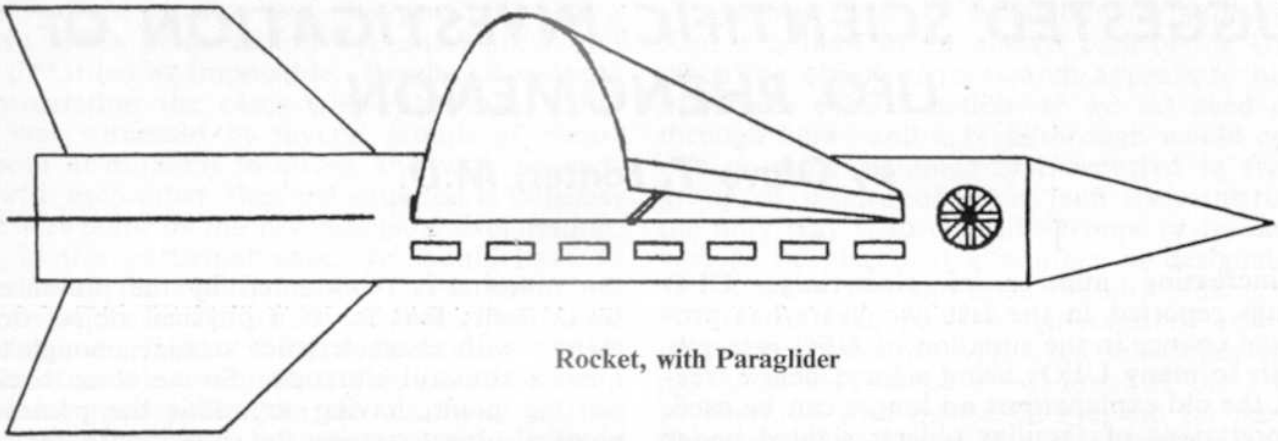

Rocket, with Paraglider

19th CENTURY PARAGLIDER?

by W. H. Watson

Our contributor, who lives in South Australia, makes an interesting suggestion that seems to underline the idea that the Ufonants are generally a few decades ahead of us with their devices.

WHILST perusing recent articles on the mystery airships over the United States between 1880 and 1897, a particular peculiarity of the descriptions struck me repeatedly as being exceedingly odd and yet strangely familiar.

Apart from the fore-and-aft mounted propellers, one reads again and again of sails, great wings, or occasionally large fins. Some reports mention light wings, triangular in shape. "Fragile construction" seems to be a prominent feature, most notably in an April 9, 1897, report from Illinois, mentioned by Jerome Clark.[1] The same report adds that *"a short distance above the body, lateral structures resembling wings or sails"* were noted.

We hear from Donald B. Hanlon[2] of one over Iowa three days later, on which *"the vibration of the wings could be plainly seen."*

Reading of sails in connection with airships recalled to mind medieval legends of "sky people" or "celestial sailors" cavorting around the firmanent in airboats or "cloud ships," closely related in appearance to the sailing vessels of their day.

Like others before me I assumed that each generation was interpreting what it had seen in terms of what was familiar to it.

But there was an obvious anomaly. Who in the nineteenth century would have visualised flexible sails above an airship? And triangular wings were, if anything, even less feasible inventions at that time.

Something niggled at the back of my mind, and remained niggling for some six months.

Then the February, 1967, copy of the British Interplanetary Society's magazine *Spaceflight* arrived, and there it was on page 50—*A New Recovery System for Sounding Rockets* by W. Pittelkow, of Dornier-System GmbH, West Germany . . . the Paraglider.

To find a concise explanation of the paraglider I turned to the March, 1964, edition, page 54, wherein G. Scheffler stated: "Two lifting-surfaces constructed on the paraglider principle are covered with a metallic silk material. They can be easily folded together and stowed in the centre of the rocket. When the rocket nears the Earth on the return leg of the trajectory, a command from a ground station via a compressed air mechanism releases the flexible wings from their compartments. The thin leading-edge booms hinge outwards and between them and the rocket body conical half-cups are formed."

The wing dihedral is 30°, angle of sweepback 56°. The experimental rocket has four conventional elevator-rudder fins at the tail, and the paraglider wing-tips are attached to the body by extending booms beneath the wing fabric.

America's National Aeronautics and Space Administration is also testing a similar device for landing the *Gemini* capsule.

Recalling Captain James Hooton's description[3] we read of "condensed air and aeroplanes" . . . "The aeroplanes suddenly sprang forward, turning their sharp ends skyward, then the rudders at the end of the ship began to veer to one side . . ."

Coincidental descriptions—paragliders operating in a reverse manner to that intended by Dornier-System, or am I too interpreting the mystery in terms of what is familiar to *our* generation?

Postscript: In addition to the mystery airship sightings, the paraglider reminds me of the weird objects observed by Vauriat, France, on August 29, 1962 (FLYING SAUCER REVIEW July-August 1963).

NOTES

[1] Clark, J. *The Strange Case of the* 1897 *Airship*, FSR July/August 1966

[2] Hanlon, D. B. *Texas Odyssey of* 1897, FSR September/October 1966. Also, in collaboration with Vallée, J., *Airships over Texas*, FSR, January/February 1967.

[3] Captain Hooton left a sketch of the airship he claimed to have encountered, and this Heath-Robinson looking object will be found adorning the cover of the July/August 1966 issue of the REVIEW.