



The Pentagon didn't discourage the

World War II combat veteran Jack Pickett has no time for aliens but he does believe in flying saucers. He says he kicked the tyres of one at a US airbase in Florida in the late 1960s and that he saw saucers flown at night at the US Navy's China Lake complex in California. He's a credible witness, a reliable source, and a unique one: he has reluctantly allowed us to name him. There are many eyewitness accounts like his, but they all refuse to be named for fear of reprisal.

What makes their accounts so hard to believe is the recurrence of the phrase 'flying saucer'. There's no single explanation for all UFO sightings, but there is evidence to suggest that man-made craft are behind the most famous cases.

Since the 1930s engineers have tried to develop high-performance aircraft, capable of taking off with little or no runway and without fear of interception. Their research into low-aspect-ratio aircraft, or 'flying wings', led them to design and fly planes that even today look futuristic, almost alien. Their designers saw these craft, with their high manoeuvrability and short

or vertical take-off and landing (S/VTOL) capability, as the fighters, the spyplanes and long-range bombers of the future.

Their thinking is reflected in the boomerang-shaped Northrop B-2 Stealth Bomber and proposed unmanned combat air vehicles (UCAVs) for the next century. Other low-aspect-ratio aircraft had a circular footprint or 'platform' and were nothing less than flying saucers. Anyone who thinks this is a bit farfetched should note there is a special US Patent (Class 244, Aeronautics: sub-class 21.2 Airplane, circular) for aircraft using a circular wing planform.

Best known were Charles Zimmerman's propeller-driven flying pancakes designed for the United States Navy, starting with the small V-173 in 1942, then the more advanced Chance Vought XF5U-1. Officially this aircraft never flew, but one of Vought's designers, Thomas Smith, says that it was flown many times before being taken to what is now the Edwards Air Force Base (AFB) in California, and that secret jet powered versions were also designed. Back in the early 1930s the pioneers were dogged by low funding levels

and problems with engines and stability, but the downfall of the Third Reich was the catalyst for further development.

Classified reports from technical intelligence teams sent into Germany even before the end of the war filtered back to the Allied commanders. These reports described top-secret research laboratories of an enormous scale and sophistication, like the Hermann Goering Aeronautical Research Institute at Volkenrode.

Under top-secret operations such as Overcast, Paperclip and Lusty, German scientists, whose research had been well funded by the Nazi war machine, were recruited to continue their work in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in Britain and France. Russia mounted US-scale efforts such as Operation Osvakim. This meant both sides in the forthcoming Cold War now had key scientists, research aircraft, equipment and truckloads of design paperwork.



■ The German connection

The father of the German disc programme was Rudolph Schriever, a Luftwaffe aeronautical engineer assigned to Heinkel in 1940. Influenced by Zimmerman's designs, his ambition was to develop a disc shaped VTOL aircraft.

Schriever's ideas soon came to the attention of Ernst Heinkel, who encouraged him to design a model prototype, the V1, which was immediately classified top secret after its first flight. Funding followed for a full-size piloted version, the V2, which first flew in 1943 with Schriever at the controls. Thirty feet in diameter, the V2 had a fixed central cabin around which a ring with adjustable vanes rotated to provide thrust in both the vertical and horizontal planes. Some drawings show a vertical tail fin at the rear of the cockpit.

■ Prague programme

Early in 1944, Schriever's top-secret programme was moved to Czechoslovakia and set up in two factories, with most of the work taking place in a restricted area of the BMW plant outside Prague. Schriever was joined by a number of leading aeronautical designers and engineers, including Dr Richard Miethe (who had worked

with Wernher von Braun on the V1 and V2 missile programmes at Peenemunde), Italian physicist Dr Giuseppe Belluzzo and Klaus Habermohl (a specialist in gas turbine technology). Another addition was the Austrian scientist Viktor Schauberger, who just before his death in 1958 claimed to have worked on a highly classified US disc programme in Texas.

This expanded team built an even larger disc, the V3, which was completed by 1944 and is said to have been much more technically advanced than its predecessors. In postwar interviews Schriever said it had a full VTOL capability and was powered by a Habermohl designed radial flow turbine that rotated around the cockpit, ducting exhaust gases below the vehicle to provide vertical lift and through vents around the rim when in level flight. Nothing is known about V4, V5 and V6, which probably never went further than the drawing board, while the fate of the more advanced V7 and V8 discs is even more mysterious.

Under Operation Paperclip most of von Braun's rocket team were transferred to Fort Bliss in Texas. Exactly what programmes Miethe

Dr Lippisch designed this Messerschmitt before moving to the States. The US report of strange aircraft sightings (below) describes a craft similar to the Messerschmitt 163, also made by Lippisch

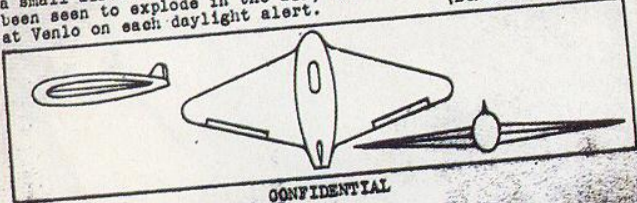


one of these flying whir... crashed near Venlo a te...
sion was heard.

The aircraft flies at very high speeds and apparently has an endurance of approximately thirty minutes. Its maneuverability is very good, and it is reported that it climbs almost vertically. From a vertical dive it appears to pull out very sharply with no "bumping".

This plane, if it does not "ram" another aircraft or "detonate" in a formation, can be landed at its base.

From the knowledge on hand it appears that experiments are being carried out with a remote-controlled jet-propelled aircraft which is to be used as a "bomb" to be exploded in the midst of a bomber formation, but to date no successes have been reported with this weapon. It appears to have been used operationally, however, as combat crews have reported sighting a small aircraft of this description, although it has never been seen to explode in the air, and it was seen to take off at Venlo on each daylight alert. (BOLINT M-4)



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