

On the evening of July 24, 1948, an Eastern Airlines DC-3 took off from Houston, Texas. It was on a scheduled trip to Atlanta, with intermediate stops in between. The pilots were Clarence S. Chiles and John B. Whitted. At about 2:45 A.M., when the flight was 20 miles southwest of Montgomery, the captain, Chiles, saw a light dead ahead and closing fast. His first reaction, he later reported to an ATIC investigation team, was that it was a jet, but in an instant he realized that even a jet couldn't close as fast as this light was closing. Chiles said he reached over, gave Whitted, the other pilot, a quick tap on the arm, and pointed. The UFO was now almost on top of them. Chiles racked the DC-3 into a tight left turn. Just as the UFO flashed by about 700 feet to the right, the DC-3 hit turbulent air. Whitted looked back just as the UFO pulled up in a steep climb.

Both the pilots had gotten a good look at the UFO and were able to give a good description to the Air Force intelligence people. It was a B-29 fuselage. The underside had a "deep blue glow." There were "two rows of windows from which bright lights glowed," and a "50-foot trail of orange-red flame" shot out the back.

Only one passenger was looking out of the window at the time. The ATIC investigators talked to him. He said he saw a "strange, eerie streak of light, very intense," but that was all, no details. He said that it all happened before he could adjust his eyes to the darkness.

Minutes later a crew chief at Robins Air Force Base in Macon, Georgia, reported seeing an extremely bright light pass overhead, traveling at a high speed. A few days later another report from the night of July 24 came in. A pilot, flying near the Virginia-North Carolina state line, reported that he had seen a "bright shooting star" in the direction of Montgomery, Alabama, at about the exact time the Eastern Airlines DC-3 was "buzzed."

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

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look and live to tell about it. A quick check on a map showed that the UFO that nearly collided with the airliner would have passed almost over Macon, Georgia, after passing the DC-3. It had been turning toward Macon when last seen. The story of the crew chief at Robins AFB, 200 miles away, seemed to confirm the sighting, not to mention the report from near the Virginia-North Carolina state line.

In intelligence, if you have something to say about some vital problem you write a report that is known as an "Estimate of the Situation." A few days after the DC-3 was buzzed, the people at ATIC decided that the time had arrived to make an Estimate of the Situation. The situation was the UFO's; the estimate was that they were interplanetary!

It was a rather thick document with a black cover and it was printed on legal-sized paper. Stamped across the front were the words TOP SECRET.

It contained the Air Force's analysis of many of the incidents I have told you about plus many similar ones. All of them had come from scientists, pilots, and other equally credible observers, and each one was an unknown.

The document pointed out that the reports hadn't actually started with the Arnold Incident. Belated reports from a weather observer in Richmond, Virginia, who observed a "silver disk" through his theodolite telescope; an F-47 pilot and three pilots in his formation who saw a "silver flying wing," and the English "ghost airplanes" that had been picked up on radar early in 1947 proved this point. Although reports on them were not received until after the Arnold sighting, these incidents all had taken place earlier.

When the estimate was completed, typed, and approved, it started up through channels to higher-command echelons. It drew considerable comment but no one stopped it on its way up.