



U.F.O.

It has been said, “Every man has a scheme that won’t work.” And I remember some exact words, “Never tell!” I kept a secret. Now, most of the folks involved are gone. It’s safe to tell this story:

Flying saucers were all the talk in 1948. I rode my Indian Chief Motorcycle around my hometown, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and often stopped to visit brother Versil and his co-worker, Jack Reese – City Firemen at Station # 2 – 8th and Linden Streets.

The Firemen sat on a bench near busy Linden Street and read daily newspaper accounts of UFO’s while waving constantly to friendly passing motorist.

Across 8th Street was old man Herndon’s Grocery. On the west side of Linden was a mattress factory with a bunch of ladies who seemed to take lunch breaks all day. And behind the Fire Station was Mr. Leslie’s Dry Cleaners.

Brother Versil put down his newspaper and said, “We can build and launch our own Flying Saucer.” Jack and I didn’t know how he came up with the idea, but we agreed. It seemed to us like a good time to expose the public to the first such threat over the Great State of Arkansas.

We pooled our money – about \$1.65 – for our construction fund. I rode downtown to Kresses and bought several sheets of tin foil, string, and a package of nearly clear-white balloons.

Back at the stationhouse, we disconnected the gas heater and filled three of the balloons. We secured string to the balloons, putting pieces of the shiny foil onto the string. We tied it all together.

Chief Engineer Versil, the Design Scientist Jack, and I, the Procurement Officer, eased out the back door of the station and launched our UFO.

A lazy wind hardly rippled the leaves on the nearby oak tree. In fact, our flying saucer rose so slowly that it sort of drifted under the oak's lowest limb. It just hung there.

We looked around to see if anybody had witnessed our launch failure. Then we pulled our monster back into the station. It was time for revisions. We removed about half the heavy foil, shortened the string, and added three more balloons.

Versil said we needed to launch from several blocks to the East. This would allow our UFO to be high in the sky by the time it floated near the Fire Station. Our top-secret project progressed.

As Procurement Officer, I went to Mr. Leslie's Dry Cleaners and got a brown paper bag normally used to cover long dresses and coats.

We put our UFO inside the bag, and I carried it to the Zebra's football stadium – about six blocks to the East. I released the Flying Saucer and it went higher and higher, heading for our destined corner. I rejoined the Firemen sitting on the bench.

Here it came. It looked to be about 100 feet high. A mite low but it was now or never. We pointed up and shielded our eyes to look at this strange out of space thing.

Cars began to stop. People gathered and looked up. "What is it?" "What do you guys see?"

With a serious frown, Versil said, "I think it's a Flying Saucer."

According to plan, Jack and I whispered, but real loud, "It is a Flying Saucer."

At this point, Versil, Jack, and I could clearly see what it was. We were concerned others could too. But they didn't. The word quickly spread. "It's a Flying Saucer!"

Somehow, a hot air updraft began taking our Saucer almost straight up. In no time at all, it must have been a 1000 feet overhead. The three of us continued to point and whisper, "It's a Flying Saucer."

The crowd grew. Cars blocked Linden Street. Ladies from the Mattress Factory stopped taking lunch breaks and looked up. Old man Herndon's Grocery store folks stood outside and looked up. Leslie's Dry Cleaners did too.

Our plan was working and our next step was to sit back down on the bench and let the crowd take control. They did!

But about this time – our serious problem developed. Radio station KOTN had been notified. The Pine Bluff Commercial newspaper had been called. Even the Associated Press and the Little Rock paper had been notified.

The mysterious flying object had gone from sight but not before a lot of folks had witnessed it.

Here was the problem. Old man Herndon was a long time City Commissioner. Mr. Leslie was a newly elected City Commissioner. They did the hiring and firing of City Firemen.

Some news reporters arrived on the scene. The crowd had remained to tell their versions, but the reporters needed quotes from reliable politicians.

Mr. Leslie said, "It was fast. It must have been traveling over 1000 miles an hour. It was round – with little windows. Made sort of a humming sound."

Old man Herndon said, "Can't say exactly how fast it was going but I can tell you this – it was faster than anything man made. It jumped from 5000 feet up to about twice that high and then back down again. All in a split second. Yeah, it was round. I saw the windows too. And, I'm pretty sure I saw some little heads inside that thing. You can quote me, boys –I know it was about the size of my grocery store."

Versil and Jack pulled me from our bench for an emergency meeting inside the Fire Station.

I was sworn to secrecy. We could not tell what we had done. Their jobs could disappear faster than our UFO. I remember their exact words to me. "Never tell."