Constructing the Enemy Within: Rumours of Secret Gun Platforms and Zeppelin Bases in Britain, August-October 1914

BRETT HOLMAN
University of New England - Australia
Email: bholman2@une.edu.au

ABSTRACT
This article explores the false rumours of secret German gun platforms and Zeppelin bases which swept Britain in the early months of the First World War and climaxed with the fall of Antwerp in October 1914, so persistently that they were repeatedly investigated by both the police and the military. They were the latest manifestation of a long-standing myth-complex around the threatening figure of an enemy within. They also represent an important moment in the British people's imaginative transition between the cautious optimism of the early months and the increasingly obvious likelihood of a long, total war.

Introduction

On Sunday, 18 October 1914, a strange urge took hold of the people of Great Missenden, a village in Buckinghamshire to the north-west of London. As reported initially by the London *Star*, a group of locals started digging up an abandoned coal drilling site, believing that it was the location of a concrete foundation which had been put in place by German spies before the war to serve as the platform for a heavy siege gun.[1] When the villagers found no evidence of any such platform, they decided instead that the site was a secret enemy aerodrome:

> There is no doubt that the site is very suitable for the rendezvous of a Zeppelin. It is a field in a hollow in the Chilterns, not so much a basin as a pie-dish in the hills. It is within 30 miles of London, and the idea is that a Zeppelin which had raided London in the night might descend there before dawn and replenish its supplies.[2]

No evidence was found for a Zeppelin base either, apart from some pipes now supposed to have been used to smuggle in petrol. The Buckinghamshire

[1] *Manchester Courier*, 20 October 1914, p.6. See also *Evening Dispatch* (Birmingham), 20 October 1914, p.3. All periodicals published in London, unless otherwise obvious.
[2] *Manchester Courier*, 20 October 1914, p.6.

Constabulary investigated the site and its Chief Constable gave a report to the War Office, but it quickly became clear that there was no enemy presence at Great Missenden.[3] This was no isolated incident; similarly unfounded rumours of gun platforms and Zeppelin bases gripped Britain in the summer and autumn of 1914. Why?

Jay Winter has argued that it was 'When the war of 1914 failed to produce a rapid outcome, when it turned into a form of siege warfare among industrial powers whose dominions stretched across the world, [that] it mutated into another kind of war, bigger, more lethal, and more corrosive than any previous conflict' – in other words, into total war.[4] Key to this process, he suggests, was 'The mobilization of the imagination', since 'Slaughter on a grand scale needs justification'.[5] This mobilisation was less the result of official propaganda, more the product of 'civil society itself' and its 'cultural campaign with two objectives: steeling the will of civilians to go on; and stifling dissent and thereby making it impossible to think of any alternative other than total victory and total defeat'.[6] The rumours of secret aerodromes and gun platforms swept Britain precisely at this juncture between the end of mobile warfare and the start of static warfare, at the beginning of the process of conversion into total war, bridging the more hopeful early months of the war and the battles of attrition that were ahead. They helped the British people to imaginatively reconstruct Britain as a home front – a term new to this war – turning it from a place of peace into a place of danger like the front line, thereby justifying and demanding the cooperation of all civilians in defeating the enemy, both within and without. The changing nature of these rumours therefore helps us to understand how the British began to make the imaginative transition from peace, to limited war, to total war.

The use of rumour as a historical source has been receiving increasing scholarly attention in recent years.[7] Rumours, and the spreading of rumours, can provide people with a sense of agency in uncertain circumstances, along with a means of social control. They can represent a dialogue between popular and elite discourses, not merely reflecting elite concerns about foreign policy and military strategy but

[3] Ibid.
[4] Jay Winter, 'Under Cover of War: The Armenian Genocide in the Context of Total War', in Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.189-213, pp.190-1.
[5] Ibid., pp.194, 201.
[6] Ibid., p.201.
[7] David Coast and Jo Fox, 'Rumour and Politics', in *History Compass*, vol. 13, no. 5 (2015), pp.222-34.

reflecting them back at the elites in an altered and amplified form. Especially in wartime, rumours work as improvised news, overcoming the limitations placed by censorship and combat on the quantity or quality of officially-sanctioned information reaching the home front. Rumours can also help make sense of the novel and often confusing experiences of wartime by assimilating them into a pre-existing 'myth-complex', as John Horne and Alan Kramer term it: a collection of cultural images and beliefs which explain what is happening and so provide a feeling of control and a basis for action.[8] As Catriona Pennell notes, the historical value of rumours lies not in their correspondence with an objective reality, but in their subjective truth – in what they reveal about the hopes and fears of the people who passed them on and, at least sometimes, believed in them.[9]

Rumours were, unsurprisingly, particularly in evidence in the early months of the First World War, when news from the front was generally late, vague, hopelessly optimistic, or all three.[10] Horne and Kramer's study of the '*franc-tireur*' myth-complex in August and September 1914, which led to German soldiers massacring Belgian and French civilians they believed were shooting at them, is foundational.[11] In the British domestic context, Pennell has examined the so-called 'Great Rumour', stories of large numbers of Russian soldiers being transported through Scotland and England and across the Channel to reinforce the Western Front.[12] This provided reassurance at a time when the German advance seemed unstoppable: to be able to hope that Russia's huge army was fighting alongside the small British one helped to allay fears of defeat and subjugation.[13] With the issue still in doubt, the Russian rumour was also a product of the desire to win the war quickly. But this false hope was soon replaced by more direct and ultimately more characteristic expressions of fear, through rumours associated with what can be termed the 'enemy within' myth-complex.

Britain's enemy within has taken many forms, from French spies to the fifth column to Islamic terrorists.[14] In the Edwardian period the primary enemy within Britain was

[8] John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp.89-93.
[9] Catriona Pennell, 'Believing the Unbelievable: The Myth of the Russians with "Snow on Their Boots" in the United Kingdom, 1914', in *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2014), pp.69-88, p.82.
[10] Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.119-21.
[11] Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914*.
[12] Pennell, 'Believing the Unbelievable'.
[13] Ibid., p.83.
[14] Jenny Uglow, *In These Times: Living in Britain Through Napoleon's Wars, 1793-1815*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), pp.24, 169; Richard Thurlow, 'The Evolution of the

widely imagined to be a German immigrant, who might appear to be a waiter or a hairdresser but was actually a soldier and a spy who remained loyal to the Kaiser. Collectively these enemies within formed a secret army, ready to aid the invasion when it inevitably came. In wartime, the enemy within myth-complex was rapidly converted into the belief that German spies were already carrying out acts of espionage and sabotage in Britain. Virulent anti-German propaganda and Germany's own acts of 'frightfulness' lent force to the belief that Germans were capable of any level of deceit and malice.[15] Demonstrating its tenacious hold on the British imagination, by the later stages of the war the enemy within had transformed into the 'Hidden Hand', a conspiracy theory in which financial and sexual blackmail of Britain's leaders by German agents and sympathisers was used to explain the continuing elusiveness of victory.[16]

Vigilance against the enemy within was an important part of the civilian mobilisation for war, in Britain as elsewhere.[17] It was partly in response to this largely imaginary threat that non-combatants began to imagine themselves as fighting the enemy on the home front and hence, to some degree, sharing in the dangers and taking part in the dangers being experienced by their soldiers on the front line. The hope provided by the 'Great Rumour' may have alleviated fear of the German enemy within temporarily but with the shock of the fall of Antwerp in October, bringing a stream of Belgian refugees to Britain and a horde of German soldiers to the English Channel, fear revived, now expressed in the form of rumours of secret German aerodromes and gun platforms. The coincidence of these beliefs at Great Missenden demonstrates how these two apparently distinct rumours were nevertheless part of the same myth-complex, different aspects of the enemy within.

Explaining rumours of secret gun platforms

Recent work on British attitudes towards Germany before 1914 has replaced a simple picture of increasing rivalry and hostility with a more complex mosaic of

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Mythical British Fifth Column, 1939-46', in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1999), pp.477-98; Antony Taylor, *London's Burning: Pulp Fiction, the Politics of Terrorism and the Destruction of the Capital in British Popular Culture, 1840-2005*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), pp.157-73.

[15] Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.6-24.

[16] Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain During the First World War*, (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1991), pp.164-81.

[17] Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p.81.

'Admiration, Antagonism, & Ambivalence', as Richard Scully puts it.[18] However, the coming of war left little room for such nuance and, unsurprisingly, it was the image of an innately hostile Germany which survived the coming of war. On this view, it was assumed that Germany's ultimate intention was to destroy Britain. This was allied to a common, if not universal, stereotype of the German character as both meticulous and duplicitous.[19] That Germany had infiltrated Britain in peacetime in preparation for a supposedly long-planned invasion was a common belief; now, with the coming of war, the danger seemed to be at its height.

Germany's covert preparations were widely rehearsed in fiction long before the war. The Victorian invasion fiction genre, inspired by the success of 'The Battle of Dorking' (1871), was joined in the Edwardian period by the spy novel, and there was much crossover between the two.[20] In Walter Wood's *The Enemy in our Midst* (1906), for example, 100,000 German immigrants have infiltrated into London over many years forming a secret 'Alien Army', which, dressed like British soldiers, strikes at the heart of the Empire just before the declaration of war.[21] Similar stories were also retailed as fact. The best-known writer of fiction about the German menace, William Le Queux, author of *The Invasion of 1910* and *Spies of the Kaiser*, also wrote newspaper articles encouraging readers to look out for suspicious characters, and passed along their reports to the newly-formed Secret Service Bureau, forerunner of the wartime MO5g and later MI5.[22] Inevitably, rumour played a part. In May 1909 alone, for example, stories circulated that a cache of 50,000 Mauser rifles was hidden in the heart of London, that German transports were practicing invasion off the Humber and even that strange subterranean sounds could be heard along the coast, as if the Germans were tunnelling under the North Sea.[23] But there was no secret

[18] Richard Scully, *British Images of Germany: Admiration, Antagonism & Ambivalence, 1860-1914,* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.1-4.

[19] John Ramsden, *Don't Mention the War: The British and the Germans Since 1890*, (London: Little, Brown, 2006), pp.91-133.

[20] Ailise Bulfin, '"To Arms!": Invasion Narratives and Late-Victorian Literature', in *Literature Compass*, vol. 12, no. 9 (2015), pp.482-96; David A. T. Stafford, 'Spies and Gentlemen: The Birth of the British Spy Novel, 1893-1914', in *Victorian Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1981), pp.489-509.

[21] Walter Wood, *The Enemy in Our Midst: The Story of a Raid on England*, (London: John Long, 1906).

[22] A. J. A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.148-63; Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5*, (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp.13-21.

[23] *The Times*, 25 May 1909, p.6; *The Times*, 13 May 1909, p.6; *Southampton Times*, 22 May 1909, p.7.

army, no secret invasion, and no secret tunnels. The German espionage network in Britain before the war numbered only a handful of agents.[24] Nor did Germany ever seriously contemplate mounting an invasion of Britain: the last time the German navy had drawn up even hypothetical plans was in 1899.[25]

The spy hysteria had abated somewhat by 1914, but it returned in the early months of the war.[26] Newspapers recycled pre-war images of spy rings and secret armies: in the first days of the war, it was reported that German rifles and pistols had been discovered in a London hotel, while a disused tunnel nearby was also searched for an arms cache, with less success.[27] Alongside a new novel, *The German Spy: A Present Day Story,* Le Queux's *Spies of the Kaiser* was re-issued in September.[28] Such rumours and stories served to highlight the Home Office's apparent abdication of its responsibilities by doing little to restrict the movements of enemy aliens. In fact, by mid-September, over 10,000 Germans had been interned, though the lack of accommodation forced a temporary pause and hence further public and press resentment.[29] The spy threat was not purely imaginary, as the trials of Karl Ernst and Carl Lody proved.[30] But the opinion of the War Minister, Lord Kitchener, that German 'information on our military defences through spies may be considered to be absolutely complete' was absurdly exaggerated.[31]

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[24] Thomas Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser: German Covert Operations in Great Britain During the First World War Era*, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.69-73.

[25] P. M. Kennedy, 'The Development of German Naval Operations Plans Against England, 1896-1914', in *English Historical Review*, vol. 89 (1974), pp.48-76, pp.54-6.

[26] David French, 'Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915', in *Historical Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1978), pp.355-70, pp.363-7.

[27] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7 August 1914, p.3.

[28] Nicholas Hiley, 'Introduction', in William Le Queux, *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England*, (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1996), pp.vii-xxxii, p.xxiv; *Bucks Advertiser and Aylesbury News*, 24 October 1914, p.7.

[29] French, 'Spy Fever in Britain', pp.366-9.

[30] Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser*, pp.78, 101.

[31] The National Archives [TNA], CAB 37/121, memorandum by Lord Kitchener [War Minister], 20 October 1914; quoted in K. W. Mitchinson, *Defending Albion: Britain's Home Army 1908-1919,* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.79.

The spy scare was intensified by increasing alarm over the possibility of an invasion.[32] In the public sphere this was again partly driven by fiction, with the invasion films *An Englishman's Home* and *For the Empire* both appearing in the cinema by early October.[33] But more important was the rapidly worsening situation in Belgium. On 1 October, *The Times* confidently declared that 'We do not think there is any need to worry about Antwerp'.[34] Unfortunately, a little over one week later, Antwerp had fallen and Belgian refugees were pouring into Britain, sparking anti-German riots in Aberystwyth and Deptford.[35] Even worse from the British point of view, German forces now threatened the Channel coast: one London woman commented that the fall of Ostend 'seems to have affected all our imaginations'.[36] *The Times* published a widely-quoted article on 15 October which warned that 'the war is reaching the climax of its violence […] We must expect to be attacked at home'.[37] The government shared these fears. The Admiralty compiled information from various sources suggesting that Germany was preparing a landing, while a War Office analysis concluded that 'Everything seems to point to a determination to reach Calais at all costs and thence attempt an invasion of England'.[38]

The apparent imminence of invasion increased the fear of sabotage. *The Times* dismissed the assurance of the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, that there had been no covert attacks by the Germans since the outbreak of war: 'It would be in the highest degree imprudent and impolitic for them to permit their agents to blow up a single railway bridge or cut a single wire unless and until a raid on English shores is contemplated'.[39] It was widely believed that the enemy advance through Belgium had been materially assisted by an extensive spy network put in place before the

[32] Howard Roy Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning 1888-1918', PhD thesis, London University, (1968), pp.537-87; Mitchinson, *Defending Albion*, pp.76-97.
[33] *Bucks Herald* (Aylesbury), 3 October 1914, p.6; *Midland Daily Telegraph* (Coventry), 3 October 1914, p.1.
[34] *The Times*, 1 October 1914, p.7.
[35] *Manchester Courier*, 10 October 1914, p.8; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 10 October 1914, p.5; Panikos Panayi, 'Anti-German Riots in London During the First World War', in *German History*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1989), pp.184-203.
[36] Leeds University Library, Liddle Collection, LIDDLE/WW1/DF/109, Ada Reece diary, entry for c. 16 October 1914.
[37] *The Times*, 15 October 1914, p.4. See also Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom', pp.550-6.
[38] TNA, ADM 137/965, undated summary; TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, report, Admiralty War Staff, 27 October 1914; TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, MT1b intelligence summary for 17-25 October 1914.
[39] *The Times*, 15 October 1914, p.7.

war.[40] While such rumours might have helped allay fears that the German army was simply unbeatable, they did so at the expense of amplifying fears of the enemy within still further.

Particularly influential was a story which emerged from the siege of Maubeuge, a French fortress city near the Belgian border. Maubeuge had resisted for two weeks, but then fell on 7 September after the Germans brought up heavy 42cm Gamma-Gerät siege guns.[41] The press was puzzled at 'how soon the German heavy artillery was able to open fire in spite of the fact that elaborate cement gun platforms have to be prepared in order to receive the heavy pieces'.[42] The explanation of the Paris *Le Matin* was that even before the war 'the Germans had the platforms already prepared on private property belonging to the firm of Krupp', the German arms manufacturer:

> Plant for manufacturing railway engines was subsequently erected on the ground. Heavy pieces of machinery could thus be constructed on the spot, and platforms built in suitable places on the property, where they lay concealed until the moment came when they were required for guns.[43]

There were also reports from the suburbs of besieged Antwerp that 'as at Maubeuge, platforms of solid concrete on which big guns could be mounted were discovered […] where many of the German residents had villas'.[44] Similar stories were told about the environs of Namur and elsewhere.[45] In fact, rather than requiring concrete foundations taking days to set, emplacing the Gamma-Gerät only required the use of steel and timber, which could be transported by rail and took only twelve hours to prepare.[46] For its part, *Le Matin* was eventually forced to retract its claim under threat of a libel suit: Krupp did not in fact own the factory in question, which was anyway on the wrong side of town.[47] But by this time the rumour was firmly entrenched in Britain. On 15 October, *The Times* asked if 'the Home Office can tell us with certainty that no such gun emplacements have been

[40] *Evening Dispatch* (Birmingham), 29 September 1914, p.1.
[41] M. Romanych and M. Rupp, *42cm 'Big Bertha' and German Siege Artillery of World War I,* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2013), p.34.
[42] *Daily Record and Mail* (Glasgow), 28 September 1914, p.3.
[43] Ibid. See also Hiley, 'Introduction', pp.xxiv-xxvii.
[44] *Taunton Courier,* 14 October 1914, p.1.
[45] *Daily Express* (Dublin), 8 October 1914, p.8.
[46] Romanych and Rupp, *42cm 'Big Bertha'*, pp.11-14.
[47] *Edinburgh Evening News*, 4 November 1914, p.3.

secretly constructed near our own cities'?[48] The *Daily Mail* implored its readers to 'Remember Antwerp' and demanded that local 'War Vigilance Committees' be set up 'with the duty of examining the houses, gardens, outhouses, &c., of all Germans and Austrians'.[49] It renewed its campaign for the internment of all enemy aliens, naturalised or not.

The response of the Home Office was swift. On 16 October, police raided C. G. Roder, Ltd., a German-owned sheet music factory in Willesden in north-west London. The building was searched and the twenty-two German workers present marched to a railway station 'amidst the booing of a large crowd', to 'be interned at Olympia as persons dangerous to the public safety'.[50] Press accounts noted particularly that 'The foundations are said to be of very thick concrete, and the roof is of concrete from three to four feet thick', while its position enabled it to dominate three railways, 'the North London, the Great Western, and the London North-Western. There is an uninterrupted view across London to the Crystal Palace'.[51] Another German-owned property, the Portobello Chocolate Factory in Edinburgh, where 'the prepared position could enable big guns to hit Rosyth and the Forth Bridge', was raided by the military on the evening of 17 October.[52] The *Manchester Courier*'s London correspondent wrote that 'When the German ante-war preparations at Maubeuge became known, it was natural for us to think of the same possibilities in London':

> Whether by accident or design, it is not easy to say, but it is obvious that in the past German and other alien residents have always favoured suburbs which by their elevation seem to dominate the rest of London and the surrounding country […] A gun placed in position on Hampstead could work effectually against any building, bridge, or railway junction.[53]

A 'vast amount of correspondence' about such prepared positions reached the government.[54] By 25 October the War Office had collated reports of suspiciously heavy concrete foundations or floors at factories or residences at Altrincham, Caterham, Erith, Romford, Sevenoaks Hill, and Surbiton, which last was supposedly

[48] *The Times*, 15 October 1914, p.7.
[49] *Daily Mail*, 17 October 1914, p.3.
[50] *Courier* (Dundee), 17 October 1914, p.2.
[51] Ibid.
[52] *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 19 October 1914, p.7; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 October 1914, pp.4, 5.
[53] *Manchester Courier*, 19 October 1914, p.4.
[54] TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, MT1b intelligence summary for 17-25 October 1914.

noted by 'German War Authorities' as a potential battery site.[55] Eventually however, the authorities became sceptical. After the first week of November, MT1b, a War Office unit concerned with home front intelligence, observed that 'No proof is forthcoming that any platforms have been actually prepared for guns'.[56] While the War Office still required commanders to compile lists of any suspicious buildings for occupation in the event of a raid or invasion, in mid-November Major-General O'Callaghan, an artilleryman attached to Scotland Yard, informed readers of *The Times* that there was 'no reason to suppose that the floors or roofs of factories […] constitute in any way a danger to the public'.[57]

Explaining rumours of secret Zeppelin bases

Before 1914, an increasingly extensive literature, by turns serious or popular, attempted to predict how the coming of flight might change the future of warfare. Sensational novels such as H. G. Wells's popular *The War in the Air* were read alongside ostensibly more sober forecasts such R. P. Hearne's *Airships in Peace and War*.[58] The consensus was that the main aerial danger to Britain was the German Zeppelin, in large part because of its ability to carry heavy loads for long distances without refuelling. This fear had led to phantom airship panics in 1909 and 1913, when thousands of people imagined they saw non-existent Zeppelins or 'scareships' in the skies over Britain.[59] The speculation about the German airship threat in both official and unofficial circles had largely focused on the possibility that they would be used to disrupt Britain's mobilisation in the opening phases of war, as dictated by the 'nerve centre' theory of Lord Montagu and other early airpower theorists.[60] But there were darker fears too: one Conservative politician speculated that German air

[55] TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, MT1b intelligence summary to 25 October 1914, appendix D.

[56] TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, MT1b intelligence summary to 7 November 1914.

[57] TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, letter, B. B. Cubitt [Assistant Secretary to the War Office], November 1914; *The Times*, 19 November 1914, p.9.

[58] R. P. Hearne, *Airships in Peace and War: Being the Second Edition of Aerial Warfare with Seven New Chapters,* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1910); H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air and Particularly how Mr Bert Smallways Fared while it Lasted,* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908).

[59] David Clarke, 'Scareships Over Britain: The Airship Wave of 1909', in *Fortean Studies*, vol. 6 (1999), pp.39-63; Brett Holman, 'The Phantom Airship Panic of 1913: Imagining Aerial Warfare in Britain Before the Great War', in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1 (2016), pp.99-119.

[60] Holman, 'The Phantom Airship Panic of 1913', p.102; Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908-1941,* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), pp.31-2.

superiority would be used to destroy British naval superiority, and 'the country would be open to the German army of five millions'.[61]

The Royal Naval Air Service [RNAS], entrusted with the air defence of Britain at the beginning of September 1914, focused its limited resources on establishing a rudimentary defensive system around key industrial, military and naval targets in London and other places, allied with an aggressive policy of long-range attacks on Zeppelin bases in Germany.[62] There was little official concern, at first, about the vulnerability of civilians: most of the few anti-aircraft guns were deployed to protect arsenals and harbours, with three assigned to protect Whitehall rather than the people of London.[63] The press was quicker to perceive that the Zeppelins might be used to bomb civilian targets thanks to the evidence of German 'frightfulness' in Belgium and elsewhere. By October, newspapers were discussing the possibility that the Kaiser would soon order his airships to attack London, while intelligence from Germany and neutral sources suggested that a raid by anywhere between twenty and two hundred Zeppelins could be expected.[64] In fact, the German Navy Airship Division was barely capable of offensive operations at this time, possessing only a single operational Zeppelin on the outbreak of war.[65] A crash construction programme produced ten more by February 1915 which, even when combined with the German Army's small Zeppelin fleet, still represented a threat far smaller than was imagined in Britain.[66]

There was, as yet, little to suggest that the Zeppelins might operate from anywhere other than their bases in Germany or their newly-established ones in Belgium apart from a spurious report in August that a German 'secret society' in London before the war had been ordered to establish 'a depot for airship parts' somewhere on the east coast of England or Scotland.[67] Rather than emerging from popular discourse about German spies, the possible existence of enemy aerodromes was generally inferred by military authorities from reported sightings of unknown aircraft in

[61] *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 4 April 1913, p.8.
[62] Barry D. Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule: British Air Strategy 1914-1939*, (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp.15-9.
[63] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, 'A.A. Guns', 27 August 1914.
[64] *Western Times* (Exeter), 8 October 1914, p.4; TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, 'Summary of information received of proposed Zeppelin and other attacks on England by Germans', 7 October 1914.
[65] Douglas H. Robinson, *The Zeppelin in Combat: A History of the German Naval Airship Division, 1912-1918*, (Henley-on-Thames: G. T. Foulis & Co., 1971), p.34.
[66] Ibid., p.35.
[67] *Standard*, 20 August 1914, p.6.

remote areas of England, Scotland, and Ireland.[68] The War Office amassed dozens of such reports from both military and civilian sources in the first few months of the war. However, no hostile aircraft flew over British territory before 24 December 1914, when a lone German seaplane dropped a single bomb on Dover; the first Zeppelin raid did not occur until 19 January 1915, when three naval airships attacked Norfolk.[69] Similarly, movements of Britain's few military aircraft could be accounted for and all civilian flying outside the vicinity of specified aerodromes had been banned by order of the Home Secretary just prior to the outbreak of war.[70] The reported aircraft were therefore phantoms, of the kind which had been seen over Britain in 1909 and 1913. They were nevertheless taken seriously by military intelligence.

One important cluster of sightings emerged in Cumberland in the north-west of England, centred on the industrial town of Barrow-in-Furness, a major centre for steel production and shipbuilding. Barrow seemed to be a focus for enemy activity. A suspected German spy, Frederick Appel, was arrested there on the first day of the war, while on the night of 10 August 'certainly 2, possibly 3' airships were reported by military personnel to be flying north over the dockyard.[71] The defences briefly opened fire, but to no effect. Squadron Commander Boothby had 'no doubt that at least one airship is working in this district', probably with 'a temporary base in the hills'.[72] A compilation of reports from the Barrow region in mid-August included more than forty eyewitness accounts by civilians and military personnel of strange lights in the sky.[73] Across the Lake District the Cumberland and Westmorland Yeomanry carried out a search near Scafell and the police at Bowness were asked to 'search some existing Aeroplane Sheds there for any sign of recent use and to establish the identity of any Aeroplane owners in the neighbourhood'; meanwhile, in Lancashire, the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry searched the Bleasdale Moors

[68] For a collection of these reports and others, see Nigel Watson, *UFOs of the First World War: Phantom Airships, Balloons, Aircraft and Other Mysterious Aerial Phenomena*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2015).

[69] Christopher Cole and E. F. Cheesman, *The Air Defence of Britain 1914-1918,* (London: Putnam, 1984), pp.19-20; Robinson, *The Zeppelin in Combat*, pp.48-56.

[70] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, order, R. McKenna [Home Secretary], 2 August 1914.

[71] *Manchester Evening News*, 5 August 1914, p.6; TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, Major H. McConaghey [general staff, Western Command], 'Re. Airships reported in N.W. England', 17 August 1914.

[72] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, letter, Squadron Commander F. L. M. Boothby, 11 August 1914.

[73] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, report, Major H. McConaghey [for General, Commanding-in-Chief, Western Command], 16 August 1914.

and the Forest of Bowland.[74] On 17 August, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Charles Douglas, ordered 'an aeroplane to be sent to fly over Derbyshire, Lancashire & Cumberland with a view to locating supposed base of alleged airship'.[75] Lieutenant B. C. Hucks, a famous pre-war aviator who had the advantage of being able to supply his own aeroplane, was accordingly detached from Farnborough and spent several days searching from the air – just prior to the RFC's first reconnaissance flights over France – but as with the ground searches nothing was found.[76] Sightings continued after Hucks was forced by engine trouble to end his search. As late as 15 October the Australian Mounted Training Corps – despite the impressive name, a small, unofficial militia group – was coordinating with local police in an investigation of 'the very clear evidence' of aircraft in Lancashire and Westmorland.[77]

Across the Solway Estuary from Cumberland, southwestern Scotland was also the source of numerous aircraft reports, beginning in late August when aeroplanes were 'heard and seen in various parts' of Dumfriesshire.[78] Unusually, many of these were reported in the local press, where they were at first explained as experiments 'by the War Office in view of contingencies that might arise in connection with the war'.[79] But by November, according to a local newspaper, many inhabitants had become 'satisfied' that the Germans possessed a secret base in the remote Galloway Hills due to suspicions over foreign copper miners present before the war, the presence of 'strange lights' in 'lonesome places where no lights should be' and mystery aircraft sightings, including one incident with 'an aeroplane flying overhead with two men plainly visible'.[80] The newspaper speculated that as London was well-defended from aerial attack, the Germans might have chosen Galloway as 'a secret base for refitting, replenishing, and getting fresh supplies before a raid on places not so well prepared'.[81]

[74] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, Major H. McConaghey [general staff, Western Command], 'Re. Airships reported in N.W. England', 17 August 1914.
[75] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, minute, Captain H. A. Ramsay, 17 August 1914.
[76] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, note, Lieutenant-Colonel W. S. Brancker [Assistant Director of Military Aeronautics], 20 August 1914.
[77] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, letter, Major H. McConaghey [for General, Commanding-in-Chief, Western Command], 29 August 1914; TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, letter, Captain Alex Rushall, 15 October 1914.
[78] *Dumfries and Galloway Saturday Standard*, 29 August 1914, p.2.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid, 7 November 1914, p.4.
[81] Ibid.

Further north, the increased importance of Scapa Flow, the wartime anchorage of the Grand Fleet, made the Admiralty sensitive to any possible threat from aircraft. When 'one Aeroplane was seen on the night of the 5th [of September] in the Orkneys, and one in both the Orkneys and Cromarty on the night of the 4th', the Admiralty concluded that 'an Aeroplane Base may have been established in the North of Scotland by the Germans, probably in the localities between Thurso and Cape Wrath'.[82] Numerous further sightings, such as the 'Air-craft supposed German' which was heard by a policeman over Kirkwall, reinforced the belief that a threat existed.[83] The Scottish Office was asked for its assistance, and responded by telegraphing police forces in Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, and Ross and Cromarty to conduct searches of remote areas.[84] These in turn enlisted the help of shepherds, gamekeepers, crofters and fishermen in 'reporting any movements of aircraft, giving full particulars'.[85] A poster issued by Scottish Command in October declared that the numerous aircraft sightings made it 'probable' that they were 'operating from some unfrequented part of Scotland where they are able to obtain oil, petrol, and other stores', offering a public reward of £100 for any information leading to the discovery of such a cache.[86] As with the scare at Barrow, investigations turned up no evidence of any German presence in Scotland and the search seems to have been suspended some time after late October, when the War Office was still enquiring as to 'places where a supply base for Zeppelins might exist' in Ross.[87]

The final area where the presence a German aircraft base was suspected in 1914 was the south of Ireland. As in England and Scotland, this theory was advanced to explain otherwise inexplicable aircraft reports. For example, Mrs McGuinness, the wife of the commander of Howth Point War Signal Station, saw 'Aeroplanes at great height' on 22 September, while two days later Private Langlan observed a 'cigar shaped airship with two bright headlights' at Heathburn Hall, near Dublin.[88] The War Office asked the Royal Irish Constabulary to 'institute enquiries', but an unofficial request

[82] National Records of Scotland [NRS], HH31/6/1, note, 6 September 1914.
[83] NRS, HH31/6/1, telegram, Superintendent Police, Kirkwall, 7 September 1914.
[84] NRS, HH33/6/1, letter, James M. Dodds, 8 September 1914.
[85] NRS, HH33/6/4, letter, H. Chisholm [Chief Constable, Sutherland Constabulary], 29 September 1914.
[86] *Hamilton Advertiser*, 17 October 1914, p.5.
[87] TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, report, Captain R. M. Crosse, 26 October 1914.
[88] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, letter, Brigadier General R. M. Greensfield [for Major General, Commanding the Troops in Ireland], 27 September 1914.

from the Admiralty that 'the South of Ireland [be] searched for secret aeroplane depots' was headed off by Lieutenant-Colonel Kell, the head of MO5g.[89]

As with the concrete gun platforms, there was ultimately no evidence that Germany had established secret aerodromes on British soil. In the opinion of a staff officer at Liverpool, 'Barrow is cracked on the subject', deluded by the glow of many iron foundries which 'are enough to create airships whenever the wind & clouds are right'.[90] Expectation played an obvious role. The same officer suggested that the Cheshire police 'have received strict injunctions to look out for aircraft & are now seeing them for the first time'.[91] Given the still-developing nature of aviation technology, aeronautical expertise did not necessarily lead to scepticism. Squadron Commander Boothby, a key figure in the Barrow sightings, was an RNAS officer attached to the Vickers Airship Shed at Barrow where the large airship HMA 9 was under construction. His recent experience on detachment in Somaliland, where he had been investigating the possibilities of operating airships from forward bases against the forces of the 'Mad Mullah', seems to have predisposed him to overestimate the German ability to do the same in Britain.[92] At any rate, whatever the original motivations the idea of a Zeppelin base died slowly, as the various searches wound down without result.

Explaining the panic at Great Missenden

The panic at Great Missenden on 18 October 1914 reflected the rising hysteria evident across Britain more generally after the fall of Antwerp. But the particular form that the panic took drew on local news and rumours as well as those circulating nationally. An understanding is therefore required of both the local context in which the villagers lived, as well as the wider context of the war. In other words, what must be attempted is a partial reconstruction of the imaginative world of Buckinghamshire in the early months of the war.[93]

[89] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, telegram, Major R. H. James, 26 September 1914; TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, undated minute; TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, minute, [signed], 26 September 1914.

[90] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, letter, [Lieutenant] H. de Watteville, 3 September 1914.

[91] TNA, AIR 1/565/16/15/89, letter, [Lieutenant] H. de Watteville, 20 September 1914.

[92] 'Airships for Somaliland', *Flight*, 19 June 1914, p.641.

[93] See also Catriona Pennell, '"The Germans Have Landed!": Invasion Fears in the South-East of England, August to December 1914', in Heather Jones, Jennifer O'Brien, and Christoph Schmidt-Supprian (eds.), *Untold War: New Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), pp.95-116.

Like the rest of Britain, since the beginning of the war Buckinghamshire had undergone a transformation in an 'aesthetic mobilisation'.[94] People could see that their nation was at war. Reservists and Territorials crowded the railway stations along with many other new recruits. Other men joined unofficial militia organisations, such as that formed in early August on the Taplow estate of Lord Desborough.[95] By early October the casualty list was beginning to mount, bringing home 'The dread effect of the war'.[96] The county assumed a more warlike aspect as military formations passed through the area; a battalion of the Durham Light Infantry was briefly billeted at Great Missenden itself at the end of September.[97] The restrictions imposed by the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) gradually tightened from 8 August, enforced by the Buckinghamshire Constabulary. Suspicion of foreigners increased: many DORA regulations concerned the threat of espionage and sabotage. Most notably these included the requirement for enemy aliens to register at their local police station, with arrest for those who failed to comply.[98] Constables were also ordered to watch for 'aliens travelling at night […] for purpose of committing outrages', and helped to guard 'vulnerable points' such as crossroads and bridges against German saboteurs.[99]

The war was not just something happening on the other side of the Channel; at times the fighting seemed much closer to home. On 29 August the *Daily Mail* reported that the military and the police were searching for two motorcyclists who had attacked a signalman at Northchurch in the early hours of the day before as well as another motorcyclist who 'fired at a policeman in the streets of Hitchin' about half an hour later.[100] While both towns are in Hertfordshire, Hitchin is only 25 miles from Great Missenden, and Northchurch just 7 miles; and the Buckinghamshire Constabulary were reported to be involved in the search on their side of the border.[101] Upon investigation, however, the stories fell apart. A doctor examined the Northchurch signalman and concluded that he was 'suffering from a nervous breakdown and was not attacked at all'.[102] Similarly, the Hitchin constable 'had not actually been shot at, but being in a state of nerves mistook the sudden bang of the

[94] Alisa Miller, 'Modern War and Aesthetic Mobilisation', in *British Journal for Military History*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2015), pp.12-41.
[95] Mitchinson, *Defending Albion*, p.69.
[96] *Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Advertiser* (Uxbridge), 10 October 1914, p.5.
[97] *Bucks Herald* (Aylesbury), 3 October 1914, p.7.
[98] Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies [CBS], BC/1/5 Buckinghamshire Constabulary Memoranda Book, memo for superintendents, 8 and 18 August 1914.
[99] Ibid, 6 and 8 August 1914.
[100] TNA, HO 45/10484/103444/4A, clipping from *Daily Mail*, 29 August 1914.
[101] Ibid.
[102] TNA, HO 45/10484/103444/4A, undated memo.

[motorcycle] engine for a pistol shot'.[103] Just before going on duty he had been reading a newspaper account of 'a presumably mythical scoutmaster on a motor cycle who goes about offering poisoned sweets to sentries and shooting at police with a revolver'.[104] Less than a month into the war suggestion and rumour were already creating alarm in Buckinghamshire and neighbouring counties.

Just after the supposed attacks at Northchurch and Hitchin the Buckinghamshire Constabulary were ordered to look into reports of 'arms and ammunition secreted at Holmer Green, about 3 miles south of Great Missenden itself, where a German firm were supposed to be boring for coal some time ago'.[105] Even in the summer of 1913, when operations began, the drill site had been the subject of local gossip and press speculation due to the secretive nature of the foreigners working there.[106] While the result of the police investigation is unknown, it presumably did not satisfy locals for, as noted above, the same site was searched for a concrete platform by the villagers of Great Missenden six weeks later. This was after the emergence of 'the stories from France of alleged gun platforms prepared beforehand by Germans in France and Belgium'.[107] Following the fall of Antwerp and the scaremongering of *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, and other newspapers, the 'people in this part of Bucks have been much excited by the recollection of the incident' before the war, and the Holmer Green site became the subject of the second, unofficial search on 18 October, only a day or two after the Army raids on the German-owned factories in London and Edinburgh.[108]

But after finding no concrete beds at Holmer Green, the villagers instead decided that it was a Zeppelin base. Unlike in other parts of Britain, mystery aircraft sightings do not seem to be the cause of the belief in a hidden aerodrome, since there are no reports from the area before the Great Missenden incident. The link may have been suggested by a newspaper account of a certain German-run factory as 'a terrifically strong fortification which could dominate some of the most vital points in London' where 'every facility is offered for the landing and mooring of airships'.[109] Alternatively, the basis for the secret aerodrome theory may have been that Buckinghamshire's proximity to London made its inhabitants aware of the risks of

[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] CBS, BC/1/5 Buckinghamshire Constabulary Memoranda Book, memo for Superintendent Bunker, 31 August 1914
[106] *Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Advertiser* (Uxbridge), 24 October 1914, p.8.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] National Maritime Museum, Arnold White papers, WHI/186, undated clipping [presumably October 1914].

aerial bombardment. On 8 October, the Chief Constable of Buckinghamshire, Major Otway Mayne, notified his superintendents that the Home Office now required that 'Police at any place within a radius of 60 miles from London will telephone reports of any aircraft seen in their district direct to the War Office', which included most of the area under his command.[110] Also, while Buckinghamshire itself was not under lighting restrictions, after some early experiments private external lighting in London was, from 6 October, ordered under DORA to be extinguished, a diminution which would have been clearly noticeable at a distance from the metropolis.[111]

News from Belgium and France contributed to this new sense of danger. Zeppelins had already bombed Liège and Antwerp in the first month of the war, while in October the fall of Antwerp was accompanied by further Zeppelin raids, described by the *Buckingham Advertiser* as 'murderous', as well as attacks by Taube aeroplanes on Paris, which the *Daily Mail* claimed was an attempt 'to burn the city'.[112] The German occupation of part of the Channel coast brought them closer to Britain, and raised the possibility that 'that they will use Antwerp as a base against England'.[113] A number of press stories repeated rumours of impending air raids, many coming from credible sources. An Aylesbury woman who was repatriated from Germany in late September was reported in the local press as saying 'One of the last things I heard was that Graf Zeppelin was speaking to some people on Frankfurt Station, and he said before long Zeppelins would be over London'.[114] Incredibly, the cabinet minister Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, gave a speech in which he claimed that 'at the end of October the German Army, Navy, and aircraft were going to honour England with their attention', with the result that 'innocent women and children would be killed and wounded'.[115] Great Missenden itself was host to two families of Belgian refugees, who arrived in the middle of the month from Antwerp. One told of having seen 'large Zeppelins which hovered over the town and dropped bombs […] We saw three policemen killed with bombs [and] one lady lying half out of a window with her head off'.[116]

[110] CBS, BC/1/5 Buckinghamshire Constabulary Memoranda Book, memo for superintendents, 8 October 1914.
[111] *The Times*, 6 October 1914, p.8. The order was not universally heeded, and had to be repeated several days later: *The Times*, 10 October 1914, p.10.
[112] *Buckingham Advertiser and North Bucks Free Press*, 17 October 1914, p.6; *Daily Mail*, 13 October 1914, p.5.
[113] *Daily Mail*, 12 October 1914, p.5.
[114] *Bucks Advertiser and Aylesbury News*, 24 October 1914, p.7.
[115] *The Sunday Times*, 11 October 1914, p.11.
[116] *Bucks Herald* (Aylesbury), 24 October 1914, p.8.

The panic at Great Missenden ended as suddenly as it started. Similar claims about suspicious tunnels emerged on 21 October from Totternhoe in Bedfordshire, about 40 miles away.[117] But thereafter, while further rumours about suspicious tunnels emerged from the area in the following weeks, they now lacked the connotations of a Zeppelin base or gun platform.[118] The enemy within was changing.

Conclusion

While the War Office continued to receive reports of phantom airships and enemy spies, the specific claims of concrete platforms and secret aerodromes became less plausible as the nature of the war changed. At Little Waltham in Essex, it was still possible in December to believe a foreign-owned business was actually 'a German fort' with 'a concrete floor for the emplacement of heavy guns'.[119] As late as January 1915, Scottish Command was again investigating reports of 'a supposed aircraft base in Kirkcudbrightshire'.[120] But as winter settled in and the front line in Flanders stabilised, an invasion began to seem unlikely.[121] Conversely, after German battlecruisers bombarded Yorkshire in December and Zeppelins bombed Norfolk in January 1915, it was no longer necessary to merely imagine the war coming home.[122] The scene was now set for a further transformation of the enemy within myth-complex, which now manifested in suspicions of Germanic names in high places and rumours of motor-cars driving around the countryside at night, using their headlights to guide Zeppelins to their targets.[123] John Buchan used the idea of an 'aerodrome […] a secret one', hidden in the moors of Galloway, in his classic spy novel *The*

[117] *Bedfordshire Advertiser and Luton Times*, 23 October 1914, p.5. See also TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, MT1b intelligence summary to 8 November 1914.

[118] *Evening Express* (Aberdeen), 2 November 1914, p.2; see also TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, undated clipping.

[119] James Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.38.

[120] TNA, AIR 1/550/16/15/27, Home Defence intelligence summary to 3 February 1915.

[121] Mitchinson, *Defending Albion*, p.80.

[122] Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.55-60; Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.25-6.

[123] Holcombe Ingleby, *The Zeppelin Raid in East Norfolk* (London: Edward Arnold, 1915).

Thirty-Nine Steps, first serialised in August and September 1915, but the war, and its rumours, had moved on.[124]

The rumours of secret forts and hidden aerodromes in Britain in the summer and autumn of 1914 illustrate the unstable nature of the enemy within, whose precise characteristics changed with the course of the fighting in France and Belgium, quickly adopting new threats as they became plausible – although discarding them more slowly, even after official disproof. The pre-war rumours of arms caches turned by degrees into secret gun platforms, those of phantom airships into hidden Zeppelin bases. In at least one case, that of Great Missenden, a new idea about the threat posed by the enemy within appears to have been invented (or reinvented) on the spot. This instability suggests that the perception of a threat – the enemy within – was more important than its precise nature: artillery or aircraft. The imaginary content of a myth-complex is therefore more mutable, perhaps, than suggested by Horne and Kramer.[125]

However, the assimilation of the new threat of the Zeppelin to the older threat of the spy suggests that the apparent ability of aircraft to penetrate all defences and strike at any point was a powerful complement to the potential for espionage to do the same, albeit through subterfuge as much as technology. Indeed, mystery aircraft were seen elsewhere during the First World War, always interpreted as threats, often in conjunction with supposed subversion on the ground. To take the English-speaking countries alone, significant mystery aircraft panics took place in South Africa in 1914, Canada in 1914 and 1915, the United States in 1916, and Australia and New Zealand in 1918.[126] These episodes bear suggestive parallels with the better-known flying saucer or UFO phenomenon, which began in the United States in 1947 but

[124] H. de V. [John Buchan], 'The Thirty-Nine Steps', *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. 198, no. 1198 (August 1915), pp.163-82, p.173. See David Daniell, 'That Infernal Aeroplane', *John Buchan Journal*, no. 11 (Spring 1992), pp.10-12.

[125] Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914*, p.91.

[126] Robert E. Bartholomew, 'The South African monoplane hysteria: an evaluation of the usefulness of Smelser's theory of hysterical beliefs', in *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 59 (1989), pp.287-300; Robert E. Bartholomew, 'Phantom German air raids on Canada: war hysteria in Quebec and Ontario during the First World War', in *Canadian Military History*, vol. 7 (1998), pp.29-36; Watson, *UFOs of the First World War*, pp.130-49; Brett Holman, 'The enemy at the gates: the 1918 mystery aeroplane panic in Australia and New Zealand', in Michael J. K. Walsh and Andrekos Varnava (eds), *Australia and the Great War: Identity, Memory and Mythology* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2016), pp.71-96.

soon spread worldwide.[127] Flying saucers have often been interpreted in the Cold War context as an 'atomic psychosis', although their origins and evolution appear to be more complex than such a reductive label suggests.[128] Certainly, the paranoid response to phantom airships sightings in 1914 was not repeated with respect to flying saucers in 1947, which were interpreted in a variety of ways, from religious to extraterrestrial. Perhaps the ghost rockets seen across Europe in 1946 and widely believed to represent Soviet missile tests were the last true expression of the mystery aircraft phenomenon as harbingers of a new or more total war.[129]

That the rumours of Zeppelin bases and gun platforms now seem literally fantastic is beside the point. Their value as historical sources lie in their sudden, if brief, plausibility, for this reveals how far the violence of the war was enlarging imagination already in the first months of the war. The British people could now imagine their own destruction by aerial and artillery bombardment, rather than indulge in vaguer and ultimately safer fantasies of spies and scareships.[130] Winter's 'mobilization of the imagination' and hence the transformation of home into home front can be seen in action here in Britain in the summer and autumn of 1914, before any bombs ever fell.[131]

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[127] Steven J. Dick, *The Biological Universe: The Twentieth-Century Extraterrestrial Life Debate and the Limits of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.267-320.
[128] Spencer R. Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.399; Pierre Lagrange, 'A ghost in the machine: how sociology tried to explain (away) American flying saucers and European ghost rockets, 1946-1947' in Alexander C. T. Geppert (ed.), *Imagining Outer Space: European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.224-244, pp.239-41.
[129] Lagrange, 'A ghost in the machine', pp.230-4.
[130] Nicholas Hiley, 'Decoding German Spies: British Spy Fiction, 1908-18', in Wesley K. Wark (ed.), *Spy Fiction, Spy Films and Real Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass, 1991), pp.55-79, p.70.
[131] Winter, 'Under Cover of War', p.194.