

JUNE 27, 1987

HOUSTON, TX CHRONICLE
SA, JUNE 27, 1987 SPARKER
COUD-I

Plane's close encounter still mystery

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — The National Weather Service doubts it was theirs and the Defense Department insists it wasn't theirs. About the only thing the Federal Aviation Administration can say about the object that encountered a Delta Air Lines jet at 29,500 feet is that no one is likely to find it.

The pilot of Delta Flight 1083, en route from Pittsburgh to Atlanta, told investigators an object that appeared to be a missile seemed headed straight for his Boeing 737 Thursday morning before passing to the side and slightly below.

"The pilot described it as a rocket or a missile about 4 feet long, with fins that were each about a foot or a foot and a half in height," said Delta spokesman Bill Berry. "It went so fast, that's all he saw. He didn't see it long enough to recognize any markings."

FAA said Friday it probably will never know what had the close encounter with the jet, carrying 60 people, at 29,500 feet 31 miles northeast of Charleston.

"It may have been a blimp-shaped helium balloon," said Kathleen Bergen, a spokeswoman for the FAA's regional headquarters in New York. "It's unlikely we'll ever find it, for a lot of reasons."

The National Weather Service said the jet stream, a fast current of air at high altitudes, was not crossing West Virginia at the time of the encounter and that wind in the area was not strong enough to make an unpowered object like a balloon move fast.

Maj. Larry Icenogle, a spokesman for the Pentagon, said that while other agencies were dealing in speculation, he could offer one fact: "The Defense Department had nothing going on yesterday that would have anything to do with that."

Bergen said that left the FAA with two explanations: The official one is that it was a promotional balloon that escaped, and she said she preferred not to talk about the other option.

"Balloons can travel pretty far," she said. "We don't acknowledge the existence of UFOs."

TOAD: UFO - SPEED-FAST,
CURIOUS SHAPE

SCOTT PARKER via COUD—I