

# AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS AND UFOs: A REVIEW OF SOME UFO-RELATED AIRCRAFT DISASTERS

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Many writers who try to prove that UFOs are hostile use as evidence reports of UFOs that allegedly have contributed to the destruction of civilian and military aircraft. Almost without exception, says Mr. Crain these writers "scramble their facts, creating the illusion that a UFO was the primary stimulus for the accident. In most cases, this simply is not true".

In an effort to balance the scales, so to speak, this report attempts to give readers an objective review of the facts in four well-known UFO-related aircraft disasters. — EDITOR

## I. THE MERKEL CASE

In January, 1956, an F-51D aircraft piloted by Lt. Colonel Joseph Lee Merkel, a member of the 123rd Fighter Interceptor group in the Kentucky Air National Guard, crashed and Merkel was killed after a UFO was reported.

Although very little is known about what really happened to Joseph Merkel, recently a censored version of the official aircraft accident report has been released. A copy of that report was obtained in 1980 from the Department of the Air Force, Norton Air Force Base, California, through the determined efforts of veteran UFO researcher Barry Greenwood of Stoneham, Massachusetts.

Whether or not a UFO was responsible for the crash is uncertain. Even the official report does not seem to make a clear determination as to the cause of the crash. The officer in charge of sanitizing the report for public consumption made a point to censor any information regarding the type of accident this was, and the conditions affecting the crash.

Some of the facts that are known about the case can be found in the accident report.

The pilot took off from Standiford Field, Louisville, Kentucky, at 14.50 CST, 31 January, 1956, on a local VFR clearance to perform a maintenance test flight for a carburettor and propeller change. The flight was proposed for one hour duration with two hours and thirty minutes fuel aboard. Climb to 20,000 feet was made and contact was established with Oak Hill Air Defense Command Radar Station. A course was set for Terre Haute, Indiana, and the pilot informed Oak Hill he was at 20,000 feet at 15.01 CST.

Everything was going smoothly until some unusual things began to happen. As the flight was continuing,

the pilot was informed by Oak Hill he was fading on their radar-scope. Merkel reported he had Terre Haute in sight. At 15.24 CST Oak Hill received a call from Merkel stating he was returning to Louisville, on a heading of 1350 at 34,000 feet climbing to 35,000 feet.

Now things get particularly interesting. The report states, "the pilot was informed of an aircraft approaching from the right". Whether the aircraft was one of ours or was a UFO was not indicated. "The pilot stated he did not have the aircraft in sight and the 'blip' faded from the radar scope." Which blip faded from Oak Hill's scope? It sounds like it could have been the unidentified aircraft, but since the report isn't clear about which blip was fading off, it could have been Merkel's. The report then states communication between Oak Hill and Merkel ended at 15.35 CST. Since a transcript of the conversation between Oak Hill and Merkel was absent in the report released to the public, we are left in the dark as to what was discussed those few minutes before impact. The report does indicate Merkel's last communication was received in a normal voice.

The accident raises some interesting questions. Who was tailing Merkel moments before he crashed? Could the object have been a contributing factor in the accident?

These facts we are sure of:—

1) Merkel was flying in close range with an unidentified aircraft which he could not see or was not permitted to see minutes before he crashed.

2) The UFO is not identified in the accident report that I received.

3) The impact occurred at 15.35 CST on the farm of Ormel Prince near Bloomington, Indiana.

4) Prince told the Aircraft Accident Investigating Officer, Grady Bishop, that he was pretty sure the aircraft exploded in the air.

**OBSERVATIONS** — The official Aircraft Accident Report, censored as it is, leaves the reader under the impression Merkel may have died of oxygen starvation in flight. However, in a file given to Merkel's son some years later by the National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), a different conclusion was reached.

In April 1980, B.F. Greene, Jr. Of Brookline, Massachusetts, telephoned the son of the late Lt.-Col. Merkel, to see if he could shed any light on his father's death, after all these years.

Son Lee Merkel told Greene the U.S. Air Force said his father crashed because of a malfunction in his oxygen equipment. However, many years later Lee wrote to NICAP requesting the file they kept on his father. In it Lee remembers reading an interview by an Indiana reporter who did an article on the crash. Lee recalls the story reported a UFO was detected on radar, and interceptors were scrambled to investigate. The UFO went too high for the interceptors who were not equipped with oxygen, so radar controllers contacted Lt.-Col. Merkel, who was airborne in the vicinity, to investigate in his oxygen-equipped P-51. Merkel headed toward the UFO, but something went wrong and his plane plunged back to earth and crashed.

**CONCLUSION** — The truth may never come out as to what really happened to Lt.-Col. Lee Merkel. One may note the Indiana reporter's account of the story does not directly contradict the Air Force's report on the incident. The reporter just filled in the details.

## II. The C-118 AIRCRAFT CRASH

**"Witnesses saw four parachute-like objects following the plane ... The Air Force would not comment."**

In April 1959, an Air Force C-118 aircraft with a crew of four on board was destroyed when it crashed in the rugged Rhoads Lake area, 12 miles east of McChord Air Force Base, Washington. There were no survivors. Reports of UFO activity occurred before and after the crash. It has been suspected by some, that a UFO may have caused the crash or contributed to it. Donald Keyhoe (*Aliens From Space*) and Jacques Vallee (*Anatomy of a Phenomenon*) and Brad Steiger and Joan Whritenour (*Flying Saucers Are Hostile*) all have implied that a UFO could very likely have been responsible for the crash.

A copy of the Aircraft Accident Report was obtained along with transcripts and photographs of the crash area. The investigation clearly indicated the aircraft was flying too low and its right wing struck several treetops, causing the wing to burst into flames. The plane lost altitude and proceeded another six and three-quarter miles before final impact.

While the C-118 aircraft was practicing touch-

and-go radar approach and landings at McChord AFB, the radar approach control (RAPCON), advised the C-118 that a flight of jets was coming in, and to wait, before another approach could be made. The pilot reported he was at 2000 feet, with 15 miles visibility, and that he could maintain visual flight control. Upon recovering the jets, RAPCON vectored the C-118 to a heading of 220 degrees, which the pilot acknowledged, at an altitude of 2000 feet. Whether the pilot complied to the new heading was not confirmed. Two minutes later, the C-118 gave a distress signal indicating they had hit something and wanted a straight-in approach landing.

Although Keyhoe, Vallee, and Steiger and Whritenour write the radio message received from the pilot was "We have hit something — or something has hit us", implying there was a mid-air collision, the real message according to the Accident Report transcript is "Roger, we've hit something out here number four's running away we're maintaining altitude". RAPCON immediately vectored the C-118 for a straight-in approach. Less than a minute later, the pilot reported, "We're on fire, our wing in on fire". The aircraft apparently could not maintain altitude and crashed one minute thirty-six seconds after reporting the emergency.

**ON THE GROUND** — Before the crash, unknown lights were observed by witnesses in the area. Some UFOs were reported in the Mt. Rainier area, according to Chief of Police, Fred Emard, of Orting, Washington. According to Steiger and Whritenour, the Public Information Officer at McChord AFB attributed the unidentified lights to flares dropped in a parachute jump exercise at nearby Fort Lewis. However, the News Chief at Fort Lewis denied any such exercise was occurring that night.

UFO Investigator Robert Gribble, then director of the Aerial Phenomena Research Group (APRG), was told by witnesses they saw two glowing parachute-like objects trailing the C-118. They also told Gribble none of the four engines of the transport were running when the plane passed over, and part of the tail assembly was missing.

Two Orting residents, Mr. and Mrs. Bill Jones, claim they witnessed four parachute-like objects following the plane. The Air Force would not comment on what these objects might be. Gribble said the morning after the crash, he received an anonymous telephone call informing him that radar picked up UFOs, at McChord AFB prior to the crash. However, this could not be confirmed by the Public Information Officer at McChord. Finally, APRG investigators discovered there were several unidentified explosions prior to and after the C-118 crashed.

**OBSERVATIONS** — To my knowledge, the parachute-like objects reported by ground observers that night remain unidentified. The objects were not observed to have contributed to or caused the aircraft to



crash, and investigators for the Air Force could find no malfunction of the aircraft that may have contributed to the accident, prior to hitting the trees at the first impact area. The question remains why was the pilot flying at such a low altitude as to hit the tops of trees?

Keyhoe writes,

For some unknown reasons, HQ said the pilot had flown too low and had hit the top of the ridge. At McChord, this hasty answer was privately denounced by close friends of the pilot. He was an experienced night flyer, familiar with the terrain. If anything had forced him to make an unexpected descent he would have put on his landing lights, so as to avoid anything jutting up in his path. He also would have radioed McChord immediately, so Search and Rescue teams could reach them promptly if he had to make a crash landing.

**CONCLUSION** — The pilot observed no UFO prior to the crash. No ground observers witnessed a UFO contribute to the accident, even though UFO activity was reported in the vicinity. Radar confirmations were not forthcoming. The craft was flying at a low altitude (initial impact occurred at a high terrain 14 miles south-east of McChord AFB at 1600 feet) and the known facts do seem to indicate the primary stimulus for causing the C-118 to crash was hitting the tops of trees. Unless more convincing evidence is offered, the Accident Report appears to be a fair interpretation of the facts.

### III. THE BRANIFF AIRWAYS CRASH

**"The plane was blown to bits ... Some potent force caused the aerial disaster."**

In September 1959, Braniff Airways Flight 542, a Lockheed Electra turboprop airliner, was destroyed in flight and further broke up on ground impact 3.19 miles east-southeast of Buffalo, Texas. All 28 passengers and six crew members were killed. It is alleged a large, red fiery UFO was observed in the vicinity by another aircraft and by ground observers, prior to the crash. The Civil Aeronautics Board investigators could find no positive reason for the cause of the crash.

**PROBABLE CAUSE** — Investigators' best guess as to what caused the crash was structural failure of the left wing caused by forces generated by an undampened propeller whirl mode. This conclusion was reached by eliminating other probable causes for the crash.

**WHAT HAPPENED** — As the airliner passed near Buffalo, things were proceeding as normal. The craft was travelling at an altitude of 15,000 feet and at

an air speed of 275 knots. The weather conditions were good, with scattered clouds above 20,000 feet with visibility of 10-15 miles. Suddenly witnesses on the ground saw a fiery glow light up the sky, followed by a violent explosion. Seconds later, thousands of fragments of the \$2,300,000 airliner fell back to earth.

**IN THE AIR** — Investigators were baffled over a report submitted by Major R.O. Braswell who was piloting an AF C-47 heading for Lufkin, Texas, at about the same time flight 542 was approaching Buffalo. Braswell was flying at 6500 feet east-northeast of Buffalo when he saw a red glare from an explosion. Braswell writes, "It was colored like a large red fire and looked like an atomic cloud. It was a massive thing, about five degrees above my plane. The base was at an altitude of 12,000 to 15,000 feet. The top was at about 16,000 feet." It may be noted flight 542 was cruising at 15,000 feet, approximately the same altitude as the cloud. What was Braswell observing?

**ON THE GROUND** — Billie Guyton of Centerville, Texas, saw the object Braswell was observing and claims he saw an object emerge from the glow. If this is true, what was Guyton seeing?

Although none of the ground observers saw the Electra disintegrate, numerous witnesses reported seeing a small fireball cross the sky.

**OBSERVATIONS** — It is implied by Keyhoe and Steiger and Whritenour that a UFO launched a fireball or warhead type weapon at the aircraft moments before the plane crashed. What evidence is there to support this conclusion?

**THE AIRCRAFT** — To investigators, the Electra crash was one of the most appalling disasters they had ever seen, Braniff's Chief of Operations, R.V. Carleton, told reporters. "I've investigated lots of crashes, but I've never seen one where the plane was so thoroughly demolished, the wreckage so widely scattered and the people so horribly mangled, and there was nothing among the wreckage which indicated a fire or bomb aboard the plane." In other words, the plane was blown to bits. Some potent force caused the aerial disaster.

Steiger and Whritenour distilled certain observations from the resulting inquiry. Three points are particularly relevant.

1) There had been no fire or explosion aboard the airliner while it has been in flight or after it had crashed.

2) Scorch marks found on glass window ports, the rear of the fuselage, and across the parting of the tail showed signs of having been exposed to tremendous exterior heat.

3) The force that caused the airliner to disintegrate had not come from within the plane.

A copy of the CAB Accident Report does indicate the surface heat effects were caused by "flame impingement rather than by radiated heat". The report

states, "The exterior surfaces of the left fuselage panels revealed considerable evidence of inflight fire effects". Much of the interior surfaces of the plane showed no evidence of heat, fire or soot.

**CONCLUSION** — This writer can't help wondering if the objects observed by R.O. Braswell and Billy Guyton was the Electra exploding. The "atomic cloud" was at approximately the same altitude (15,000 feet) as the Electra, but I have no information of whether or not the objects were in the same location in the sky. If this could be established, it would explain several observed circumstances of the crash. According to the CAB Accident Report, several witnesses saw a smaller fire emerge from the larger ball that fell in the northeast. This smaller fire could have been a large chunk of the Electra. It also could have been the object that emerged from the glow that Billie Guyton observed.

However, if what Braswell observed was not the Electra, then a UFO could have been in the vicinity at the time of the crash. If some weapon was fired at the Electra, it would explain why the plane was so terribly destroyed. It would also explain the tremendous exterior heat that scorched the plane's outer skin, with little or no fire inside the plane. Guyton's testimony would support the hypothesis that a flowing fireball emerged from the "atomic cloud" that could have accelerated toward the Electra, causing the desired destruction.

A case can be established for both scenarios. Based on the facts, if Braswell's observation was flight 542 exploding, then the CAB report of structural damage could be a reasonable explanation. However, if the object or "atomic cloud" flying near the Electra is unidentified, one must consider the possibility a UFO may have been the stimulus for the accident.

#### IV. THE WALESVILLE DISASTER

**"An anonymous telephone-caller said radar picked up UFOs prior to the crash ..."**

In July 1954, an F-94C Starfire jet piloted by 2nd Lt. William E. Atkins and 1st Lt. Henry Coudon Jr. was pursuing UFOs that day, when suddenly an abrupt furnace-like heat filled both cockpits. The crew bailed out, and the plane crashed down into Walesville, New York, killing four people.

**WHAT HAPPENED?** — At 11.05 EST on July 2, 1954, an F-94C aircraft took off from Griffiss Air Force Base on an operation training mission. What happened next is best described in a summary of the events in the Air Force Records.

The aircraft was only a few miles out when the Griffiss control tower operator called the pilot and advised that he was being diverted to an

active air defence mission. The aircraft was given a vector of 60 degrees and 10,000 feet altitude to intercept an unidentified aircraft. Some difficulty was experienced in finding this aircraft, so the controller then vectored the plane to a second unidentified aircraft in the area. This aircraft was identified as Air Force C-47. The ground controller then gave the F-94 pilot a heading of 240 degrees as a vector back to the first unidentified aircraft. At the time, the F-94 was flying above the broken clouds at 8,000 feet. The unidentified aircraft was not found above the clouds, so the plane started to descend below the clouds. During the descent, a fire warning light came on. The engine immediately shut down; also due to the low altitude, the crew members ejected and were recovered without injury. The aircraft continued for about four miles while on a heading of 199 degrees and crashed in the area known as Walesville ... Four people were killed in the accident.

**TREMENDOUS HEAT** — Shortly after the pilots landed safely, at Walesville reporter appeared on the scene. One half-dazed pilot started telling the reporter about the intense heat before ejecting, but before he could finish, a United States Air Force car pulled up, and whisked the pilots away. UFO writer Margaret Sachs writes, "when the Walesville reporter's story of the strange heat was published, the Air Force denied it and blamed engine failure for the accident. Interviews with the pilot and radar operator were prohibited and the official report was a classified secret".

What may have been classified then is not classified now. Additional clues about the origin of the heat have been released. In the recent book *The Encyclopedia of UFOs*, researcher Kevin D. Randle explains, "Subsequent investigation revealed that part of the engine had caught fire, pouring heat into the cockpit and forcing the men out". If this is what happened, it would explain the thermal effects felt by the pilots. But is it true? Not according to the Air Force. In a report released in January 1969, by the University of Colorado, The Air Force states, "As the pilot started a descent, he noted that the cockpit temperature increased abruptly. The fire warning light was on and the pilot informed the radar observer of this fact. The fire warning light remained on after the throttle was placed in idle so the engine was shut down and both crew members ejected successfully". There is no mention of an actual fire. In my copy of the Aircraft Accident Report, investigators claimed "the investigation of the wreckage disclosed no in-flight fire. The cause of the malfunction in the fire warning system could not be determined."

**CONCLUSION** — The first object the F-94C was trying to identify was not a UFO, but an Air Force aircraft that entered the traffic pattern at Griffiss AFB



and landed. The other object was identified by the pilots as an Air Force C-47, tail number 6099. Although there does seem to be some discrepancy about the heating effects in this case, the facts reveal

there was no UFO involved in the accident. If the Air Force account is accurate, then the heating effects can only be attributable to a malfunctioning aircraft regardless of origin.

## CLONING BY ALIENS?: TO WHAT PURPOSE?

*Irene Granchi, FSR Consultant (Brazil)*

Among the strangest, most puzzling features presented by alien abductees we have the claim that *cloning* is taking place.

To my present knowledge, there are now many of such cases of which we have become aware. One Brazilian case which I investigated was that of Antônio Alves Ferreira, published in FSR 31/2 (1986)

And in Europe recently, we have had the case of Xavier Clarés, investigated by Antonio Ribera of Spain, and described by him in his articles on *"The Jinn & The Dolmen"*, in FSR 31/4 and 32/2.

We now have another case here in Brazil — that of Dirant Mello Ferraz. I secured the details of it from the investigator and writer Fernando Cleto Nunes Pereira, author of the book *"A Bíblia e os Discos Voadores"* (*"The Bible and the Flying Saucers"*) and in the early 1980s I was able to interview Dirant for myself and check the story with him. And I found that all the details as I had been given them seemed to stand up to investigation. — I.G.

### Dirant's Story

**D**IRANT Mello Ferraz, now married, and a successful businessman with his own small firm, which manufactures medical equipment, bandages, and such like, was only 18 years old at the time of his claimed abduction.

The date was February 28, 1974. At 7.30 p.m. on that day, Dirant was at home, standing in the service-area in the kitchen, when, all of a sudden, he found himself *"somewhere else"*, in a square place with no doors or windows to it. And a voice resounded, penetrating and permeating all around, and saying: *"Keep calm — we are your friends!"*. Dirant was able to pinpoint this voice as coming seemingly from a box-like contrivance in the corner of the chamber — something like a tape-recorder, which was what he presumed it to be, as a little light flickered on and off. Alternatively, he thought, it might also have been a translating-device.

And now, in the blank wall before him, there appeared a door. The door opened, and from it emerged a large oval-shaped contrivance, of the same colour as everything else around him, namely the colour of smoked glass. This egg-shaped machine came towards him. In the hall where he was standing, a yellow light came down on to him for a few seconds from the centre of the funnel-shaped ceiling, and he again heard a voice trying to tranquillize him.

### The Double

Then, from the egg-shaped machine, there stepped out ... *a double of himself!* The same voice then asked

him to touch the replica, and when he did so, it felt to him completely like flesh.

Next, the double proceeded to pat him on the back, saying: *"Keep calm! Wish me a good journey, for I do not intend to harm anybody."*

This other being's voice was a replica of his own.

Then the double vanished through the wall, and a large panel appeared at the spot through which he had passed. This panel resembled the front of a TV set. And through it Dirant now watched his *"other self"*, in his own home!

But this other being's behaviour was totally different from his! Dirant himself is an affectionate person. But this *"other one"* treated Dirant's sister gruffly — something to which she was not at all accustomed. The same gruff treatment was extended to the driver of the car who came to pick up Dirant (who was working in his family's firm at the time) in order to take him to visit clients. And the double showed quite clearly that he did not know how to handle money or understand its value. Nor could he write. He even asked an employee to write out an invoice for him — something that Dirant had never been known to do before!

### Obliged to "help" the Double

Dirant had been directed to assist his *"other self"* by means of the *"TV-like screen"*, and the effect of this was that he had the sensation, as it were, of *looking through the other one's eyes, which were fixed in their sockets*. At other times, he felt himself to be above the double, trying to advise him how to act.

On several occasions, however, the *"TV"* was