

American panic 40 years ago

United Press International
Forty years ago the night before Halloween, the Martians invaded earth, a million Americans became unshinged and folks around Grovers Mill, N.J., shot the local water tower full of bullet holes.

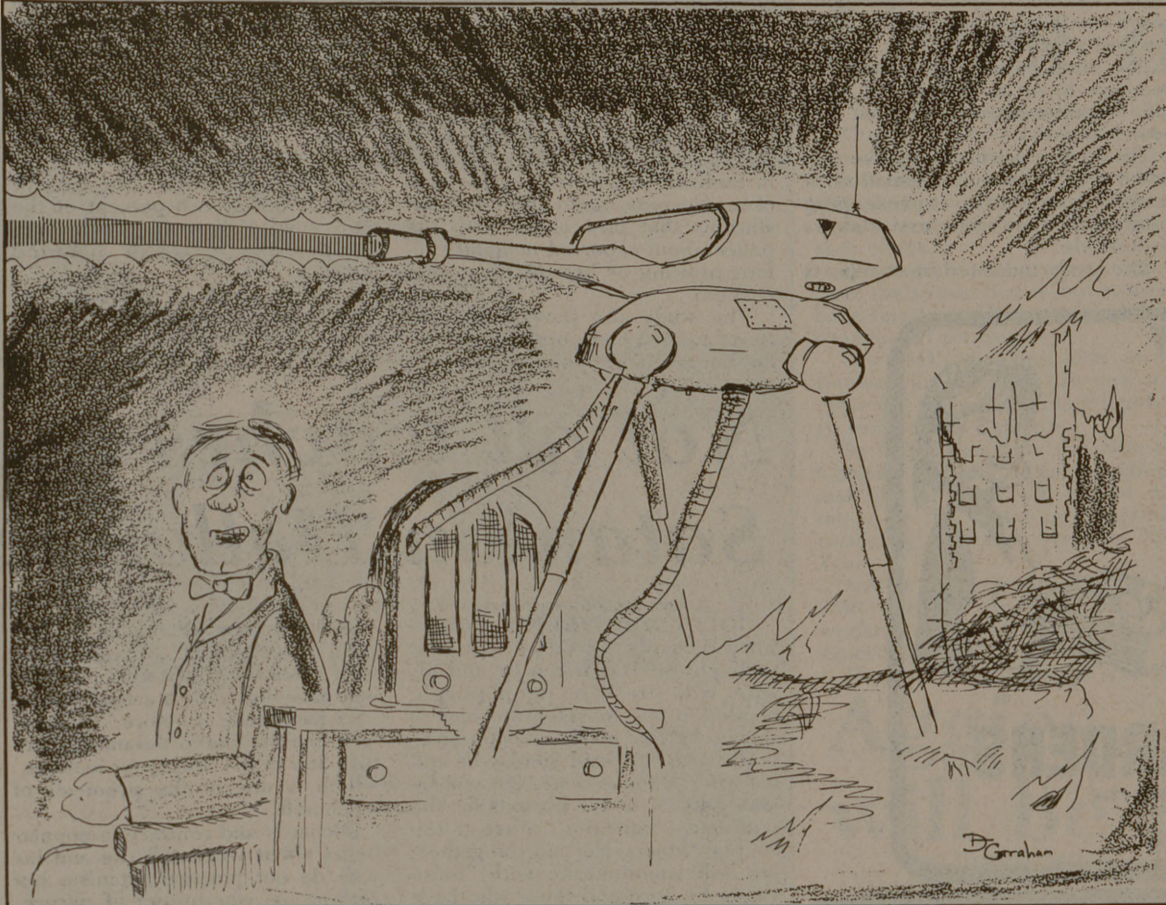
The occasion: a battle that never existed outside the pages of H.G. Wells science fiction classic, "War of the Worlds," but under the masterful hand of another Welles — one named Orson — it came a bit too late the night before Halloween in 1938.

Eddie Kemp, now 66, never heard the "Mercury Theater of the Air" radio bulletins that struck terror in the hearts of his neighbors, but he remembers the terror well. It was supposed to be happening in his backyard.

"I drove through the area...but I had the radio shut off in the car," he said Sunday night. "I drove right through a big traffic jam, but I thought it was a fire or accident or something. Next morning, there in the newspaper was a picture of my home which was right in front of the field where the Martians were supposed to have landed.

"My good God in heaven," I thought. "I'm sure glad I didn't have the radio turned on. If I did I probably would have been gone with the rest of 'em right into the hills of Pennsylvania."

They took to the hills all over the nation that night as Welles and his crew rapped out one terse radio bulletin after another, describing in horrifying detail the inexorable march of the Martians, in war machines like gigantic spiders, striding across the countryside on their long legs, slaughtering everyone in sight.



That's why the Grovers Mill water tower got the business.

"It was a foggy, misty night, and people could see this image through the fog — the four legs of the tower," Kemp said. "Oh God, they thought they had one. The tower

hasn't been used in a good many years, but I suppose it's still got the bullet holes."

But Grovers Mill, picked by script writer Howard Koch as the Martians' beachhead after he closed his eyes and aimed a pencil point at

a map of New Jersey, wasn't the only area swept by panic at the coming of the aliens. Never mind that Welles and his CBS broadcast crew ran frequent disclaimers saying it was all make-believe. An estimated 1 million of the 6 million who heard the program heard only disaster.

In Pittsburgh, a man returned home just in time to keep his wife from swallowing poison.

"I'd rather die this way than like that," she wailed as the radio re-

lentlessly pounded out its fictitious bulletins.

Later, in what had to be the understatement of the decade, an unrepentant Welles was to describe the classic dramatization as "a Halloween prank," but few of the embarrassed victims who fled were laughing.

At one point, they learned that of 7,000 men battling a single Martian machine at Grovers Mill, only 120 had survived.

"The rest strewn over the battle area from Grovers Mill to Plainsboro, crushed and trampled to death under the metal feet of the monster," the breathless "announcer" said, rattling on with other battle statistics.

In Newark, N.J., hundreds of residents ran into the streets covering their faces with wet towels and handkerchiefs to protect themselves from the poisonous gas of the oncoming aliens. In Ashville, N.C., five boys at Brevard College fainted as students fought for telephones to call parents, begging to be taken home.

While panic spread, Welles and his crew were blissfully unaware of the havoc their "newscasts" were spreading.

Later there was debate. Should Welles and his imaginative crew be given medals — or hempen neckties?

Columnist Dorothy Thompson finally came down on the side of medals — or at least kudos — for a program she said pointed up the nation's vulnerability to panic in the very real war already raging in Europe and overnight, Welles was an international celebrity.

Could such a thing happen again, today? Some say yes, but Kemp dis-

agrees. "People are too educated now," he said. Forty years ago, it was something new, but a radio story is a lot different than television. Today, it wouldn't cause a ripple."

Hitler cast spell, says ex-aide

United Press International
BONN, West Germany — Adolf Hitler was petty, pedantic, illogical and irrational but possessed hypnotic powers that compelled obedience even in defeat, says his lieutenant and war production chief, Albert Speer.

Thirty-three years after the Nazi leader killed himself in his Berlin bunker, Hitler's mesmeric power over his associates still fascinates him, Speer writes in his latest memoirs.

The first installment of "Albert Speer on Hitler" appeared Sunday in the West German newspaper Welt am Sonntag.

Speer believes it was this power that allowed Hitler to dominate

other Nazi leaders — "desperadoes from all classes" — and make "courageous officers" obey him even when they saw his orders leading to catastrophe.

Reports of Hitler's hypnotic powers began to circulate as soon as he became German chancellor in 1933. Speer, who probably was closer to Hitler than any other Nazi leader, writes in his new memoirs that the reports are true.

"If Hitler had a friend, I was it," Speer writes. Hitler thought that Speer, who began his career as the Nazi architect, was a fellow artistic genius and was drawn to him.

Speer, 73, has written other books and articles since 1966, when he finished his 20-year sentence in

Berlin's Spandau prison for war crimes. But never before did he discuss Hitler's hypnotic powers.

But in his new book, Speer, writes that only Hitler's hypnotic powers could have held together the desperadoes who gathered around him for different reasons all the long years when Hitler's prediction he would gain power legally seemed irrational and illogical.

"This to me is still today overwhelming proof of Hitler's hypnotic powers," Speer writes.

"It was a time when strictly speaking he should not have been able to be an absolute ruler. The lost battles and the impending downfall should have destroyed his halo."

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