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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DUST-WHIRL DANGERS

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A few years ago the locomotive of a passenger train in Kansas collided with a dust whirlwind, which carried away the bell, broke a window and did other damage. The moral of this tale appears to be that aviators would be well-advised to steer clear of these whirling columns, which are common over dry plains and deserts in hot weather, especially when there is little wind.

In the Middle East they are called "dust devils." Wing Commander Roderic Hill, in his book "The Baghdad Air Mail," writes of them:

"The dust is drawn upward by an ascending spiral of air, and builds itself into a column of gray smoke rising into the sky. Sometimes a number of these dust devils can be seen together, moving along like silent specters. Anywhere in the world you can see tiny whirlwinds that whisk up the dust with a sharp sigh. In Ireland I believe they call them Sheelan na gig.

"If you are standing near your aeroplane in the desert and a large dust devil passes over you, the aeroplane rocks in the swift vortex of air. When flying, unless you want a rough passage for a minute or two, it is well to give them a wide birth. But their bark is worse than their bite."

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