

It seems that, for their part, the German pilots had been persuaded that it was a case of a secret U.S. weapon. A board of inquiry reportedly was even created in Berlin to study the matter.

The current explanation of electrical phenomena such as the Saint Elmo's fires is not convincing because it does not take into account the diverse characteristics observed. The files relating to the "foo fighters" seem to have been subject to military secrecy at least until 1949.

Many other sightings concerning much larger, cigar-shaped, disk-shaped, or sphere-shaped objects were recorded in both camps.

From 1880 to 1900, "airships" over the United States and Great Britain

During these years, tens of thousands of witnesses sighted flying machines resembling modern dirigibles, which were not produced by factories until twenty years later. In most cases, it was a matter of fairly voluminous, fusiform, vessels equipped with powerful searchlights, often emitting engine sounds, and, in some cases, even seeming to have propellers.

In the United States, the majority of the sightings occurred between 1896 and 1897. Other cases were reported, particularly in Spain, Germany, Sweden, and Russia. A second wave [of sightings] occurred at the turn of the century in Great Britain.

The explanation that comes immediately to mind is that of true dirigibles (and right away we think of craft of German origin). However, it has a hard time holding up to a thorough examination.

In actuality, in 1880, the technology of these craft was still in its infancy. It is true that Colonel Giffard did conduct an initial test in 1852 with an elongated balloon equipped with a very low-power steam engine. Then in 1885, Renard traveled several kilometers for the first time, overflying Paris with a dirigible equipped with an internal combustion engine, but it was still extremely slow and not very easy to fly.

In fact, the first truly efficient aircraft were subsequent to 1910; however, even the zeppelins built during World War I far from possessed the characteristics observed by the witnesses to these phenomena.

From Greco-Latin antiquity to the beginning of the industrial age

Human beings in all ages have sighted phenomena in the sky that they considered, rightly or wrongly, to be abnormal. It is true that our epoch naturally has a tendency to doubt the accuracy of ancient testimonies, and especially so the further back into the past we go.

During the first three quarters of the 19th century, chroniclers related several dozen sightings of spheres and luminous wheels resembling present-day UFOs. The 18th century was marked by one strange case. Goethe recounts, in fact, that in his youth, in 1768, during a trip between Frankfurt and Leipzig, he and two other witnesses saw a type of large luminous tube positioned on the ground, surrounded by a multitude of small, very bright, moving flames.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, authors mentioned numerous sightings, not only in Europe but also in America and Japan. Among these, a few hold our attention due to their spectacular appearance and the multitude of witnesses. In the skies of Nuremberg, in April 1561, a large number of brightly colored spheres, disks, and "cigars" seemed to wage a sort of battle that left a profound mark on the population and caused the authorities great concern. A spectacle of the same kind took place in August 1566 in Basel.