

ERS ARE REAL  
DDBERGH

FLYING SAUCERS  
from  
OUTER SPACE

DONALD E. KEYHOE

HUTCHINSON  
Stratford Place  
London

1954

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It's early morning on July 24, 1948. A DC-3 with 20 passengers aboard drones through the darkness at 5,000 feet altitude. The sky is clear with a bright moon peeking through broken clouds (4/10th coverage) forming a layer 1,000 feet above the cruising airliner. The pilot, Captain Clarence S. Chiles, gazes straight ahead into the blackness. Suddenly he sights what he at first believes to be another aircraft approaching out of the ebony depths. Captain Chiles quickly nudges his co-pilot, John B. Whitted, as he exclaims: "Look, here comes a new Army jet job." The next 5 to 10 seconds, however, were instead like something out of a Halloween eve.

Because of the controversial nature of the forementioned few seconds, the exact statements of both aviators will be reproduced as they are preserved in official records:

Captain Chiles:

"At 2:45 a.m., we were cruising at 5,000 feet when there came what looked like a jet type aircraft to our right and slightly above meeting us. It was a clear moonlit night with the visibility excellent; therefore, we were able to view the ship as it passed for a period of around ten seconds. It was clear, there were no wings present, that it was powered by some jet or other type of power shooting flame from the rear some fifty feet. There were two rows of windows, which indicated an upper and lower deck, from inside these windows, a very bright light was glowing. Underneath the ship there was a blue glow of light.

t = 10 sec

"After it passed it pulled up into some light broken clouds and was lost from view. There was no prop wash or rough air felt as it passed." 123.

Captain Whitted:

"I was flying co-pilot for Capt. Chiles on Trip 576 which left Houston, Texas at 8:40 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, Friday night July 23, 1948. At 0245 EST, we sighted a strange object coming toward us at a high rate of speed. We were at 5,000 feet and our position was 25 miles southwest of Montgomery, Ala. The strange object had a stream of red fire coming from its tail. I assumed that it was a jet type airplane of the Army or Navy but as it came nearer I could see that it was much larger than any Army or Navy jet that I have ever seen or read about. It passed us on the right side of our DC-3. I estimate its speed in the neighborhood of 700 mph but this is purely a rough estimate. We were holding a compass heading of 50 degrees and the object passed us going in the opposite direction. To me, the object seemed about a half-mile from us, flying straight and level. I could see no wings supporting the object.

"The object was cigar-shaped and seemed to be about a hundred feet in length. The fuselage appeared to be about three times the circumference of a B-29 fuselage.

It had two rows of windows, an upper and a lower. The windows were very large and seemed square. They were white with light which seemed to be caused by some type of combustion. I estimate that we watched the object at least 5 seconds and not more than 10 seconds. We heard no noise nor did we feel any turbulence from the object. It seemed to be at about 5,500 feet (This would put it about half way between the airliner and the layer of broken clouds at 6,000 feet.) "124."

After the "thing" had whizzed past, the pilots had the following reaction. Chiles remarked: "After it passed us we must have sat there for five minutes without saying a word, we were so speechless." 125.

Also, another quote given in the press stated: "The light of the plane (UFO) and its jet flames was so bright it almost gave them 'lightning blindness,' they said, and they had to turn up their instrument panel lights in their cockpit." 126.

Whitted shattered the silence asking Chiles what sort of eye-popping stratospheric Loch Ness monster was that. Chiles, no less baffled, clicked his mike and tried to explain what had just happened to the Eastern Airlines radio post at Columbus, Ga., requesting that Lawson Field at Fort Benning, Ga., be contacted about a possible experimental aircraft trespassing in commercial airplanes. Within minutes Lawson Field replied that it was ignorant of any such military air traffic. More puzzled than ever, Chiles chatted with Columbus explaining that: "... it looked like some type of rocket ship." 127.

Whitted later would be quoted as saying: "If you look at one of those fantastic Flash Gordon rocket ships in the funny papers you've got a picture of what we saw." 128.

After the pilots regained their composure, they left the DC-3's controls and went to the passenger cabin to seek other witnesses, finding only a C. L. Mc Kelvie awake. 129. Mc Kelvie later told military intelligence that: "... the pilots seemed quite excited and they appeared nervous over the episode." 130. An Air Force interrogator filed the following report on Mc Kelvie:

"He was occupying the 5th or 6th seat from the front of the plane on the right and would periodically glance out the window. There was a full moon which illuminated the ground and skies and the ground could be clearly seen. Frequently they passed cumulus clouds. On one occasion as he was looking out he observed a sudden streak of light moving in a southeastern direction across the airway above the plane. He wondered if it were lightning but observed the flame moved in a straight line and not in a flare(?). The color was bright flame--he thought it was probably a light cherry red--although the edges were more of a yellow flame. He shifted his position in his seat for better observation, momentarily losing sight of it. Then he saw it again. He estimated the flame

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to be about one-half as far above the plane as the plane was above the ground. He saw no physical shape--only a streak of flame moving in a straight line. The whole experience was momentary so that detailed observation was absent. He heard no sound but stated that the vibration of the plane was much greater than normal and that it was not possible to hear any sound from the outside." 131.

After landing at Atlanta at 3:49 a.m., the pilots attempted to impress others with the strangeness of their experience, but those who listened remained incredulous. The aviators were emphatic when they said they had observed a machine. They are quoted as stating: "It was a man-made thing all right." 132 And: "... they were certain it was not a meteor or comet, because they had seen them before in the air." 133.

Chiles and Whitted checked into Atlanta's Henry Grady Hotel but they got little rest. The two were soon in the radio studio of Atlanta's WCOM being interviewed by the station's news director, Lockwood Doty. The next day the city's newspaper, the Atlanta Constitution, splashed a big headline across its front page: "ATLANTA PILOTS REPORT WINGLESS SKY MONSTER." Other newspapers around the country picked up on the story and followed suit.

Reaction was rapid. Response came in from various quarters. A Washington Air Force spokesman remarked: "... obviously this country has no plane resembling a double-decked, jet-propelled, wingless transport shooting a 40-foot flame out of its back end." 134. Another: "Out at Santa Monica, California, the famous Gen. George C. Kenney, Chief of the Strategic Air Command, was bearded in his den. His eyes twinkled. No, he said, cautiously, it wasn't one of his planes. The Army as yet hasn't got anything like the thing seen over Montgomery. 'I wish we did,' the General said wistfully. 'I sure would have liked to see that thing.' 135. From a civilian source came this remark: "William M. Allen, President of the Boeing Aircraft Co., up at Seattle. 'I'm pretty sure it wasn't one of our planes,' said Mr. Allen, modestly." 136.

Incredibly, authorities momentarily tried to fall back on an old standby to explain the sky bogey as both the Pentagon and the local Weather Bureau at Maxwell Field at Montgomery, Alabama, were quoted as asserting: "... that the Atlanta pilots had flown past an air radar weather observation balloon. Those things, they explained, are 10 feet in diameter and have square, tinfoil boxes fastened to them. The boxes reflect light and 'give strange illusions' as they twist and turn." 137.

The fact that wasn't:

One aspect that was sure death to the meteor theory was the estimated closeness of the aerial monster. Chiles: "It passed us about 700 feet to our right and about 700 feet above us..." 138. Whitted: "... within a one half mile." 139. Unfortunately some early statements offering definite proof of a near brush with the aerial monster which turned up in the first news accounts was later declared false by the two pilots. How or why the

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statement came to be is not clear. Early press stories credit Captain Chiles as saying: "As the aircraft (the sky monster) passed them, their DC-3 fluttered in the prop-wash, jet-wash, or rocket-wash. It sent out tremendous shock waves." (140). The subsequent denial of such statements was double checked by the late Dr. James E. McDonald. The denial still stands. (141) \*

The "rocket shock waves" was an aspect seized upon by Donald Keyhoe, an author that used the assertion with great effect in his writings to build up the mystification of the Chiles-Whitted incident as late as 1960. (142) Keyhoe cannot be faulted too severely since the same bit of data was included in an official memorandum released in April 1949, which reads: "... its prop wash or jet wash rocking our DC-3." (143). The exact words of Capt. Chiles taken down on August 3, 1948, and since preserved in Blue Book files, states: "There was no prop wash or rough air felt as it passed." (144). Whitted: "We heard no noise nor did we feel any turbulence from the object. It seemed to be at about 5500 feet." (145)

The final official evaluation resorted to the meteor hypothesis, as did an arch-foe of UFO apparitions, Dr. Donald Menzel, who displayed a rooted aversion to the sensationalism surrounding the Chiles-Whitted episode. Menzel wrote:

"There can be no doubt that Chiles and Whitted misinterpreted the appearance of an unusually brilliant meteor, its body glowing white (the momentarily persisting luminous train of a meteor often has a veined or fibrous structure that could easily have suggested the 'lighted window' and 'cockpit') and blue incandescence (the glowing 'undercarriage') as it rushed through the atmosphere some fifty miles or more away, shooting off flaming gases (the 'exhaust') and vaporizing from the friction of the atmosphere. Flashing beyond their range of vision ('pulling up into the clouds'), it probably burned and disintegrated before it reached the earth." (146).

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The weakest part of Menzel's explanation is the last point he referred to. Could the departure upward have been an illusion? Chiles was not fuzzy on this as he plainly stated: "After it passed it pulled up into some light broken clouds and was lost from view." (147). Interrogated again on November 2, 1948, Chiles said the object's departure in more precise terms: "Excellent--well coordinated gentle climbing turn into clouds prior to disappearance." (148). To make sure a special sketch was drawn of the object's climb and made part of Air Force records (see the illustration accompanying this text).

More questioning obtained other details not found in the first accounts. Chiles: "... thought it had a 'snout' similar to a radar pole on the front and he had the impression there was a

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\*Ruppelt states that the DC-3 hit an air pocket immediately after the "sky monster's" pass at the airliner. This writer has not found this mentioned in the official files or newspaper accounts.

cabin with windows above--much like a pilot compartment--except that it appeared brighter .... he saw no occupant nor did Whitted. Visible from the side only was an intense, fairly dark, blue glow running the entire length of the object beneath the fuselage. (149)

Moreover:

"The exhaust was described as a red-orange flame, the lighter color (orange) being predominant about the outer edges. Chiles thought the flame flared out from a nozzle in the rear which he thought he perceived. The flame extended some 30 to 50 feet behind the object and became deeper in intensity (redder) and increased in length as the object pulled up into a cloud." (150)

Whitted's version of the exhaust went:

"He saw the 'exhaust' as a parallel wide flame which appeared to come from the entire rear of the object rather than from a nozzle never growing any wider than the width of the object itself, although he noticed the increased length of the flame as the object 'pulled up.'" (151)

An Air Force officer associated with the Pentagon's UFO investigation in the 1950's revealed:

"According to the old timers at ATIC this report shook them worse than the Mantell incident. This was the first time two reliable sources had been really close enough to anything resembling a UFO to get a good look and live to tell about it." (152)

Before the military investigators could become embroiled over the subtleties of the Chiles-Whitted encounter in the sky, a ground report came to their attention providing some thought-provoking, supporting evidence that enhanced the strangeness of the "sky monster" mystery.

#### The Robins Air Force Base Incident:

"At 0945, 10 August 1948, Lt. Colonel Cropper, Acting District Commander, 6th District Office of Special Investigations, interrogated Mr. --- (deleted), Robins Air Force Base employee, regarding an aerial phenomena witnessed by --- while on duty at Robins Air Force Base on the night of 23 July 1948. The following is a transcript of this interrogation:

- Q. 1. What is your name, age, address, and employment?  
 A. 1. --- (deleted). I am 23, unmarried, and live at ---, Macon, Georgia. I am a member of the Transient Maintenance Alert Crew on the midnight shift - 2400 to 0800 hours.
- Q. 2. Do you recall the date and the time you saw this object?  
 A. 2. It appeared on Friday night, the 23rd of July 1948, between 0140 and 0150 hours, Eastern Standard Time. I was standing fire guard on a C-47, directly across from Operations, and I had to take down the take-off time which was between 0140 and 0150.

- Q. 3. What was the weather condition?  
 A. 3. Good visibility and no clouds.
- Q. 4. Were there any lights around you? Outside lights or beacons?  
 A. 4. I am not sure whether the flood lights on the hanger were on or off. I was facing the north looking away from any possible lights.
- Q. 5. In what direction did you see this object?  
 A. 5. It was coming out of the north. I was facing the north and actually didn't see it until it got overhead, but it came out of the north and was in my view for about twenty seconds. The last I saw of it the object was taking a southwest course.
- Q. 6. Describe in your words what you actually saw from the time it appeared until it disappeared.  
 A. 6. The first thing I saw was a stream of fire and I was undecided as to what it could be, but as it got overhead, it was a fairly clear outline and appeared to be a cylindrical-shaped object, with a long stream of fire coming out of the tail end. I am sure it would not be a jet since I have observed P-84's in flight at night on two occasions.
- Q. 7. Approximately what was the height and altitude of this object?  
 A. 7. Three thousand feet--it could be lower or higher, at night it is difficult to judge distance.
- Q. 8. What was the size and shape in comparison to the trail of fire?  
 A. 8. The trail of fire was longer than the cylindrical shape of the object.
- Q. 9. Was the entire object illuminated? Describe its shape.  
 A. 9. I noticed a faint glow on the belly of the wingless object--a phosphorescent glow.
- Q. 10. Are you familiar with shooting stars?  
 A. 10. Yes sir. I thought at first it was a shooting star or meteor, but a shooting star falls perpendicular. This object was on a straight and level plane. When it disappeared it disappeared from sight due to distance, than drop.
- Q. 11. How did it differ from a shooting star or meteor in size and shape?  
 A. 11. I have only seen one or two meteors and they appear to be round or more or less ball-shaped and this object was long and cylindrical in shape.
- Q. 12. What was the color of the light?  
 A. 12. It was a trailing faint blue flame.
- Q. 13. Was there any moonlight at this time?  
 A. 13. I didn't pay too much attention to the moonlight. I wouldn't say for sure whether there was a moon.

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- Q. 14. Where did the light that illuminated the shape of the object seem to come from?
- A. 14. It looked like it was close to the bottom deck.
- Q. 15. Did it give you the impression that there were windows or holes and did the decks appear to be divided into sections?
- A. 15. I am not sure. It would be hard to tell if there were windows and a divided deck could not be recognized from the ground.
- Q. 16. Did you read the newspaper account of the civilian pilots who saw this strange object about the same time and did the paper's description seem to refer to the object you saw?
- A. 16. I read the write-up about the rate of speed. I don't see how they could tell if it had square or round windows but the description seemed to fit my impressions.
- Q. 17. Was there anyone with you when you saw this object?
- A. 17. No sir. I was standing in front of No. 2 engine and I tried to call the co-pilot's attention to the object in the sky. He had already put his headgear on before I could get his attention and the object was gone.
- Q. 18. With whom did you first discuss this matter?
- A. 18. I called the tower and asked them if they saw it. They didn't.
- Q. 19. What was their reaction regarding this object?
- A. 19. They thought I was drunk or seeing things.
- Q. 20. Were you unusually fatigued at this time?
- A. 20. No sir. I had been merely reading Air Force magazines prior to this time.
- Q. 21. Have you ever had occasion to read much or study Air Force magazines, experiments with guided missiles objects, or similar material?
- A. 21. No sir, only what I could get out of Air Force and Aviation magazines.
- Q. 22. Were you in the Air Force during the war?
- A. 22. Yes sir. I was an Aircraft Engine Mechanic with a rating of Buck Sergeant in the Ninth Air Force.
- Q. 23. Is there anyone else on the Base who saw this particular object that you know of?
- A. 23. No sir.
- Q. 24. What type of construction, color, size, material did this object appear to resemble?
- A. 24. I would say that it looked like it was about the size of a B-29. It might have been a little larger, in circumference. It was too large for a jet. It seemed to be a dark color and constructed of an unknown metallic type material.
- Q. 25. What would you say its speed was in comparison with other types of aircraft?
- A. 25. About seven hundred miles per hour.

- Q. 26. How did you arrive at that estimate?
- A. 26. I have seen P-80 type aircraft flying but this was one of the fastest objects I have ever seen. I saw German V-1's in the Summer of 1944 and they were fast, but this one was even faster. This object was much larger. A V-1 is very small and only made about three hundred miles per hour speed.
- Q. 27. How did it disappear?
- A. 27. Just like an airplane in normal flight fading away from normal vision.
- Q. 28. Was there any sound or odors at the time?
- A. 28. I heard no sound and everything was quiet. No engines were warming up at the time.
- Q. 29. How about the maneuverability and exhaust trail of this object?
- A. 29. It was flying straight and level and took a changing south-west course while in sight.\* The flame seemed to be longer, maybe due to the object moving through the air.
- Q. 30. Had you consumed any alcohol in the preceding four or five hours?
- A. 30. No sir. I do not drink.
- Q. 31. Did you ever see any planes in 'Buck Rogers' comics that resembled this object?
- A. 31. Maybe the length and roundness resembled, but as far as the wings, I couldn't tell if this object had any.
- Q. 32. What did you say your educational background and Air Force experience was?
- A. 32. I am a high school graduate and I was in the Air Force for four years.
- Q. 33. How long --- (questions 33 and 34 concerned his personal work record.).
- Q. 35. Is there anything further you would like to add to aid in this evaluation?
- A. 35. Yes sir. During the Battle of the Bulge, a Sergeant and myself were on guard duty and saw something that resembled this object in question. We later found that we had witnessed the launching of a German V-2 rocket. It carried a stream of fire that more or less resembled this object. This object looked like rocket propulsion rather than jet propulsion, but the speed and size was much greater.
- Q. 36. Did the altitude, speed, and size of this object have any similiarity to a meteor or shooting star?
- A. 36. No sir.
- Q. 37. What else did you associate your thoughts with when you first saw this object?
- A. 37. It looked like a rocket and was the shape of an XS-1 but it was too large for an XS-1. My final conclusion was

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\*Note that he claims the object changed course!

- that it was energized by rocket propulsion.
- Q. 38. Were you excited when you told the other people about this object?
- A. 38. No sir. They more or less kidded me about it and I was informed that Flight Service wanted to see me.
- Q. 39. Who did you talk to in Flight Service?
- A. 39. I talked to a man over the interphone system but did not know his name. He wanted to know whether I was a civilian or military and asked me a few questions. I think Flight Service turned it over to Air Defense Command the next morning."153.

Military Intelligence observed that both the Chiles-Whitted encounter and the Robins AFB sighting were: "... officially made within a period of time that precludes any chance of impressions being gained from radio or newspaper reports."154.

More specifically: "Special Agent Cassidy contacted Capt. H. R. Daniels, Public Information Officer, Robins Air Force Base, Georgia, to determine whether or not any publicity releases were given to the reported sightings at Robins Air Force Base. Captain Daniels stated that no press releases were given out on this information at least until ... (August 9th).155. Since the Robins case was an hour before the Chiles-Whitted encounter, conceivably the two pilots could have been inspired by the sighting, but as we have seen there had been no chance of that.

Major General Cabell, Director of Intelligence, AF01, at Wright-Patterson, immediately dispatched a team of investigators to Atlanta; a group made up of Major R. A. Llewellyn, Project SIGN officer, Mr. A. Deyermond, Technical Assistant to Col. Clingerman, Mr. A. C. Loedding, Assistant Deputy for Technical Analysis Division, and Capt. R. J. Groseclose, Security Officer. When they arrived in Atlanta, the team questioned Chiles and Whitted at the Henry Grady Hotel where they obtained signed statements and had the two pilots produce sketches of the object on hotel stationery. Major Llewellyn sought also to have a chat with passenger Clarence McKelvie but didn't catch up with him until July 31st.156.

While the military was slowly setting its investigative wheels in motion, popular author R. DeWitt Miller was way ahead of official speculations and already had the ear of a stringer for United Press. A year before during the height of the flying saucer flap (July 8, 1947) Miller had achieved recognition by the press when he proposed a long list of possible explanations for the reported sky phantoms. This time, however, he narrowed the options by, for example, dismissing the idea of an Army experimentation program, or the theory that the thing zooming over Alabama that night was the product: "... of some strange group of super scientists working in a secluded Shangri-La." Instead, Miller thought only of the possibility of something emerging from an unknown dimension, or about something arriving from Mars or somewhere else beyond the Earth.157.

As previously indicated, perhaps of even greater importance is what Miller brushed aside as it seems the news media was now inclined to do at the moment. There was no entertaining the illusion, natural phenomenon, or hoax theories.

The composure of the military Intelligence team in Atlanta may have suffered a little July 26th when something swept over Georgia while the Intelligence team was still there and still trying to determine what happened the 23rd and the 24th in the skies at that locality. Official files state:

"This object was observed between 2100 and 2300 hours 26 July 1948 at Chamblee and Augusta, Georgia, by observers --- (names of six witnesses deleted). This object was not thought to be a meteor in that it maneuvered. The glow was described as varied in color but predominantly brilliant blue-white. The course was described as generally 'southern.' Although the dates seem to indicate that this sighting could not be the same as that described in incident #1 (Chiles-Whitted), yet the major portion of this testimony refers to a 'blue white light.' Observations in the first instance describe a 'blue glow' running the entire length of the fuselage. When viewed from the ground it is logical to assume that the blue glow would be mostly visible." 158.

The evaluator was attempting here to match this sighting with that of the Chiles-Whitted "sky monster" that was supposed to have had a blue glow along its undersurface, yet another bit of data that increased the strangeness index of the case.

Additional descriptive information from other witnesses in the Chamblee and Augusta areas mention the phenomena as, for the most part, a football shape with a green light and silvery tail racing along to the southwest in level flight.

If the thing was a meteor it certainly had to be one of the slowest in recorded history. The night editor for the Augusta Chronicle was working on the next day edition of the Chronicle in his office when his nocturnal routine was disturbed July 26th by a series of phone calls beginning at 9:50 p.m. concerning a fiery ball in the heavens. Finally he peeked out his office window and immediately spotted an odd bluish light. Peering closer, this is what he saw:

"The light was sighted southwest and was moving in a southwest direction, bobbing and weaving in flight. It was not traveling in a level plane but seemed to go slightly up and down. The speed was approximately that of an average passenger aircraft. I judged the object's distance from us to be approximately five miles. There was a slight trail following the object which seemed to burn itself out in the course of its flight. The object itself gradually disappeared from sight as a normal aircraft might do in flight. The altitude was approximately 5,000 feet." 159.

In a written wrap-up of the case the following paragraph was inserted:

"On 12 August 1948, S/A (Special Agent) Montgomery, 111th CIC Det., contacted personnel at the Atlanta Naval Air Base and adjoining municipality regarding a reported aerial phenomena. It was generally agreed that the phenomena resembled a shooting star, despite

the fact that course and altitude did not correspond to the characteristics of such an aerial phenomena."160.

The origin of the confusion was from accounts like that of the Chief of Communication at the CAA station at Daniel Field who sighted the same phenomena apparently moving to the northwest while he stood on the porch at his home. To him the thing was large, about one-fourth the size of the full moon, a brilliant multi-colored sight trailing burning fragments. He believed it to be a meteor and estimated its speed at 10 - 12,000 miles per hour during the 2 - 3 seconds it was in view.161.

One is tempted to accept the above account and write off the report by the Chronicle editor since it seems to come down to making a choice between an expert observer and an untrained layman, but consider the next account by an expert observer named "Avery" at the Atlanta Naval Air Base, Chamblee, Ga. He had been on duty in the base observation tower on July 26th at 10:00 when he spotted a blue-white light: "... the light was very high, traveling very fast, and maintained a uniform altitude and speed. The light looked very much like a shooting star except for the fact that it maintained a uniform altitude."162.

So far there was nothing intriguing in the testimony and evidently this is all many persons in the Atlanta area observed but it just so happens that "Avery" goes on to say that suddenly: "The light appeared to gain altitude and then turned sharply to the south..."163.

The July 26th case:

"An attendant at the Atlanta Naval Air Station reported he saw the apparition twice. He said the first time he saw it about 9:00 p.m. near Stone Mountain. The operator, who was asked that his name not be used, said he thought 'it was a falling star' until it started climbing and banked sharply to turn away from the city.

"He said the 'bluish streak of light' was traveling very fast and very high. He added it did not look like any jet plane he has seen in night flight. He saw it again 45 minutes later."164.

Extensive checks of air traffic in the southwest area at the time of the Chiles-Whitted encounter turned up something from an airliner that was cruising an airplane to the north of the EAL plane. The time in the report is a guess but if it is any where near correct then it would play havoc with the meteor hypothesis since it indicates that the object in question was traveling at subsonic velocity. Did it take the object some 15 minutes, instead of seconds, to travel from North Carolina to Alabama? The report reads:

"At about 0230 (Chiles-Whitted encountered their object at 0245) --- (deleted) and I (Louis Feldvary), as pilot and Captain on 571/23, saw what I believe was an unusual meteor. It was brighter than any I have seen before, and traveling in a horizontal direction,

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slightly above the horizon. I estimate that I saw it for about three seconds before it died out. At no time did it appear to travel in a downward direction. ---- (deleted) and I talked about what we had seen and discussed the fact that a meteor, caused by gravity, could still appear to be traveling horizontally. 165.

*t = 3 sec*

The pilots had just checked with Blackstone, Va., ground station so they said the time is approximate, based as it was on the Blackstone transmission. The document continues:

"At the time of this incident we were traveling between Blackstone, Va., and Greensboro, N.C. The sky was clear and the visibility unlimited. We were on a magnetic heading of 240 degrees and I estimate that the object was on a bearing of about 210 degrees from us (Chiles and Whitted put their object on about 230 degree heading), that is, about 30 degrees to the left of our heading. It appeared to be traveling in a southerly direction, about but close to the horizon." 166

The trail, which to the pilots appeared to be a jet or rocket trail, covered an 80 degree to 90 degree arc laterally. 167

The initial evaluation of the Chiles-Whitted report stated that of all the strange light sightings in the area during late July, it was:

"The only incident which possessed absolute intelligence significance... (and) it is obvious that this object was not a meteor. There has been no evidence to support any findings of unreliability, nor have there been any major inaccuracies on the part of the witnesses." 168.

The first conclusion rendered on the case was:

"After extensive investigations and studies; and consideration of all possible approaches and data pertinent to suggest at least one valid hypothesis or explanation to the sighting were exhausted--the incident was appropriately classified as a true 'Unknown.'" 169.

There exists extensive official comment on the conclusion which may be instructive:

"... there is no astronomical explanation if we accept the report at face value. The sheer improbability of the facts as stated, particularly in the absence of any known aircraft in the vicinity, makes it necessary to see whether any other explanation, even though far fetched, can be considered. The two reliable pilots obviously saw something. If one extracts from their reports parts of the description--'tremendous bursts of flame,' 'cigar-shape,' 'disappeared into a cloud,' 'orange-red flare,' time in sight five to ten seconds,' the explanation could be satisfied by a brilliant, slow-moving meteor. The orange-red flame is particularly suggestive. It is