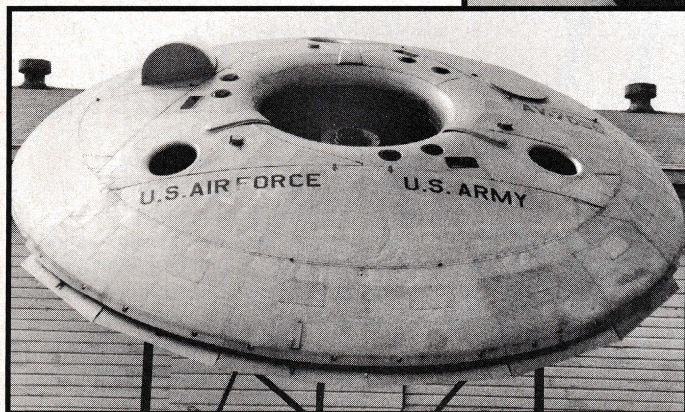
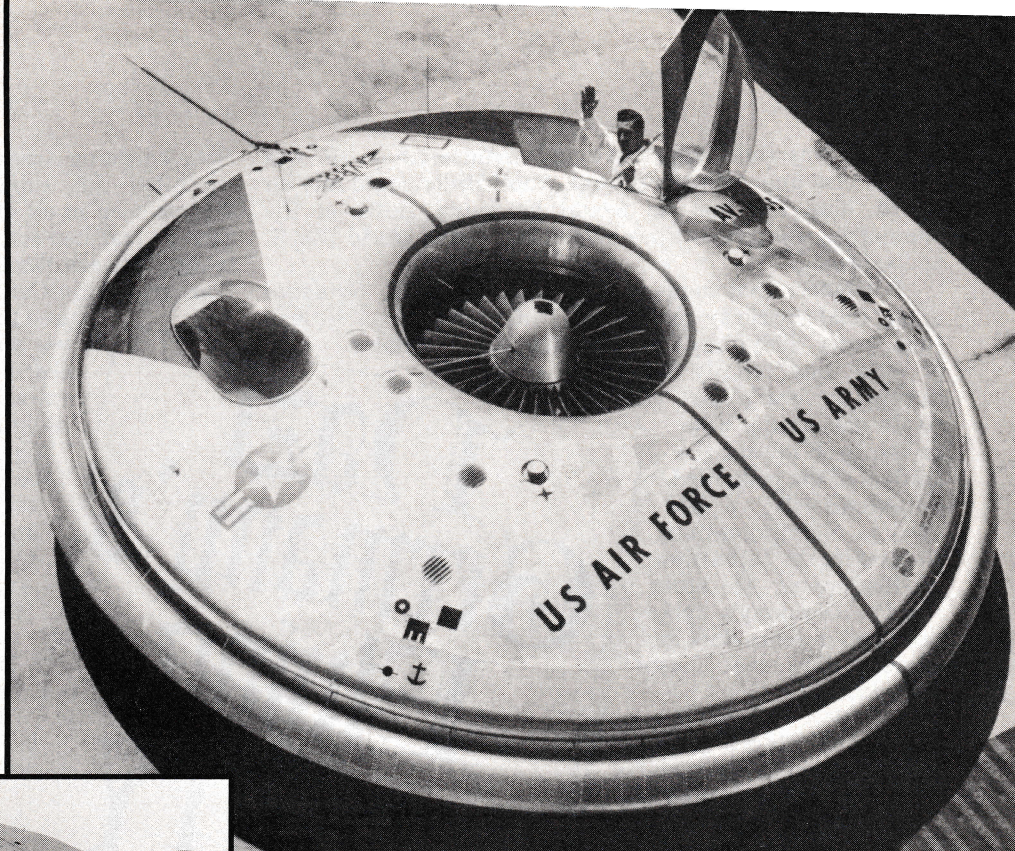


Do you see them at night, after everyone's gone to bed, like rising ghosts, which appear briefly on the horizon and then are whisked away at high speeds under some unknown power source? Are these the Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) spotted by so many, so often? Those strange lights in the desert sky that nobody seems willing or able to describe in lucid detail, except to say they were accompanied by some mysterious light. Aliens from outer space notwithstanding, the nearest thing to a real flying saucer was the Canadian Avro Avrocar built on a joint U.S. Army/Air Force contract in 1955 as the VZ-9V (pretty catchy designation). Its direct lift came from three internal jet engines, which enabled it to rise vertically, after which vectored thrust gave it forward motion. Stability problems - the bane of all such machines - prevented it from reaching its planned top speed of 260 mph. and the project was dropped. Nevertheless, one couldn't miss the Avrocar in the night sky, or at any other time, with its top-like diameter of 18 ft. and a gross weight of nearly three tons.



computations. A highly accurate and detailed 1/10 scale model of the proposed R-1 was also constructed. On it, a number of small changes were made to wing position, wing fillet size and shape, wing/fuselage juncture, and the shape of landing gear fairings, cowl sections, air inlets, tail wheel, etc. It was so exacting that wind tunnel tests showed the final proportions could, under optimum conditions, achieve a top speed of just over 300 mph., very close to the actual 309 mph. of the R-1's peak performance.

Constructed of chrome molybdenum steel tubing for its fuselage skeleton, with fabric and bakelite/plastic covering - the latter on horizontal stabilizers and inboard wing areas - mainly wooden wings, with wire bracing for both wings and tail, the Gee Bee R-1 and R-2 racers were deceptively strong, capable of easily absorbing plus 12 G during high angle of attack maneuvering and minus 6 Gs. And Zantford Granville's projects were not confined to air racing. He was already planning to offer four-seat, six-seat and eight-seat versions of his magnificent racer, each powered by an appropriately sized P&W Wasp engine. He was even exploring a vest-pocket 3,500 lb. (loaded) export fighter based on the R-1, when he was killed in a 1934 plane crash while trying to avoid workers on a runway.

After the successes of 1932, which saw Gee Bees take first and fifth in the Thompson and fourth in the Bendix cross-country, when the long-distance R-2 version, although well ahead nearing the finish, suffered a broken oil line, the Granvilles prepared for major prizes in 1933. Fortune, however, did an abrupt about-face, ceasing to smile on them. With

Jimmy Doolittle no longer available, Russell Boardman, who was not familiar with the revised and heavier R-1, turned it over on the runway during take off and died two days later, resulting in the Super Sportster Gee Bees being withdrawn from the Nationals.

Later in 1933, veteran Jimmy Haizlip rolled up the R-2 during landing and, although the enterprising Granvilles rebuilt the remains of the two wrecks into a hybrid R-1/R-2, it went nowhere. In the hands of another inexperienced pilot, it rolled off the end of the runway and sank into a drainage ditch. In 1935, another pilot wrecked it completely, killing himself. With Zantford Granville no longer at the helm, his Springfield Racing Association could no longer attract backers and the Gee Bee name passed into history. Still, it left behind a legacy of uncompromising ambition and skill. Bob Hall, who had departed the company early in 1932 in a dispute with Zantford Granville, probably over the choice of Russell Boardman - he was also the largest stockholder - to become the pilot for that year's Thompson, although remaining on good terms with the other brothers, formed his own association. He flew his high wing monoplane Bulldog to sixth place in the 1932 Thompson, went to work for Stinson for a short time, and then joined up-and-coming Grumman, where he helped design and flight test the prototype G-21 Goose amphibian, F4F Wildcat and F6F Hellcat fighters, the XTBF Avenger torpedo bomber, the twin engined F7F Tigercat, and the postwar XF8F Bearcat.

Up through 1939 the National Air Races continued to draw entrants and enthusiasts and, by that time, both Zantford Granville and Jimmy Wedell had been dead for nearly five years. Although more new designs emerged, some based on the earlier Gee Bee and Wedell Williams originals, it wasn't until 1936, when a Frenchman, Michael Detroyat, with the backing of the huge Caudron factory behind him, was able to better Jimmy Doolittle's 1932 speed record. Meanwhile, modified Wedell Williams racers were still placing among the money winning Thompson entrants as late as 1938 and 1939. When the races resumed, after the war, the innovative and near home-builts were all gone, their places taken by ex-military surplus fighters; an entire generation of designers had passed into history.