FLYING JUNE 1951

Captain Vinther (right) and co-pilot James F. Bachmeier examine sketch of strange object. Vinther, 33, has over 8,000 hours, is ex-USAAF cadet instructor.

The Office of Naval Research claims that cosmic ray balloons explain all "saucer" reports. If so, what did this pilot see?

AN AIRLINE CAPTAIN REPORTS:

Another Saucer Mystery

When the Office of Naval Research recently disclosed that all "reliable reports" of flying saucers can be attributed to cosmic balloons, the nation's press sat back stolidly and accepted the statement at face value.

The press services, the leading weekly news magazines, most of the country's newspapers and a host of periodicals hailed the revelation as the solution to a long-standing mystery.

Yet the mystery is not solved. It has only been deepened.

In the past 11 months, FLYING *has reported the observations of five veteran airline pilots who, along with their co-pilots, encountered strange objects flying over the United States.*

Last July, FLYING *said: ". . . it is obvious that skilled pilots, trained observers of sky phenomena, saw something. If they saw it, it must exist. They are not all victims of hallucinations despite the ready explanations of the physicists. But what the strange phenomena are, the editors of* FLYING *do not pretend to know."*

The following is a report from a veteran Mid-Continent Airlines captain, the sixth report of this type to be published in FLYING.—THE EDITORS.

By LAWRENCE W. VINTHER

Captain, Mid-Continent Airlines

I WAS taxiing out for take-off at Sioux City, Ia., on Mid-Continent Airlines' scheduled Flight 9 of January 20, 1951, when the tower asked if I would investigate a very bright light west of the field. I told him that what he saw was a star.

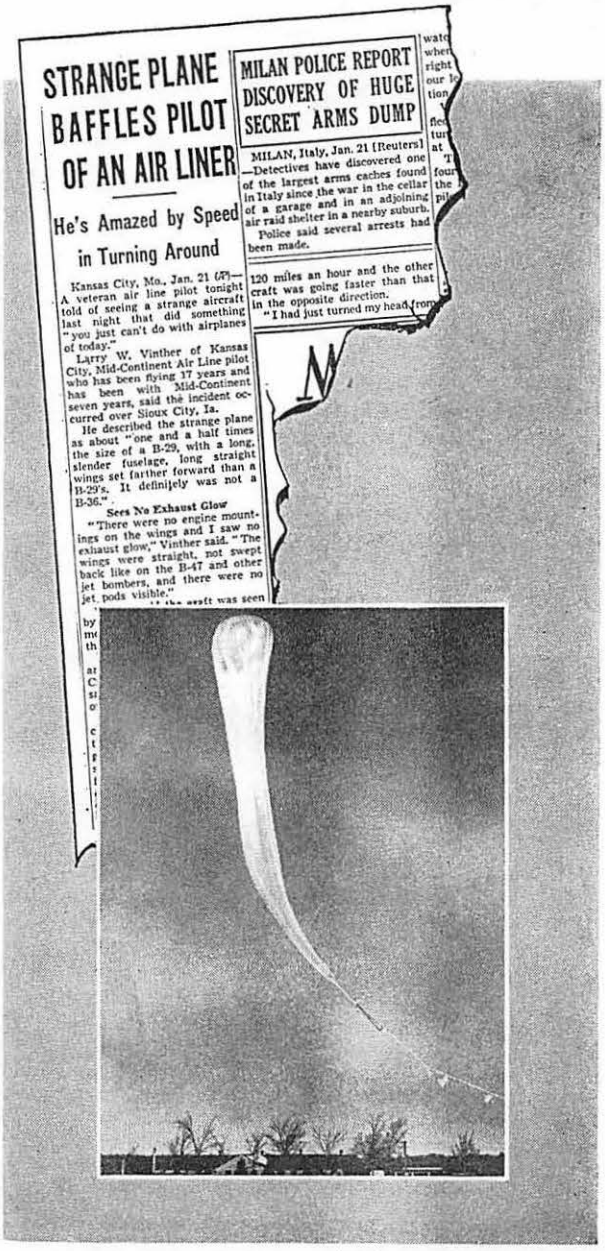
"No," the tower said, "I see what you mean, but this is higher than that—about 8,000 feet."

Looking higher, I saw the light moving from north to south, west of the field and fairly high. I agreed to investigate it.

The crew of the Mid-Continent Airlines DC-3 that night, in addition to myself, included Co-pilot James F. Bachmeier, a lieutenant commander in the Naval Air Reserve (who returned to active duty March 1, as commanding officer of a supply squadron), veteran of World War II in the South Pacific where encounters with Jap night fighters were commonplace. Bachmeier had flown nearly four years with Mid-Continent and had a total flight time of over 6,000 hours.

Immediately after a northwest take-off, a left climbing turn was started, following the left-hand circle of the observed light. The radius of the circle of the light was at least two miles—possibly more—outside the circle made by the DC-3.

Southeast of the field the strange (*Continued on page* 56)



STRANGE PLANE BAFFLES PILOT OF AN AIR LINER

He's Amazed by Speed in Turning Around

Kansas City, Mo., Jan. 21 (AP)—A veteran air line pilot tonight told of seeing a strange aircraft last night that did something "you just can't do with airplanes of today."

Larry W. Vinther of Kansas City, Mid-Continent Air Line pilot who has been flying 17 years and has been with Mid-Continent seven years, said the incident occurred over Sioux City, Ia.

He described the strange plane as about "one and a half times the size of a B-29, with a long, slender fuselage, long straight wings set farther forward than a B-29's. It definitely was not a B-36."

Sees No Exhaust Glow

"There were no engine mountings on the wings and I saw no exhaust glow," Vinther said. "The wings were straight, not swept back like on the B-47 and other jet bombers, and there were no jet pods visible."

MILAN POLICE REPORT DISCOVERY OF HUGE SECRET ARMS DUMP

MILAN, Italy, Jan. 21 (Reuters)—Detectives have discovered one of the largest arms caches found in Italy since the war in the cellar of a garage and in an adjoining air raid shelter in a nearby suburb.

Police said several arrests had been made.

120 miles an hour and the other craft was going faster than that in the opposite direction.

"I had just turned my head from

Skyhook balloons rise to great heights to measure cosmic rays. Under some lighting conditions they resemble "flying saucers." Big question: Do they explain all "saucer" reports?

Another Saucer Mystery

(*Continued from page 23*)

lights were blinked five or six times. The rest of the time they were steady. When we reached a point east of the field (the DC-3 was headed northeast), we observed a change in the object. By the time we realized what the change was, it dived over our nose at about a 160° angle to the heading of the DC-3 and 200 feet above it.

That brought the object down beyond the left wing of the airliner, and then came the strangest part of the whole encounter. Instead of running by, as any aircraft will when met nearly head-on, the object abruptly (as quickly as the heads of the pilots could be turned) was flying in the same direction as the airliner—and at the same altitude and the same speed! Here it was, flying formation with us, about 200 feet away!

And the object was big! We estimated the size as being anywhere from that of a B-29 to half again as big. The time was 8:30 on an exceptionally clear moonlight night, so we got an excellent silhouette view. There was a definite fuselage and wing configuration. The fuselage was cigar-shaped. The wing was further forward than a B-29 wing and no engine nacelles or jet pods could be seen. The wing had no sweepback, being perfectly straight. It had a high aspect ratio like a glider wing.

I couldn't tell whether the object turned around or just reversed direction. We didn't see any jet glow or exhaust flame. As the object dived across our nose, the bright white light observed by the tower could be seen at a slight angle—not in full force as it would have been head-on. As nearly as could be determined, this light was located on the bottom of the fuselage. It was either in a "tunnel" mounting that blocked the view, or was turned off as it came toward us. From take-off to the time of this run toward the airliner, we were able to see a red form of navigation light.

There was insufficient light to determine the probable material from which the object was made, or if there were any markings on it.

About the time this object was flying on the wing of the DC-3, a Cessna 140 made an emergency landing at Sioux City and parked while the object was still in sight. After the object was lost to sight a *Bonanza* arrived from the east-northeast. These were the only other aircraft in the vicinity at the time.

The object flew formation on the left wing of the DC-3 for four or five seconds or more, then started dropping down and under the fuselage of our aircraft. I reduced power and made a left turn to the west over the Sioux City field attempting to keep the object in view. After losing sight of the object under the belly, we made a right turn in an attempt to regain sight of it, but no further contact was made. We continued our scheduled flight to Omaha, Nebr.

In addition to the two Mid-Continent Airlines' pilots, three other persons are known to have seen the object. One was a passenger aboard the flight who happened to be looking out the window at the time. The other two were Chief Controller John Williams of Sioux City Tower, and his fellow controller, whose name I don't know.

The passenger, incidentally, is an aide to Col. Matthew Thompson, USAF, at Offutt Field, Omaha, Nebr., who is assigned to investigation of strange aircraft. END

Magnetic Compass

(*Continued from page 28*)

learned in time that electric wiring could raise Old Ned with a course, especially when the wires had juice in them.

Engine vibration could make a compass spin like a top. Pivotal friction within the instrument caused the shaft to lag, then speed up. Broken jewels were troublemakers. Leaky cases and murky fluid could be cured but the addition of radio equipment fouled us up again. Screw-drivers and pliers that came aboard in flying suits frustrated us from time to time. Even movement of the front stick itself (having been inadvertently magnetized in manufacture) would affect the compass.

Then the grand-daddy of all compass problems showed up. This difficulty was called "residual magnetism," for it resided (and still does) in every piece of steel tubing in every part of the fuselage. The vertical welded members, the diagonal members, the longerons, clusters—all of them had it.

From a physicist we learned that we could pass a fuselage through a gigantic coil and slowly de-magnetize the structure. But if we had constructed this giant coil, it would have neutralized only the horizontal members. The vertical and diagonal tubing would hold on to their fields. With three big coils, the fuselages could have been neutralized in three directions in three painstaking operations.

But we were even more dismayed to learn that every hard landing could induce new residual magnetic fields that would affect the compass. Every new steel tube that went into the airplane, every accident would destroy our work; and we would have to start over. This was the insurmountable obstacle and I don't believe it was ever solved. We finally decided that we had to accept the compass as a limited-use gadget and accept it as it was, subject to manifold vacillation.

In the Third Liaison Training Detachment at Denton, Tex., I taught artillery officers what was called "navigation." The officers studied the fine Air Force computers, "confusers," and "mis-calculators." With tongue in cheek they figured that on a true course of 180°, wind from 90°, deviation and variation worked in, that their compass heading should be 92.5°.

Then on cross-country they did what most experienced pilots do—they used the compass as a secondary reference only. It was merely a check on what they already knew. It might read 60° or 160°. It didn't matter. They had learned quickly that dead reckoning in texts, and dead reckoning in a lightplane are two different things.

One Sunday a rancher-pilot flew in to see me at Lovelock, Nev. He had crossed a couple of ranges and a barren desert to get there. I asked him what compass heading he had used. He flicked an imaginary ash from his hand-built cigarette and said, "Well—yuh jist fly over thisaway and here yuh are."

There are visible marks everywhere on the earth's surface which can be read, interpreted and flown by with ease. In the midwest a section line angle, a good chart, and a $2 watch make practical navigation more accurate than radio compass. In the far West topography lends itself to flying without the chart. Conditions in the East vary somewhat, but horse-sense navigation and a good chart should bring you home every time. For extended over-water travel you should have a gyro compass.

One degree of compass error means a mile off in 60 miles. The best authorities claim that a pilot must be content to fly within five degrees. This means a potential error of 15 miles in a 180-mile range lightplane, under ideal conditions and with true take-off course. But what if thermals complicate the situation? Your compass will have a severe case of St. Vitus' dance. After working all the off-course problems you wish and even figuring some radius of action problems, you'll still end up with an alternate airport problem—the problem of how you got there.

Manufacturers are not at fault. They have come up with the best possible device for the modern lightplane given simplicity and low cost. The fault lies in not looking facts in the eye.

Most lightplane compasses have not been swung since new. You can check this statement by stepping out to your airport and looking at the compass cards. I believe fully 90 per cent of the current trainers in use today have never had their compass oriented to current conditions.

If every licensed airplane were swung at least annually, cross-country flying would be somewhat improved. If every student were taught what experienced pilots know—the limitations of the critter and how to fly without or with little use of the compass—more people would be showing up where they ought to. That old excuse of "that cross-wind blew me off my compass heading" is a little threadbare.

Each modern text and pilot exam should have a little horse-sense navigation written into it. A good $20 gyro compass could lick the problem but until then, I'll continue to stick to the two-bit chart, the $2 watch and the check-points. END