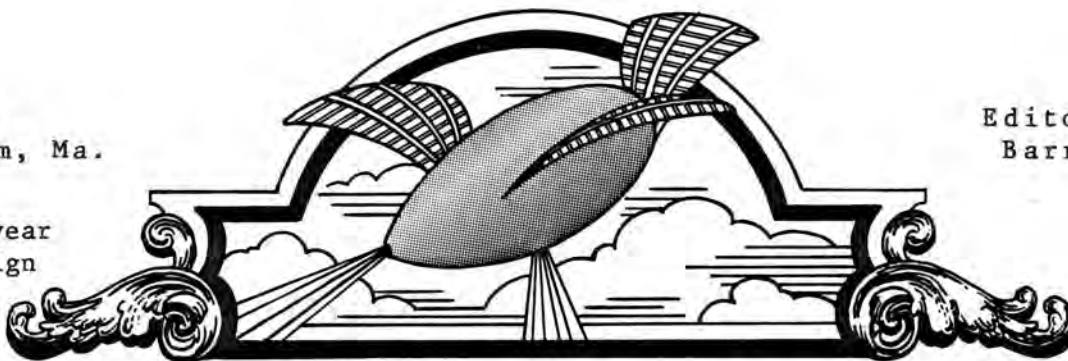


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U.F.O. HISTORICAL REVUE

#2

September 1998

EDITORIAL

On May 26th of this year, the American Geophysical Union displayed the academic equivalent of a barroom brawl at a conference in Boston. On one side, Dr. Louis Frank presented evidence of his theory that the Earth is being bombarded by as many as 25,000 house-sized ice comets every day (Boston Herald, 5-27-98). On the other side were a variety of critics of the claim, saying that Frank's information is flawed and that no evidence existed for such a bombardment. What data was flawed?

It seems that about twelve years ago Frank found curious satellite images of the Earth's aurora with hundreds of dark pixels, unidentified images which he claimed could only be low-density ice comets, like giant snowballs that fell apart upon contact with the atmosphere.

The question is were the images of real objects, or artifacts of the data collection processing system, namely the satellite's digital reproduction? There has been no independent confirmation of the innumerable ice comets by others and researchers had blamed Frank's attempt to enhance the auroral images for producing the dark pixels.

Insults erupted at the meeting over what, in essence, was a photograph of unidentified flying objects, UFOs. The important issue here is that had the photography been labeled as UFO imagery (not in the popular sense of what UFOs are, alien, but in the literal interpretation of UFO, unidentified.), which initially it more correctly is as opposed to the supposition of it being of ice comets, it would likely have not been admitted to the conference, or if it had, would have been taken far less seriously than it was.

The term "UFO" has taken on an entirely different meaning from that intended when the phrase was first coined by the government. It has become a poisonous term to science in a sense that is almost irrational. There is nothing wrong with researching and investigating an unidentified flying object; after all, the U.S. Air Force did such for over twenty years. It only becomes difficult when one attaches an exotic backdrop to it.

The bottom line is that the eruption at the AGU conference is a good example of why all spins on unexplained reports or images, or on the term "UFO" must be removed, whether it is "aliens" by UFO adherents or ice comets by some in the realm of science. There will be no progress in the study of aerial mysteries until such withdrawals occur. Some might call it a hopeless task at this point, but maybe such a realignment of thinking would at a future time allow a UFO photo, an instrumental de-

tection of a UFO, or a UFO sighting by capable witnesses to be discussed at mainstream scientific conferences without the accumulated baggage of over fifty years of nonsensical biases.

As if to stress this, a popular columnist, Marilyn Vos Savant, the acknowledged record-holder of the world's highest IQ (Guinness Book of World Records), recently wrote about becoming involved in causes (Parade, 6-7-98):

"...great causes are like religions: They set standards and create goals, but the ideals are never reached because they're usually unrealistic in a free society (Sound like UFOlogy? ed.). If you're an emotional person, getting involved in a cause will very likely lead to frustration and unhappiness. If you're not an emotional person, however, you won't feel too bad about it - and maybe you'll make a difference."

With that, the matter boils down to whether the community of UFO researchers will get the message, or whether they will miss it - again!

THE USS SUPPLY SIGHTING OF 1904

On March, 9, 1904, the New York Times published what must have been one of the more remarkable articles of that era. In it is described rapid formation flying by three strange objects over a U.S. naval vessel in the Pacific, barely a year after the first powered aircraft flight by the Wright brothers.

The report has been described by a variety of books and journals as an example of a vintage UFO report supporting the notion that extraterrestrials have visited the Earth well before the Kenneth Arnold "first" UFO of 1947. Charles Fort (Books of Charles Fort, 1941, pg. 298) described the objects as "...of different susceptibilities to all forces of this earth and of the air." Lore and Deneault (Mysteries of the Skies, 1968, pg. 90) called them "flying objects of superior performance." In "The UFO Evidence" (Richard Hall, NICAP, 1964, pg. 13), the sighting is listed under Section 2, Intelligent Control, and described with the addendum that, "Meteors, of course, do not travel in echelon formation, change course and climb, nor remain visible for two minutes."

In both the Times story, and a more detailed account in the "Monthly Weather Review" of March 1904 (see next page), the objects are described as "meteors," nothing more. The terms "UFO" and "Flying Saucer" had not at that time existed, so there was little else to call such reports.

Reading the accounts from that time, we have only a few possibilities as to what the objects were:

- 1) some sort of extraordinary flying machines of unknown origin.
- 2) a concoction by the witnesses, seemingly unlikely as they would have been lying to their superiors for no apparent reason. UFO celebrities they would not have been in 1904!
- 3) a formation of meteors.

New York Times

March 9, 1904

NAVY OFFICER SEES METEORS.

They Were Red Ones, the Largest About Six Suns Big.

WASHINGTON, March 8.—In a report to the Navy Department received to-day, Lieut. Frank H. Schofield, commanding the Supply, from Guam for San Francisco, tells of the observance on Feb. 28 last of three meteors which he says appeared near the horizon and below the clouds, travelling in a group directly toward the Supply.

Lieut. Schofield reports that at first their motion was rapid and the color a rather bright red. As they approached the ship they appeared to soar above the clouds at an elevation of about forty-five degrees.

The largest meteor had an apparent area of about six suns. It was egg-shaped—the sharper end forward. The second and third meteors were round. It is estimated the meteors were about a mile above the ship.

REMARKABLE METEORS.

By Lieut. FRANK H. SCHOFIELD, U. S. Navy.

In any UFO investigation, it is required of the investigator that all mundane explanations be ruled out before declaring a report to be unidentified. With the report from the Supply, it must be determined that the three objects could not have been meteors to declare them to be UFOs. We are fortunate that Lt. Schofield's statement is detailed enough so that one may walk through the incident as if almost being there.

The ship was located some 250 miles WSW of San Francisco in the Pacific Ocean. The objects were seen by three people near the horizon in the NNW below the clouds (see MWR, point 2). At this point, if the objects were below a cloud cover, estimated by Lt. Schofield at being one mile up, it is unlikely that they were meteors without their having impacted nearby. It also strains logic to think that large meteors would take an upward turn that close to the surface and disappear from view.

However, we aren't really clear on what Schofield meant by "below the clouds."

In Figure 1, we see an illustration of three objects seen in clear sky below scattered clouds, and we know it was scattered because Schofield said so in point 8 of MWR. The objects are literally below the clouds from the perspective of the witnesses, but it is equally likely that the objects were far beyond the clouds. Many times I have seen airliners approach Boston from the west, many miles away and obviously high up, but my perspective shows the landing lights often just skirting the treetops.

Going back to point 8 of MWR, Schofield never said that the objects passed in front of the clouds, which would have had to happen if they were below the clouds and approaching the ship. He said quite the opposite in fact, that they were at times obscured by the clouds, which would have placed them higher than the one mile estimate given by Schofield of the cloud height. A "mystifier" (one who tries hard not to explain something) might suggest that when the objects were below the clouds and approaching the ship, initially they passed through a gap between the clouds in the distance, as depicted in Figure 2, and only became obscured when they neared and passed over the ship, as in Figure 3.

The following report, as kindly communicated by the editor of the Pilot Chart, is dated U. S. S. *Supply*, at sea, latitude $36^{\circ} 20'$ north; longitude $127^{\circ} 36'$ west, February 28, 1904:

1. I have the honor to report that three somewhat remarkable meteors were observed from this ship at 6:10 a. m. (Greenwich mean time 3 hours 12 minutes) February 28, 1904, in latitude $35^{\circ} 58'$ north, longitude $128^{\circ} 36'$ west.

2. The meteors appeared near the horizon and below the clouds, traveling in a group from northwest by north (true) directly toward the ship. At first their angular motion was rapid and color a rather bright red. As they approached the ship they appeared to soar, passing above the clouds at an elevation of about 45° . After rising above the clouds their angular motion became less and less until it ceased, when they appeared to be moving directly away from the earth at an elevation of about 75° and in direction west-northwest (true). It was noted that the color became less pronounced as the meteors gained in angular elevation.

3. When sighted, the largest meteor was in the lead, followed by the second in size at a distance of less than twice the diameter of the larger, and then by the third in size at a similar distance from the second in size. They appeared to be traveling in echelon, and so continued as long as in sight.

4. The largest meteor had an apparent area of about six suns. It was egg-shaped, the sharper end forward. This end was jagged in outline. The after end was regular and full in outline.

5. The second and third meteors were round and showed no imperfections in shape. The second meteor was estimated to be twice the size of the sun in appearance, and the third meteor about the size of the sun.

6. When the meteors rose there was no change in relative positions; nor was there at any time any evidence of rotation or tumbling of the larger meteor.

7. I estimated the clouds to be not over one mile high.

8. The near approach of these meteors to the surface and the subsequent flight away from the surface appear to be most remarkable, especially so as their actual size could not have been great. That they did come below the clouds and soar instead of continuing their southeasterly course is also equally certain, as the angular motion ceased and the color faded as they rose. The clouds in passing between the meteors and the ship completely obscured the former. Blue sky could be seen in the intervals between the clouds.

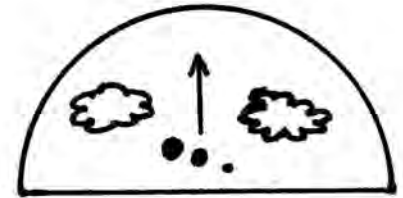
9. The meteors were in sight over two minutes and were carefully observed by three people, whose accounts agree as to details. The officer of the deck, Acting Boatswain Frank Garvey, U. S. Navy, sighted the meteors and watched them until they disappeared. He sent a messenger to me who brought an unintelligible message. When I arrived on the bridge the meteors had been obscured for about one-half of a minute.

Figure 1



The problem here is that the suggestion that they were below the clouds (less than one mile up) weakens if they were never seen to have passed in front of the clouds on the initial approach. We have no real evidence that they were that low. The illusion of closeness due to the human eye's lack of 3D perception of objects at great distance on the horizon seems to be working more here in this case. A similar horizon illusion occurs with the so-called "Moon Illusion" where the full moon rising is often reported by witnesses to be much larger low in the sky than higher up. The moon never really changes size but when it is low in the sky, with distant buildings and trees appearing small by comparison, the moon seems to be much larger and closer than it actually is.

Figure 2



More support for the objects being at a large distance when first seen is evident in point 2 of MWR on page 3. Schofield said, "At first their angular motion was rapid and color a rather bright red." Later on in the account he said, "It was noted that the color became less pronounced as the meteors gained in angular elevation." This color variation can be attributed to the same thing that makes the sun reddish when low on the horizon. Light passing through thick layers of the Earth's atmosphere at low altitude becomes scattered by air molecules, allowing the lower frequency red light to filter through more readily to observers. As the light source elevates, the light becomes less scattered because the air is thinner, and the more natural color returns. Schofield didn't specifically say what the colors of the objects were higher up but he did say that the color became less pronounced, implying a whiter appearance, more like typical meteors.

The objects moved in echelon formation with the largest one leading, the next largest one about a diameter of the first away, and the third at a similar distance from the second; i.e. a rather tightly packed formation (see point 3, MWR).

The large object was egg-shaped, point forward and the equivalent of six suns in area, quite sizeable. The other objects were round and smaller (points 4&5, MWR).

Is it not possible to suggest that the large object with the pointed head and broad end was a meteor flaking off two chunks, trailing the first off to the side and behind; the large one presenting a jagged front like a rough-edged rock, peeling off into a stubby, trailing ionization, giving the appearance of an egg-shape, while the smaller chunks are more regularly shaped, giving a more rounded aspect like normal meteors?

The size of the largest object is unusual at first glance, but further on in Schofield's report he says (point 8, MWR), after commenting on how remarkable the sight was:

"..their actual size could not have been great."

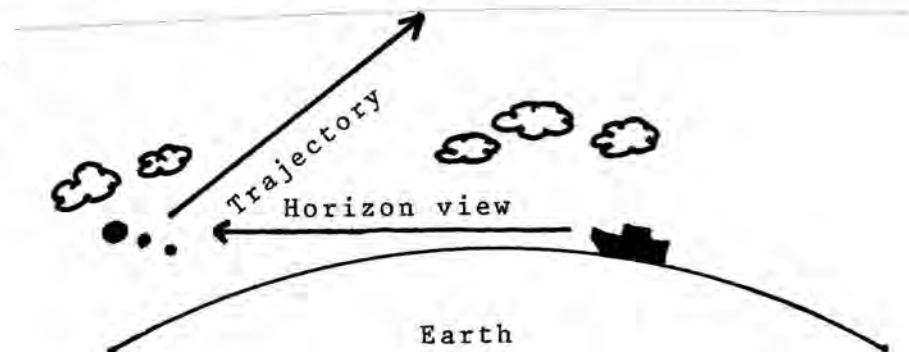


Figure 3

If Schofield had reported that the first object were as large as six suns, then what made him think that they could not have been large? This leads one to think that the size of the first object could be attributed to the object and the entire glow of ionization around it. Any meteor observer is aware that much of the area covered by a meteor's profile is from the ionization glow around it rather than of the rocky body itself. Fireballs shooting across the sky can make an impressive appearance, lighting up the entire celestial sphere with their glow.

A mystifier might say, "If these might have been meteors, why weren't long trails reported for such sizeable objects?" In fact, such trails do not always occur. In "Fireballs, Meteors and Meteorites" by Harold Povenmire (JSB Enterprises, 1980), Povenmire, an assistant director of the American Meteor Society, states, "Some fireballs as bright as -18 (magnitude) do not leave any significant train."

So we see the likelihood that many high-flying, glowing bodies, not leaving trails or trains behind, could still be meteors, killing the common stereotype of what meteors are supposed to look like.

The sighting was said to have been over two minutes in duration, rather long for a meteor normally. In an article on the 1949 General Mills incident (Just Cause, Dec. 1995), I had pointed out that such long-duration meteors were not unheard of, one in 1972 lasted 100 seconds.

If the 1904 objects were tangential, or skipping meteors, those which have been documented to skip off the atmosphere like a rock skipping on water when thrown at a low angle, (discussed in the General Mills piece), let us say that the skip took place less than a quarter of the Earth's circumference NNW of the ship's position. This would place the nadir of the meteors' path over western Siberia, poorly populated and, therefore, poorly witnessed. Penetration into the atmosphere would have been deepest early in the sighting, so that the meteors would be at their brightest while relatively low on the horizon to the Supply's crew. This is supported by the fact that they were easily visible at great distance. And how do I know that they were at great distance? The red coloration of the formation's light mentioned earlier is evidence that the light passed through as much air as the sun's light passes through each day.

As the objects begin to approach their exit from the atmosphere, they become less reddish and move higher. As they move out into space in the region of sky almost over the ship, angular momentum reduces to a crawl and they soon fade out, as described by Schofield. Such movement would keep the objects in view for a longer period than a lateral movement from horizon to horizon would. When I lived in Somerville, Mass. in 1970, I saw a fireball overfly the city of Boston on a south to north track. I followed it across much of the sky, but the longest time in view of the ten seconds of its duration was when it was virtually stationary as it moved almost directly away from my position into the north.

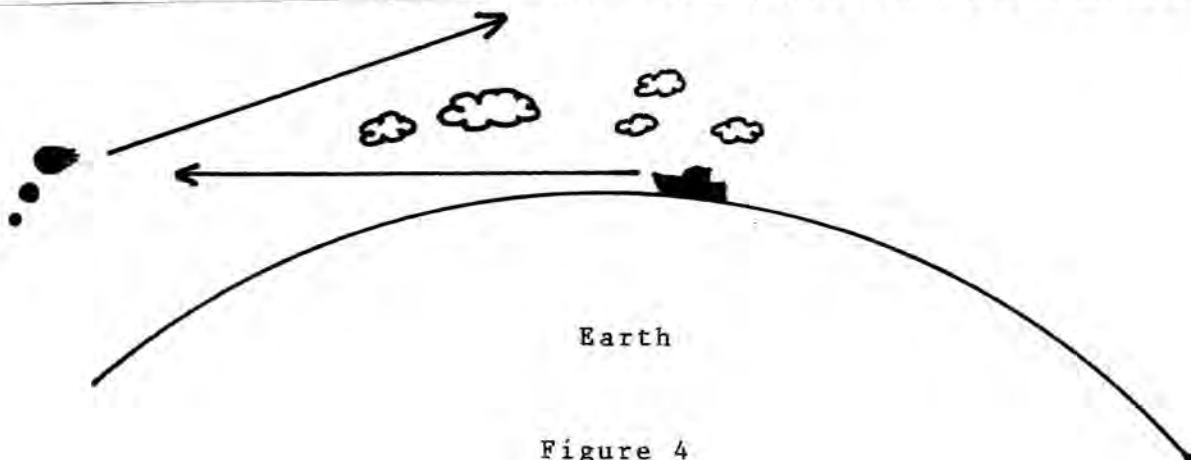
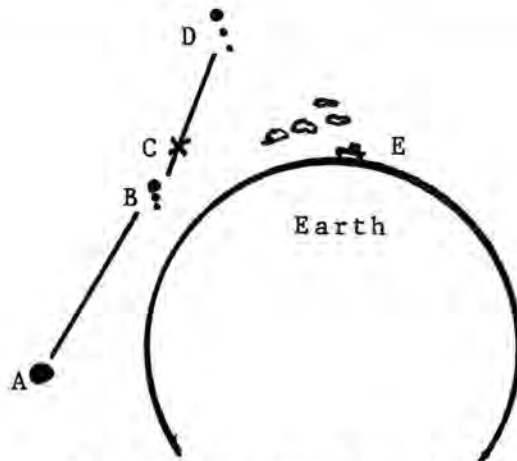


Figure 4

Figure 4 (previous page) gives a more realistic scenario of the view from the Supply.

The final sketch in Figure 5, in a zoom-away view, shows a possible path for a tangential meteor formation's movement near the Earth and its aspect relative to the ship. The deflection angle and altitude are, of course, uncertain.



- A: Meteor perhaps began as a larger body approaching Earth.
 - B: At the point of skip off of the atmosphere, body may have fragmented.
 - C: Point at which the Supply caught sight of the formation.
 - D: Formation leaving the Earth's vicinity and fading.
 - E: The Supply's position in the Pacific.
- (Sizes are not relative in sketch. A 3D model is more illustrative.)

It is rare to be able to study such an old UFO report in detail. But I feel it is now possible to consider a flight of tangential meteors as a reasonable possibility for an explanation in this instance. So far removed from the event, we can never be certain, yet every effort needs to be made to turn UFOs into IFOs before even thinking that these reports are proof of alien visitation.

But Then Again....!

New York
Times
Feb. 20, 1922

FIRE BALL IN SKY A MYSTERY AT SEA

Officer of the Vauban Tells of Astronomical Phenomenon Off the Brazilian Coast.

This object has the look of a meteor; moon-sized, flaming, with a long train. Look at how long it was in view. 3 minutes and 20! What might it be? Or, is there a flaw in the report? We will explore it next issue.

On the arrival of the Lamport and Holt liner Vauban yesterday at Hoboken from South American ports, Frank C. Blessing, second officer, reported witnessing an astronomical phenomenon on the night of February 11 off the coast of Brazil which lit up the ship and the sea like day and startled those on deck. The officer said he was in charge of the bridge at three bells in the first watch, 9:30 P. M., when he saw a huge ball of fire rise above the horizon in the West and describe a low arc ahead of the ship and disappear below the eastern horizon.

When he took his observations the fire ball, which was as large as the full moon in the Southern hemisphere and surrounded by a flaming halo, lighting up sky and sea, was about 10 degrees above the horizon. It was traveling at

great speed and was in sight three minutes and twenty seconds.

In describing the strange sight Officer Blessing said: "The ball was very fiery and a brilliant red, with a tall and a long fiery trail, which lit up the sea in all directions. The ship, and for a quarter of a mile around, was lit up like day, and the light was so brilliant that it dimmed the lamp in the binnacle and the smoking room lights, which caused passengers inside to rush out on deck to see what was the matter. I was scared at the strange sight, because I thought that it had something to do with the end of the world. It was too large for a meteor and came up from the horizon on the west and did not drop from the zenith.

"I could not estimate how far it was from the ship when it passed across the bows. I called the Captain to see it but by the time he reached the bridge the ball of fire had disappeared. I cannot imagine what it could have been and the astronomers attached to the observatories could not explain it to me.

"When we arrived at Rio de Janeiro the scientists from the observatory came on board and questioned me as to the time I had seen the phenomenon and what it was like, and the same thing took place at Buenos Aires and Montevideo. From what the astronomers told me the big ball of fire must have been visible within a radius of 700 miles north, south, east and west of the Vauban when we observed it."

MYSTERIOUS LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS.

BUT THEORY THAT IT'S AN AIR-
SHIP IS EXPLODED.

MIS-~~TERIOUS~~ LIGHT IN THE VI-
CINITY OF NEW BRITAIN.

Many Have Seen It and Are Still Mys-
tified as to Its Origin—Good Views
of It from Forestville and Plain-
ville.

(Special to The Courant.)

Bristol, Aug. 14.

It has been reported the last few days that Daniel Collins, who lives two miles north of Forestville on the road to Farmington, while out late on Sunday night saw an air ship come at a rapid rate from the direction of New Britain, and land near his house. After the ship had struck the ground the story went that Collins saw a man alight from it whom he recognized as Harry Townsend of New Britain, a former resident of Bristol. It was also reported, that Townsend recognized Collins, told him that he was testing a new air ship, and to say nothing about it.

When this story became known young men who have been out late at night for the past week said they had seen a bright light in the heavens in the direction of Plainville and Farmington, and that it must have been the air ship that Collins said he had seen.

Collins was seen at his home this evening, three miles from Bristol, and he said that there were several faults with the story. Collins is the son of Timothy Collins and he works at the Turner shop in Edgewood. He said that for several nights past he had seen a very bright light arise from the vicinity of New Britain and go up high in the air, at the same time drifting towards Farmington and Plainville. The light usually arose from the earth about 10 o'clock and some nights was much later. He had with other young men, especially his brother, noticed the light and there was much speculation among them as to its meaning.

He couldn't make out what it was until some one among them suggested that it might be an air ship, as the light in it was much brighter than is usually on balloons and burned steadier and longer. He said he saw it last night and the night before, but so far as seeing any thing that looked like an air ship was concerned he would have to plead not guilty.

Michael Stone, the night watchman at the burner shop department of the Bristol Brass Company in Forestville, has also seen the mysterious light in the sky every night for some time. He said this evening that every night for a week, including last night, the bright light has arisen from the vicinity of New Britain and gone high into the air. He says it usually soars up and goes to the north in the vicinity of Farmington and coasts over towards Forestville. He had called the attention of Frank Neale and Frederick Miles, both of whom work in the same shop with him, to the mysterious light. Last night there were several young men, about 10:30, in front of the burner shop watching for the appearance of the light. It came up at the usual time and they all looked at it for a long time. It went last evening in the vicinity of Farmington and was floating around the skies when they left and went to their homes.

Harry Townsend whose name has been used in connection with the air-ship is superintendent of the mechanical department of the Corbin Cabinet Lock Company of New Britain. He said to-day that he had been experimenting on a model for an air ship and that thus far he had completed a paper model four feet long, which was comfortably resting on the bottom of his cellar at his home in New Britain. He says the story of his making trips in an airship or balloon was nonsense. The origin of the light is still a mystery.

Late this evening residents of Forestville saw the light which seemed to them to be of unusual brilliancy. It was apparently several hundred feet above the ground and was, they thought, a mile or so away, the light ranging some distance north of New Britain. Those who saw it are still unable to explain what it is.

Arizona Republican
Phoenix

May 3, 1904

A TRAVELING LIGHT

Curious Phenomenon in the Heavens
Last Night.

A curious phenomenon was witnessed by several persons in and about Phoenix last night. About 8 o'clock a light suddenly appeared in the southwestern heavens. Those living in the central part of town thought at first that it was a light sent up on a kite or in a hot air balloon. The light seemed to be as large as the full moon and was moving very rapidly in a northerly direction. But people living in the extreme southwestern part of the city said they had seen it still southwest of them and the size of it appeared the same as it had to those who saw it from the center of the city. This circumstance proved that the light was at a greater height than had been supposed by the observers.

Though it appeared to be traveling directly from the southwest and would therefore pass over the town, its path led far north of the city. From the time it was first seen until it was directly in the north was about ten minutes. It then seemed to grow smaller until it looked no larger than a star and might have been taken for one but for its lurid color and its flickering. By this time it was moving so slowly that the motion could be detected only by its changed position in the course of five minutes' observation. It seemed to be approaching the horizon.

A party of ladies living four or five miles east of the city called at The Republican office last night and said they had seen it while they were driving along the road not far from the Insane asylum. Their description of it was the same as that of the observers in town.

Even after it had disappeared, that is when the intermittent flickering could no longer be observed, a strong glow brought it into view and gave it an apparent diameter of a foot.

So far as could be learned from those who saw the light it was in view of Phoenix for about half an hour.

(The sighting from the USS Supply was certainly not typical of UFO reports in the early part of this century. As we will see in future numbers, bizarre-looking airships and planes were more the "norm" than. These two reports from 1904 document more peculiar lights at different ends of the U.S. Some reports were embellished with details of mysterious inventors in untraceable machines. When they weren't, reports often could be attributed to "fire balloons," akin to the more modern laundry bag balloons which are easily launched by amateurs with cheap materials and eerie results from a lit bag filled with hot air, a description not unlike several UFOlogists I've encountered through the years!)

B-24 SIGHTS "CIRCLES OF LIGHT"

A B-24 of the 11th Bomb Group on a snoop mission over Truk during the early morning hours of 3 May 1945, encountered what may prove to be as baffling a phenomena as the balls of fire seen by the B-29s while over the Japanese mainland. (Excerpted From Hq. AAF, FOA, Air Intell. Memo No. 4, 8 May 1945.)

The B-24 first observed two red circles of light approaching the plane from below while still over the Truk atoll. One light was on the right and the other was seen on the left of the B-24. The light on the left side turned back after one and one half hours. The one on the right remained with the bomber until the B-24 was only 10 miles from Guam. From the time that the B-24 left the atoll, the light never left its position on the right side. It was reported by the crew members as sometimes ahead, sometimes behind, and sometimes alongside the B-24 and always about 1200 to 1500 yds distant.

At day break, the crew reported that this light climbed to 15,000 ft and stayed in the sun. It was a short time afterward that the B-24 let down and went through a 300 foot undercast and lost sight of the light.

During the flight from Truk to Guam, the light was observed to change from an orange color to a bright yellow or white like electric light. The light was also described as sometimes looking like a phosphorous glow. This sequence of color changes occurred at regular intervals. The light appeared to be about one foot in diameter and the changes in color did not follow a pattern of acceleration or deceleration.

The light followed the B-24 in dives from 11,000 ft to 3000 ft, through sharp course changes and even brief cloud cover always keeping its same relative position and distance. At one time, the pilot turned into the light and he definitely reports no closure occurring. During the night high cirrus clouds masked the moonlight and no part of object was observed except the light. At daybreak, the light changed to a steady white glow and a possible wing shape with a silver glow was noted by some members of the crew.

Guam radar units reported no bogies plotted at any time that this light was within its range. The crew members reported that the light finally left them when only 10 miles from Guam. The light was never close enough to the bomber to give a single blip on the radar and therefore should have been easily detected. Two blips with IFF were not reported at this time, the B-24 being the only plane on the scope.

The report from the Guam radar units plus the fact that the light was always seen on the right side of the B-24, and that even when the bomber turned into the light, no rate of closure was noted tends to make the possibility of a jet powered or even a conventional type aircraft a doubtful one.

A preliminary evaluation by the Assistant Chief of Air Staff Intelligence gives the following possibilities:

"It is believed the lights observed were those of an unknown type mounted on Japanese aircraft with the capabilities of an Irving on an experimental or observation mission. While certain jet exhaust flame characteristics are apparent, the range and length of light greatly exceed the known capabilities of friendly or enemy jet aircraft. While observations vary considerably from characteristics of "Balls of Fire" recently seen over Japanese homeland, there is great need for intelligence on all air phenomena.