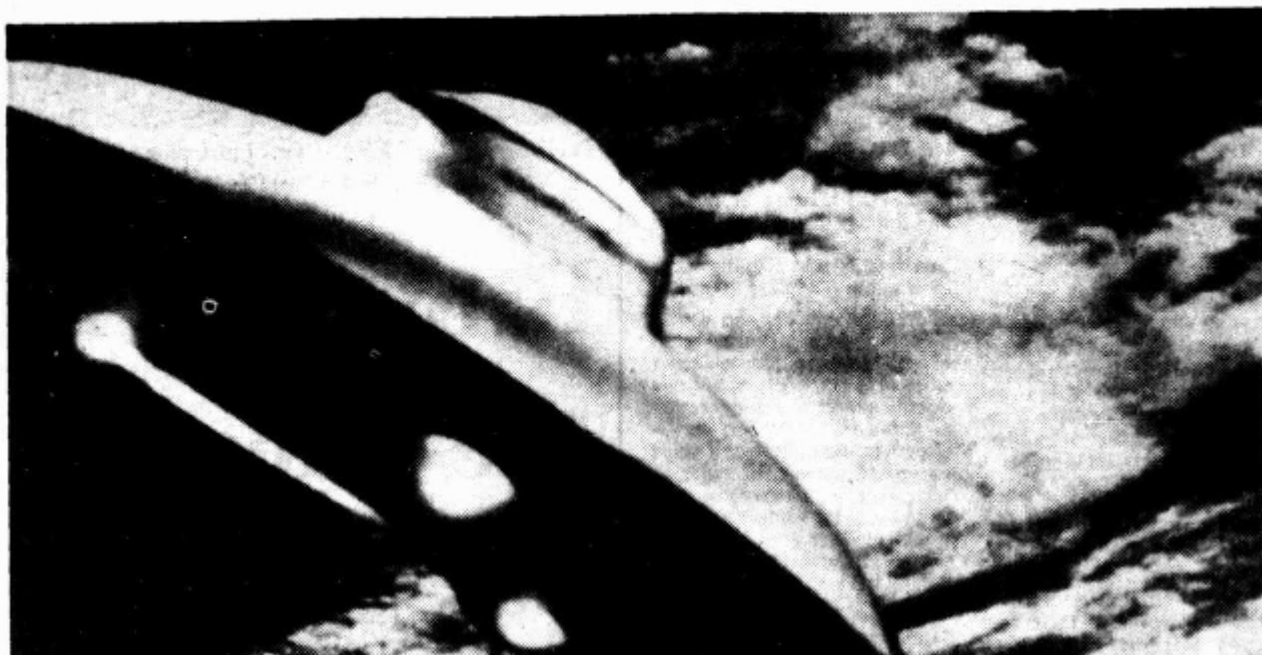
does one explain away the many sightings of UFOs? They have been called swamp gas, identified as weather balloons, satellites, aircraft, meteors, searchlights on clouds, and optical illusions. They definitely do not seem to be a mass hallucination because too many reputable people have seen them. It is also unlikely that they are secret military weapons because no veil of earthly secrecy can last for two decades.

Those who doubt that UFOs are from outer space have, in recent years, been able to point to significant evidence. The space-scanning devices used by the North American Air Defence Command had not until 1965 reported any unknown objects, although they keep track of more than 1,000 items in orbit. Strangely enough however, three objects in orbit have just recently been listed as "unknown" — objects that have not been connected with any launching site or country of origin.

They were discovered last May and June by US tracking radar. Their existence was

...by the use of US tracking radar. Their existence was kept secret until early October while government officials debated whether to admit that they had found objects whose origin could not be determined. Secrecy prohibits US officials from discussing the sizes of the three objects. Tracking agencies have said in the past that radar could find orbiting objects as small as 12in long. Yet there have been

IN a reversal of its policy over the past 10 years, the US Air Force decided on a bid to unravel the flying saucer mystery. Arturo F. Gonzales Jr tells of the scientific project now under way.





This mock-up by artists reproduces the details of the most commonly reported variety of flying saucer. The three spheres beneath it are described by observers who claim to have seen saucers on the ground, as undercarriage.

indications that at least two of the three objects found last May are much larger, and that they were in orbit perhaps for years before they were discovered.

Conversely, a continuing sky survey conducted by the Mount Palomar Observatory in California produced 5,000 wide-angle, high magnification photographs of the heavens.

The Harvard Meteor project of 1954-58 produced 3,300 hours of star-gazing. Another 2,500 hours were added by the Smithsonian's visual Prairie Network project. "Not a single unidentified object has been noted", the reports indicate.

Until Dr Condon's group got together, those who believed in saucers complained that detection efforts were

cursory and ill-manned. Believers began their own semi-

never began their own semi-private organisations to track down the origin of saucers.

In 1952, APRO (the Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation) was founded, and several years later the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena began. The latter group has seen its membership double to more

than 11,000 in the last year alone. One of its top executives Richard Hall, says there have been enough confirmed sightings to justify an intensive scientific scrutiny of UFOs, but his group declines to express a view on the nature of the saucers.

Other fringe groups are not so conservative. At a recent Los Angeles convention, a

stooped old man dressed in animal skins wandered into the auditorium saying "I'm an observer from Alpha Centauri. It's been a very informative meeting". Flying saucer zealots regularly appear on television, are heard on the radio, and write for the mass magazines. Some of these

magazines. Some of these crackpots say they have made trips aboard saucers, believe the saucers are flown by demigods and, in general, put discredit on any serious investigation of the phenomena. The head of the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Club of America in Los Angeles, Gabriel Green, insists he can prove that "we have been visited regularly by extra-terrestrials". Many of the 3,700 members of his group say that they have seen saucers and some claim they have travelled in the space craft, according to Mr Green — a lean, intense man who has twice run for the presidency of the USA on a "Flying Saucer" ticket.

The explanation for these types is simple: they have been conditioned by years of space-age comic strips, science fiction and TV shows. Just as a few generations ago intelligent and observant people believed in ghosts, saw them, and described them in great detail, so these individuals now see saucers.

But in ruling out the cranks, one still cannot completely rule out the possibility that some of these UFOs may be visitors from afar. Scientists confirm it is hard to believe that our

it is hard to believe that our world, alone among the countless planetary systems, is the only one where intelligent life has evolved. It remains for Dr Condon's group, within the next year, to determine whether there is life out there and if it is trying to get through to us on earth.
