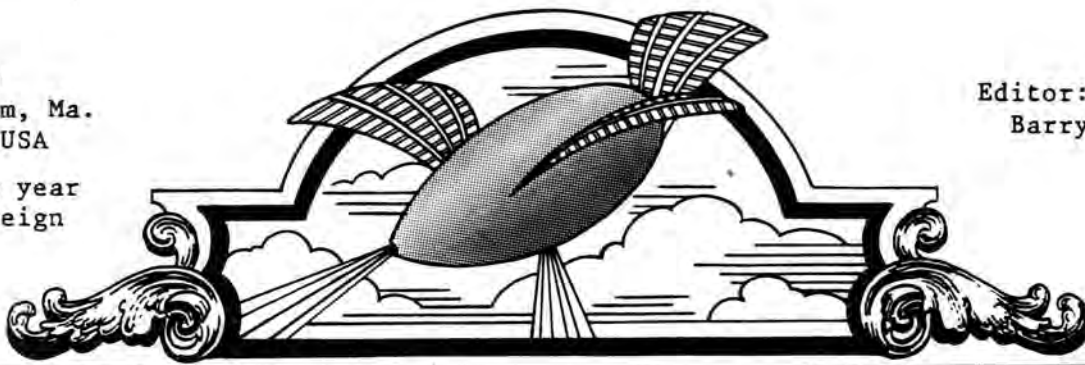


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U.F.O. HISTORICAL REVIEW

#4

April 1999

WERE MOST OF 1947s FLYING DISCS METEORS?

A virtually unknown fact about the summer of 1947, during the blitz of flying disc reports, is that the Earth was being blasted by a meteor shower through the entire time, according to a report in Science News Letter for August 23, 1947.

Dr. A.C.B. Lovell, then director of the University of Manchester's radar research program on meteors, reported to the British Astronomical Association that beginning in early May the shower, detected as "pips" on their instruments, was observed for three months, ending in early August when the shower abated. The peak time of the shower each day was around 11AM, with the radiant of the shower coming from the direction of the sun. The hourly rate of meteors detected was said to have often exceeded 80, with the daily height of the shower never falling below 20.

It was said that the meteors could not be seen visually, being blinded out by daylight.

Oddly, there has been little discussion of this discovery, even though the report was carried within a matter of weeks after the flying disc observations. There is much to consider here.

The 1947 disc sightings were the first en masse reports of UFOs in modern times. As can be attested to by anyone who has seen the degree of press coverage between June 26th and July 15th, the reports caused quite an alarm. The characteristics of the reports were generally of high-flying, distant, roundish or disc-shaped objects moving at great linear speed. Little thought was given to the objects being of extra-terrestrial origin. Instead, the trend of thinking was that they were either of natural origin, or some kind of U.S. or foreign government aircraft. Given that the possibility of extraterrestrial origin of the discs was being understated, it seems peculiar that Dr. Lovell did not consider that a large number of the disc reports may have been meteors from the shower that he discovered. In fact, Dr. Lovell has historically been intensely anti-UFO. With the meteor shower having been first noted in early May through early August, the flying disc wave, lasting about three weeks, would have been placed virtually in the center of the time frame of the shower, presumably during the most intense period of the meteor display. This would have afforded Dr. Lovell with a golden opportunity to largely debunk a great many of the disc sightings.

But he said that daylight would have prevented the meteors from being seen. Under normal circumstances, this would be true. A vast majority of meteors seen, even those that are plainly visible in the evening, are simply not bright enough to override daylight glare. Yet,

in the midst of an extraordinary shower, the likelihood that occasional sporadic meteors can be visible in daylight increases. We know that meteors can be seen in daylight as fireballs. I've seen one myself. They can be seen without significant trains behind, resembling strange flying objects. During the summer of 1947, after the original "debut" report of flying discs by Kenneth Arnold over Washington state, the "fad" of saucer-watching exploded onto the scene. This during the time of most intense outdoor activity by the public, the July 4th week. With the large numbers of people looking for flying saucers, with the skies of 1947 clearer than they are today, and with an unreported meteor shower in progress, it is not hard to imagine many of the meteors crossing the line to visibility.

In defense of the "strangeness" of the saucer wave, UFO adherents would say that the large number of saucer reports would preclude the meteor shower as being responsible since the shower would have to put on a veritable fireworks display to be that visible in broad daylight. And Dr. Lovell's description of the shower would seem to argue against that having happened.

The reported rate of meteors, as recorded by Dr. Lovell's radar, had sometimes exceeded 80 per hour, with the daily peak not below 20. If only a couple of meteors per hour were bright enough to be seen in daylight, this could generate a significant number of reports. Let us say for example that even a marginally daylight meteor shoots south to north near the east coast of the U.S., say from North Carolina to Boston. And that large numbers of people are at the beach, or engaged in other outdoor activities. To those paying attention, they see a roundish, or disc-shaped at a distance, moving at great linear speed, faster than any known aircraft of the period. Individuals in particular cities, Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York; etc., report seeing a flying saucer, resulting in dozens of individual reports on that particular day. Many reports of the 1947 period are notoriously poorly-described in the press, making attempts to correlate sightings to one another difficult. So, we can have one cause = dozens of sightings. A correlation of the more detailed reports of flying saucers by area, time of day, direction of travel and duration may reveal that some of the less exotic reports could have meteors at the core.

Reports of flying saucers spread throughout the world after the U.S. publicity had settled down. Here again, the reports of high-velocity, distant objects were characteristic, though not nearly so intense as in the U.S. And the volume of these reports did not last a great deal longer than that of the U.S. activity, coincident with the slackening of the meteor shower in early August.

It may very well be claimed by UFO-as-alien believers that Dr. Lovell's radar data would actually support the claims of strange alien craft invading our planet's airspace, the large number of "pip" hits on radar verifying the large number of flying saucers being reported. Except that, according to radar, the "pips" were behaving just like meteors. If we were being invaded by spacecraft, and Roswell were true, would Lovell's story have seen the light of day as it did, only weeks after the deluge of reports? His radar data may have been seen as confirming the saucers! And for that matter, why didn't the radar detect angular turns and controlled ascent and descent as was reported in the more unusual saucer reports of the time if they were intelligent vehicles from another planet. "Oh, the saucers were so advanced that they could avoid our radar," a typical saucer supporter might say. If that is so, then, depending on whose story one believes, how does such a person explain one, two or more saucers crashing in New Mexico? Let me offer an easy out to believers on this: They were hit by Lovell's meteors!

Don't laugh or ridicule me, it is as good as any other Roswell theory put forth (Now how may I capitalize on this.....?).

Even considering that a meteor shower could have been responsible for many of the 1947 saucer reports, it was still a peculiar meteor shower. Most meteor showers are due to the earth intersecting the particle debris path left behind by a comet in it's approach to, or retreat from, a gravitational encounter with our sun. We had seen extensive discussions last fall of the encounter with the annual Leonid meteor shower, with predictions, down even to the hour, of how intense a meteor bombardment our planet was to experience. In the case of the 1947 shower, the "path" was fully a fourth of the Earth's orbit around the sun, much larger than one would expect from the normal debris wake of a comet. And if the 1947 wave was evidence of a massive meteor shower, then the debris contained an unusual number of large bodies (large in this case meaning meteors the size of a clenched fist). It is not inconceivable that the solar system could have passed through a cloud of interstellar debris in it's travel through the galaxy, enough to cause an unusually large meteor shower for one time only.

This certainly cannot explain everything about the 1947 flying saucer wave inasmuch as with any UFO wave, an investigator knows that there can be dozens of causes for various sightings reported through whatever source; stars, planets, mirages, hoaxes; etc. But in this case, we have the first identifiable, world-scale phenomenon that may have been a major player in creating the UFO topic as we know it today. Whatever many of the other reports of flying saucers that behaved strangely might have been remains to be seen.

POSTSCRIPT: ON MUNDANE PHENOMENA AS A CAUSE OF UFOs

It may seem that I have given an unusual amount of attention in UHR, and even before this, to classic UFO stories being caused by meteors. It sounds to a lot of UFO fans like an easy way to dismiss the possibility of UFOs being alien vehicles from another world, certainly a fun thing in which to believe. Most people interested in the UFO topic started out being convinced that these things were real and embarked on a crusade to prove this to the disbelieving science, media and the public. I include myself in this, though I was never really a zealot, unlike many now. It was later my understanding, made clear to me by experienced investigators, that all possibilities had to be exhausted before even beginning to think that any UFO could have been extraterrestrial. Otherwise, one would open himself to being easily deluded, to jumping to false conclusions, to misinforming others.

Out of concern of being perceived as being an unscrupulous, dishonest or gullible person, I chose not to promote what amounted to a belief anymore. I could not prove that UFOs were extraterrestrial or anything else not of this world. I was also aware that after spending so many years doing research, the data on the subject was utterly reeking with misinterpretation and belief rather than what had really occurred. I realized that this would cost me friends with whom I had worked in investigations, and who had wanted me to help promote extreme theories of UFO origin. But things were wrong and needed to be corrected. From my point of view, the whole business had to be torn apart and reassembled anew to eliminate the body rot that had infested UFO research. Old tales had to be reexamined. Personalities had to be reassessed.

Two things had to be done to this effect: One: Find as much unrevealed background and original sources as my resources would allow to complete the picture of a particular event of interest. Two: Apply as much common sense as possible, not to bend events into what my wild

imagination could conjure rather than what they really were.

Being that my own personal interest and experience has been with astronomical and meteorological matters, I tend to look at seemingly unexplained aerial phenomena with this background in mind. I observe the night sky and have seen a variety of transient events; meteors, fireballs, aurorae, satellites, aircraft with unusual lighting, searchlights reflecting off of clouds. During daytime, mirages, haloes, sun dogs, subsuns, tangential arcs, rainbows - whole and double partial arcs, sun pillars, even seeds and insects illuminated near the sun - looking for all the world like flying saucers. One doesn't have to be a special type of person for this. One needs only to be observant and clear-headed. If something about a UFO sighting's details suggest a mirage, meteor; etc., then that is the angle to be explored. Sometimes such an explanation fits, sometimes not.

I think most researchers would agree that with many older UFO reports, if we had more information or a fresh insight into existing details, some of those reports might be explainable as being more mundane than they are painted to be. The same researchers would also agree that explainable reports need to be weeded away from more challenging ones (those which potentially suggest an unusual new phenomenon) to be able to assess what they examine properly. For example, the value of statistics used by UFO researchers is to me virtually nil when one considers the record of explainable reports which have been labelled UFOs and UFO reports which have been poorly explained, not to mention badly worded public opinion polls that may imply belief or disbelief where none exists.

Reports have existed of unusual sky flashes above cloud tops at great distances. Such reports were dismissed as mistakes or illusions because there was no precedence for the reality of this type of phenomena in science, until the existence of peculiar lightning discharges, called "sprites," "jets," and "elves," were confirmed decisively some years ago. Some of those reports were once regarded as evidence of UFO alien activity. That was wrong. How much more is wrong now?

UFOs don't become extraterrestrial by consensus. That must be demonstrated convincingly -- and it hasn't been yet. Until it has, we are stuck with the painful realization that not all of what we have been told has any basis in reality. In studying these reports, we are in a laboratory, not a revival hall.

FINAL OFFER: BACK ISSUES OF JUST CAUSE

I still have a supply of back numbers of my previous journal, Just Cause. In the future I will only be keeping a master copy of the run for my records, so all back issues must go. They are available for \$1.50 each. Issues from September 1984 (#1) through November 1997 (#51) are here except 1, 18, 24, 25, 26. Funds will finance searches of pre-1960 press and journals at Boston area universities.

WHITHER MJ-12?

I have yet to hear an adequate response to criticisms raised in the previous number of UHR (January 1999). As such, I consider the matter dead and intend to spend no more time on it. Continuing lip service on MJ-12 only encourages more fakery by the perpetrators, thinking that they have a rapt audience. However, I am aware of several efforts on the Internet to continue documenting flaws in the papers. I recognize their time and effort in exposing this nonsense, but at some point the poor, dead horse must stop being beaten. Getting true believers to stop believing is virtually impossible.

The next two pages are a sampler of what passed for UFOs in the early part of this century.

Berkshire Eve. Eagle

Pittsfield, Ma.

Aug. 1, 1908

MYSTERIOUS AIR CRAFT GOES OVER SPRINGFIELD

Early yesterday morning what appeared to be a balloon or air ship hovered over the city of Springfield but no report has been received of the starting or landing of any air craft that might have passed over that city. The night was luminous for the Herndon Manufacturing Company saw the balloon of whatever it was about 3 o'clock in the morning. It hovered over the city for about an hour as though the occupants desired to make a landing but later it rose higher and went to the southeast. A circular row of lights was on the craft but the watchman could not see the shape of the gas bag above. He was sure that it was not a galaxy of stars or electric lights that he saw.

It is an unusual occurrence to have lights in a balloon and it is believed that these must have been electric lights because all fire is tabooed in airships. The appearance of this craft recalls the recent mysterious visit of an airship to Connecticut and it may be possible that some one is trying some secret experiments with a new ship.

Japan Weekly Mail

Aug 15 1908

Bridgewater (Ma)

Independent

Nov 6 1908

A Mysterious Air Ship.

If you saw a balloon, you would know it was a balloon, wouldn't you?

And you would call it a balloon.

The fact that no trace of its landing could be found, wouldn't alter the fact that you saw it, would it?

Well that's just where the mystery comes in, that's just what gives one that creepy feeling, the fact that some lunatic is sailing a balloon around and about and over in the dark hours of the night, with a possible anchor dragging along, apt at any moment, liable to catch in the neckband of our "nightie" and yank us away to the mysterious one's mysterious hiding place. Two of Bridgewater's reputable citizens are authority for the statement that they saw a balloon with a bright light in it hovering over the Stanley Iron works at ten minutes past three last Saturday morning. They were out on legitimate business, hadn't been electrocuted, hadn't been to a smoke talk, and were in their right senses. They say the balloon was in thorough control, and they are backed up by other reliable citizens. The press of the state was busy Saturday locating balloons and searching for a landing place of the mysterious balloonist. It could not be found. The editors of the leading papers believe it was a balloon or airship, and the mystery of this appearance, and others of like nature in New England stands in good for an old age pension to a reporter who is fortunate enough to solve it.

Manchester (N.H.) Union

Nov. 2, 1908

MYSTERY OF THE AIR

Another Report of Searchlight Traveling the Upper Levels.

BRIDGEWATER, Mass., Oct. 31.—Unknown balloon passed here about 4 a. m., going towards Plymouth. The balloon bore a light and descended as though the inmates were getting their bearings and then again arose and passed on.

BOSTON, Oct. 31.—A careful search by The Associated Press covering practically every bit of territory between Bridgewater and the sea coast failed today to reveal any trace of the supposed balloon which was reported as passing over Bridgewater early this morning. The search failed to reveal that the balloon had been anywhere except in Bridgewater and there by only two men, who were driving down the main street from West Bridgewater to Bridgewater.

According to the Bridgewater reports, Philip Prophet and John Flynn, undertakers of that town, while driving into town a little before 4 o'clock, noticed a bright light in the sky above them. The light was not like that of a lantern, according to their reports, but resembled a searchlight. This light was traveling at a rapid rate, when suddenly it neared the earth. The light was then played upon the earth beneath, as though operated by someone who wished to learn where he was. Then the light ascended, Prophet and Flynn say, until reached a high elevation, when it disappeared in the direction of Plymouth.

All of the balloons in which ascensions are made in this state, were accounted for today. The "Pittsfield Heart of the Berkshires," is at Pittsfield awaiting shipment to Fitchburg; the North Adams No. 1 is at North Adams, where an ascension is to be made today; the Greylock was used yesterday in an ascension by William Van Fleet, and landed near Whiteley and the Balloon Boston is in New York under repair.

Stories of a mysterious bright light, believed by those who have seen it to have come from a balloon, have been heard all over New England. Last summer several such reports came from the vicinity of Bristol, Conn., and later the same phenomenon was observed near Pittsfield. Persons at Whit River Junction, Vt., have also told of seeing a similar light, and last week persons at Ware reported that an illuminated balloon had passed over the town in the early hours of the morning. In all these cases, however, no balloon could be found, all the known airships being accounted for at the time.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE "COMET."

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE "JAPAN MAIL.")

SIR,—With reference to the paragraph in your issue of 3rd Aug. headed "A Comet," this was an exceptionally large and brilliant meteor, and passed Dairi (Buzen) at 10.02 p.m. on the 31st July.

The motion was so slow (south to north-east) that people had time to come from other parts of my house to witness it.

It is probable that the meteor struck the earth in N.W. Shikoku; it would be interesting to know where.

Yours truly

Moji, August 31st, 1908.

X.Y.Z

Berkshire Eve. Eagle
Pittsfield, Ma.
Sept. 12, 1908

A STRAY BALLOON SEEN IN EARLY MORNING

Seen From Pittsfield and
Other Places on Thursday
—Appeared to Come From
the East—Carried a Large
Light.

Glidden Makes Short Flight
From Springfield—Arnold
Going Up from North Ad
ams—Balloons Picked
Up at Sea.

That there was another balloon flying through the air over towns in Western Massachusetts other than the airships sent up from Pittsfield early Thursday morning, is the belief of many people. Such men as Police Officer Charles Thompson and George N. Hopkins of this city, Henry Stowell of Springfield and many others vouch for the story that a balloon was seen sailing over the east side of Pittsfield within a few hours after "Bully" Van Sleet and Dr. H. B. Stowell of this city sailed away from this city and Charles J. Glidden and H. H. Clayton left Springfield in their flight to the eastern part of the state.

Reports that a balloon was flying over this section early Thursday morning were received by the Associated Press at Boston, representatives of that office having devoted much time in their efforts to follow the course taken by the balloons released from Pittsfield and Springfield. It was learned from various places that a balloon could be seen soaring over towns in the east-central section of Berkshire early in the morning. When it was learned that the balloon "Pittsfield" and the balloon "Boston" had landed in towns close to Cape Cod bay

then it was known that if a balloon floated over any portion of Berkshire county early that morning, it must have been some balloon, the release of which, had not been reported.

Officer Thompson and Mr. Stowell were on North street about 8 o'clock Thursday morning, when they discovered what appeared to them to be a balloon carrying a large light. The light travelled in a westerly direction for a time, the course then changing. The light then appeared to travel toward the east. They then supposed it was the Pittsfield balloon.

George N. Hopkins was called to Washington late in the evening and when he started for home about 8 o'clock, his driver called attention to a balloon which he had been watching for an hour or more. Mr. Hopkins could plainly see the light which appeared to be attached to a balloon. During the time Mr. Hopkins and his driver were traveling from Washington to Pittsfield this light was in plain sight and several times appeared to change its course. The light was to be seen in the east, apparently not high in the air when Mr. Hopkins reached Pittsfield.

Upon various occasions reports have come from various places in Connecticut and towns in the vicinity of Springfield that a balloon had been seen soaring through the sky but notice of a flight was never received. A despatch from Lowell says that a balloon believed to be the "Boston" in which Charles J. Glidden and John Barrett ascended at Springfield late yesterday afternoon passed over Lowell at 6:15 o'clock last night. The balloon was reported as traveling high in the air and passed to the southeast in the direction at Boston. Inasmuch as the "Boston" landed in Connecticut it must have been some other balloon that was seen over Lowell. No report has been sent out of any other flight in this section yesterday.

Brockton (Mass.)
Enterprise
Oct. 31, 1908

HOVERED OVER TOWN.

Bridgewater Residents Saw Balloon
To-Day—Sailed Toward Kingston.

Bridgewater, Oct. 31.—High above this town a big passenger balloon, equipped with a powerful light, was seen floating between 3 and 4 o'clock this morning. The balloon attracted the attention of John E. Flynn and Philip F. Prophet, because it hovered over Bridgewater Iron Works like a bird and then dropped, as if about to alight. The balloon did not land, however, but floated away in the direction of Kingston.

It may have been the same mysterious airship that has been reported as seen at night in various parts of New England the past two months.

Berkshire Eve. Eagle
Pittsfield, Ma.

SEPTEMBER 10, 1908.

OFFICER REPORTED THAT HE SAW A BALLOON

Report had it that a balloon was seen hovering over Pittsfield at 5:30 o'clock this morning. Officer Thompson reported to Chief White that the balloon "Pittsfield, the Heart of the Berkshires" was still over Pittsfield at that hour. When the chief heard that the airship had landed at Kingston at 5:15 he concluded that the balloon Mr. Thompson saw was another balloon than the "Pittsfield."

A Pittsfield balloon enthusiast offered this "comparison" this morning when he heard of the success achieved by Van Sleet and Stowell.

"In one account I saw that the Glidden party had enough scientific apparatus to 'sink a ship.' They were equipped with all the modern and up-to-date paraphernalia that one can suggest. The Pittsfield men were simply equipped, yet they made the best flight. Reminds me of the high-toned fisherman, who has all the now-fangled fishing tackle, but is beaten out at the brook by the demure youngster with a rod he cut in the woods."

Earlier in the week a balloon was seen hovering over Pittsfield and several people sized it up as having been a "hot air" affair sent up during the old home week in Troy.

Boston Herald
July 26 1908

Large Airship Seen Sailing Over East Part of Bristol, Ct.

BRISTOL, Ct., July 25.—A large airship sailing very high, passed over the eastern part of this town, known as Forestville, about 6 o'clock this evening and after maneuvering for a short time, took a westerly course, apparently moving toward Waterbury.

The craft is described as an elongated gas bag under which was suspended a framework equipped with a propeller. Spectators were sure that they saw one man aboard, but were not positive whether he had a companion. The airship appeared to come out of the north and continued its southerly course over the town until it reached Lake Compounce. Over the lake it stopped and appeared to be seeking a place for a landing. After circling about a few times, however, it again came north and then changing its course moved in a westerly direction over Wolcott mountain. At that time it was apparently descending and it was thought when it disappeared that it might have made a landing in the mountain. Persons who followed it and made the journey up the mountain found no trace of it. It is supposed that the airship continued its westerly course. Nothing could be learned as to its identity.

Extract from: "Historical Data of 30th Air Division (Defense), Eastern Air Defense Force, Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan for October - December 1951."

Unusual Flying Objects

The unusual flying object was reported to have been observed in the vicinity of Battle Creek, Michigan. Further investigation by this office revealed that the observer, a civilian pilot of fourteen years flying experience, encountered a disk like, highly polished flying object which closed head on with his aircraft at an extremely high rate of speed. Estimated altitude of the object was 3,000 feet, 1,000 feet below the observer's aircraft. Investigation of the unusual object revealed that the observer is a very stable individual. Check of available sources both civil and military indicated no known aircraft in the vicinity of the sighting at that time. A report of the incident was forwarded to AMC, ADC, and EADF.

During November several flying objects were observed. One was seen in the lower Michigan area between 24/2320Z and 24/2323Z by six observers at five different points. The object in all cases was observed at speeds as fast or faster than jet aircraft. It was described variously as round, football shaped, egg-shaped and bullet shaped. Its reported color was variously described as bright white, white, grayish white, and brilliant black white.

The second flying object was observed at 06/102000 by a Capital Airlines pilot 25 miles due east of Milwaukee. It was described as a ball of fire, orange in color and had a blue exhaust like flame behind it. A second Capital Airlines pilot apparently observed the same object although he was approximately 75 miles south of the first observer. He did observe the blue colored exhaust flame but did not recall any orange colored object preceding it. Reports of each incident were prepared and forwarded to AMC, ADC, and EADF, through Technical Intelligence Channels.

A civilian guard on duty at Oak Ridge, Tennessee reported sighting an airborne object on 7 December 1951, at 0815 EST. Traveling at a constant speed, equivalent to conventional aircraft, the object was described as square, approximately 20 feet wide, grey-white in color, with no markings. The observer, a SGT, is described as honest and conscientious, and is held in high respect by his employer. Two F-47's were unsuccessful in an attempt at interception.

Another report of an unusual flying object came from a Mr. Charles Huston in Hamden, Ohio. Mr. Huston reported observing a large round light for nearly three hours early on the morning of 22 December 1951. Telephone conversation with Mr. Huston produced names of corroborating witnesses and additional details. A report was made to EADF.