

BEHIND THE NEWS

By RICHARD CARTER

The swift-moving celestial luminosities which the American public has come to call "flying saucers" are phenomena with a recorded history dating back at least 200 years and perhaps several thousand.

The Biblical Ezekiel's airborne wheels, for example, had some of the earmarks of what modern American science fiction readers, televisioners and "cold worriers" are on the verge of regarding as interplanetary scouts or missiles from Moscow.

Dr. Donald H. Menzel, professor of astrophysics at Harvard University, made this point in an interview last month with Time magazine. He produced documentary evidence that there was a saucer scare in Chicago on April 10, 1897, when man-

sky-watchers claimed to have seen two flying cigar-shaped objects.

Cigar-shaped objects have been spotted skyward by innumerable participants in America's postwar saucery.

Flying lights which differ in all apparent respects from shooting stars, meteors, and the like, have been seen by multitudes of sailors over the centuries, and their accounts of the phenomena differ hardly at all from those contributed by recent viewers.

Some people see white lights moving in formation; others see kelly green fire balls; others see orange fire balls; others see flying disks; others see the cigar-shaped mysteries. Some of the objects seem to hover, virtually

Continued on Page 16

motionless, before darting into a cloud and disappearing forever; others move at what seems to be an impossible rate of speed, reversing direction instantaneously, swooping and climbing in a manner which no man-made machine or human pilot could survive.

Since one of the foundations of modern science is to believe nothing that cannot be proved, most theories about the skittering whatizzits have to be rejected. Many theories which have gained wide currency are based on facts which are "probably true." But no scientist bases conclusions on things which only are probable.

The closest anyone has come not only to explaining the phenomena, but duplicating them, is Prof. Menzel. He believes the saucers are fancy mirages—actual images of lights, but displaced through miles of space by refraction. He explains that light moves slower through a dense medium like cold air than in warm air. When it passes from a layer of dense cold air into a layer of less dense warm air at an appropriate angle, it is bent, and may be seen miles away, as if disembodied,

moving at fantastic speeds, or just hovering, depending on conditions.

Headlights, aerial searchlights, even street lights in a city can be refracted by the atmosphere and become "flying saucers" out in the country miles away, he says.

To prove it, he has produced startlingly similar phenomena in his own laboratory.

One of the reasons the Air Force has felt impelled to take part in the public debate on the subject, after having satisfied itself through research that the saucers are something akin to what Menzel describes, is that radar scopes in Washington have been described as spotting the saucers at the same time pilots and ground observers were seeing them with the naked eye.

Until further returns are in, the only explanation available is one known to anyone who has ever had anything to do with radar—you see all kinds of unaccountable things on it. It was considered noteworthy that Air Force radar in the same region failed to pick up the impulses which the CAA now has added to flying saucer lore.