

JOHN J. CALLAHAN

What I am about to tell you now, is about an event that never happened.

I am John Callahan, and I was Division Chief of the Accidents, Evaluations and Investigations Division of the FAA in Washington, for 6 years during the 1980's.

In early January of 1987, I received a call from the Air Traffic Quality Control Branch in FAA's Alaskan regional office, requesting guidance on what to tell the media personnel who were overflowing their office. The media was requesting information about the UFO that chased a Japanese 747 across the Alaskan sky for some 3 minutes at flight levels between 3000 and 35000 ft. on November 7, 1986. Somehow, the word had got out.

"What UFO; when did this take place; why wasn't Washington Headquarters informed?" I asked.

"Hey, he replied, "who believes in UFO's? I just need to know what to tell the media to get them out of here."

The answer to that question was easy: "Tell them it's under investigation. Then, collect all the data - the voice tapes and data disc for both the facility and the military. Send them overnight to the FAA Tech Center in Atlantic City, New Jersey."

Japan Air Lines flight 628, a cargo jet with a pilot, co-pilot and one crew member, was just north of Anchorage, and it was about 10 pm when the pilot first reported the UFO. He described it as a huge ball with lights running around it. He said it was about 4 times bigger than a 747, and he saw it with his own eyes. So did the other two crew members.

Over the course of 3 minutes, the UFO jumped miles in a few seconds, changing places to different spots around the 747, in one sweep of the radar scope.

After receiving the data from Alaska almost two months later, I briefed my boss Harvey Safer and the FAA Administrator Admiral Engen, and Safer and I went to the FAA Tech Center to observe the playback.

The FAA had developed a program capable of recreating the traffic on the controllers' scope, or plan view display. I instructed the FAA specialist to synchronize the voice tapes with the radar data so we could hear everything the controller and pilot said. I video taped the radar display.

Later that day, I requested that the FAA automation specialists plot the radar targets along the route of flight and explain what each target was doing. I video taped the resulting chart.

The print out and radar play back displayed primary targets in the vicinity of the 747. These target returns were displayed about the same time and place as the pilot advised viewing the UFO.

Both the radar and manual controller observed the primary target. The military controllers also viewed the primary target on their radar and identified it as a "double primary." The pilot and crew viewed the target on their radar and were able to see the huge UFO at the same time as it approached their aircraft.

If this craft had been a learner jet or military aircraft at the wrong altitude, that would have been clear. The FAA has procedures that cover tracking unidentified aircraft violating another's airspace - but it has no procedures for UFOs.

Back at FAA headquarters, I gave Administrator Engen a quick briefing and showed him the video. He set up a briefing with President Reagan's scientific staff, and told me my function was to give them a dog and pony show and hand this event off to them, "since the FAA does not deal with UFO's."

I brought along a copy of the video and all the data print outs available at the time.

One of the scientists asked a number of questions, such as, what is the range of the radar, what is the frequency of the radar, what is the band width, what is the formula for the height equipment, etc.

I was impressed with the response from the FAA experts. At the end, one of the three people from the CIA said, "This event never happened; we were never here; we're confiscating all this data and you are all sworn to secrecy."

"What do you think it was?" I asked the CIA person.

"A UFO and now they have over 30 minutes of radar to go over," he responded.

"Well let's get a twix out and advise the American public that we were visited by a UFO," I suggested.

"No way, if we were to tell the American public there are UFO's they would panic," he informed me.

Some time after the briefing, the detailed FAA report which included extensive interviews with the pilot and crew, the chart prepared at the Tech Center; and facility voice tapes arrived at my office and were placed on a small table waiting for the CIA to request more data. The material stayed there until I retired 2 years later, and I've had it ever since.

Most people including FAA controllers really aren't familiar with how the FAA radar system works and why all aircraft traveling through our airspace are not caught on radar or displayed on the controllers PVD. But I am.

The system and organization of the FAA is not configured to identify and track these types of performances.