

Controller says unknown image tracked on radar

Image seemed to be following JAL cargo plane that reported sighting of UFO

By HAL BERNTON

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Three air traffic controllers tracked on radar an image that seemed to be following the Nov. 17 flight of a Japanese Air Lines cargo plane, according to one of the controllers who helped monitor the radar.

The captain of the JAL plane reported that an unidentified flying object was tailing his aircraft at the same location as the radar

image.

"All three of us thought there was a track," said Sam Rich, a controller who has worked for the Federal Aviation Administration for more than a decade. A track is what air traffic controllers call the radar image of an aircraft.

In previous news releases, the Federal Aviation Administration reported only one controller sighting the mysterious object — described by

the crew as waverling lights — on radar. That controller, whose name has not been released by the FAA, mistakenly interpreted a split-image of the cargo plane as a second object, FAA officials said following a review of radar tapes.

On Thursday, FAA spokesman Paul Steucke said he had no knowledge of additional controllers who had tracked the UFO reported by the JAL's pilot and two-man

crew.

Capt. Kenju Terauchi said the UFO tailed their plane for more than 300 miles as it crossed into Alaska air space en route from Iceland to an Anchorage refueling spot.

Terauchi told United Press International that he saw two brightly lit objects and a third enormous object — twice the size of an aircraft carrier — follow the plane. That report triggered a new FAA investigation of the inci-

dent and a burst of international publicity for Terauchi.

Controllers have been interviewed by FAA officials, but until Thursday had not talked to the press.

Rich said he was on duty for the half-hour during which the JAL plane reported spotting the UFO.

He said the JAL crew first contacted the Anchorage air controllers as their plane flew over Fort Yukon. "They said 'something was following them.' It appeared to be light. And appeared to be white, orange and yellow," he said.

Rich said the pilot sounded shaken. "He was concerned. There was a quaver in his voice."

Rich said the controllers immediately turned down their radar range to small-scale that would better define the air space around the JAL plane.

"There did appear to be a track near the plane about where he (Terauchi) said there was. So we kept looking."

The track was not real strong, Rich said, but neither he nor any of his colleagues then thought it might be a split image.

After spotting the track, Rich said he called the Military Regional Operations Control Center. "They informed me that they had the same track."

Another controller then told the pilot to make a series of turns and a descent in an effort to shake the UFO. Finally, as the plane headed south from Fairbanks, the controllers lost track of the UFO.

Since the November incident, the FAA launched a major review of the radar tapes; initially confirming the controller tracking, then dismissing it as a split or double-image of the JAL plane.

Rich confirmed that double images often occur on the FAA radar screen, which relies on computer-generated data. But the plane didn't fly through the areas where the split images normally occur.

The JAL pilot isn't the first pilot to report strange things in that northern corridor. During the past decade, there's been about a half dozen reports of unidentified lights from civilian and military pilots. "It's pretty real to them (the pilots)," Rich said.