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Fast-moving UFO spied as 5,500 mph secret takes off

Simon Tisdall in Washington

THE mysterious appearance of a fast-moving UFO off the Shetland Islands at the weekend, which prompted seasonal speculation about the Second Coming of Christ, has coincided with reports in the US that an ultra-top-secret American spy plane has gone operational with a top speed of 5,500 mph.

Shetland police, the Coastguard and the Lerwick Observatory recorded 17 sightings of a "large, white object travelling low and very fast" at about 9pm on Saturday. Some witnesses compared the UFO to a shooting star. Others said it might have been a meteorite, a ball of lightning, or even Norman Lamont leaving Edinburgh.

"We just haven't a clue what it could be," a puzzled Lerwick police spokesman admitted. A Lerwick Observatory scientist who reported that the UFO had been moving so fast that he had missed it could only say: "I hope it comes round again."

It may just do that. According to reports in Washington, defence industry specialists and writers are heading into excitement overdrive on reports that the US military has begun testing the successor to the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane.

The plane with no name is said to have a top speed of Mach 8, or eight times the speed of sound. It is so fast that it could reach anywhere on the globe within three hours.

For this very reason, the plane-spotters say, tests cannot be restricted to US airspace. By the time the plane has warmed up, it could be over, for example, Scotland. It would also take several countries to come to a stop.

The Pentagon, predictably, imposed a no-fly, no-comment, no-nothing zone over the plane with no name yesterday.

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14 Dec 92 Simon Tisdall 14/12/92

Fan Simmons + O.N + David Ridgway + P.H.E

6/12/92 PRT
WORLD NEWS
IN BRIEF
US 'has superfast secret plane'
The United States may be operating a wedge-shaped secret spy plane that flies up to 5,280mph — eight times the speed of sound — the Wall Street Journal said yesterday. It said an article in Jane's Defence Weekly next week suggests that the long-rumoured spy plane exists, costs £667m and has been flying for at least three years.
Merry Christmas