

Ready Room Conversation

CHERRY POINT — The favorite conversation topic in the ready rooms of Second Marine Air Wing squadrons this week is speculation on the unidentified "object" which outsped an F9F Panther jet flying more than 500 miles an hour Monday night.

The jet fighter, piloted by Marine First Lieutenant Ed Balocco was on a local night flight from the Auxiliary Landing Field at Edenton, N. C., when alerted by the Norfolk (Va.) Navy Tower to watch for a silver object sighted from the ground near the North Carolina-Virginia line.

The lieutenant proceeded to the vicinity, flying at 20,000 feet, but sighted nothing during a half hour in the area. He then took a southerly course which took him over Edenton toward Cherry Point.

"Over Little Washington (N. C.)," the Marine Fighter Squadron-224 pilot's statement, said, "I saw what apparently looked like an airplane with red lights which appeared to be below me. What caused me to look back at the light was the fact it moved from below me 10,000 feet vertically in a matter of seconds."

His attention focused on the object, Lieutenant Balocco proceeded full throttle (500 knots) towards it. "I didn't gain anything at first," he commented, "and appeared to be just looking at it when my rate of closure was suddenly prominent."

The object, at a distance of 10 miles, looked about a quarter of an inch wide and three inches long to the lieutenant's vision. From that he considered it a "big" object, the color of white heat and throwing out a glow. It had what appeared to be two red lights on the left-hand side, flashing and bouncing off the end, inscribing an arc.

The lieutenant's rate of closure on the object was again stopped and it "seemed to just drop from

my position" in the direction of the Cherry Point coastline on a heading of 180 degrees. He then called on his radio for other planes in the area to help locate the 'craft.

Diving towards the spot where the object disappeared, Lieutenant Balocco thought he saw a flash but was unable to observe it again. By then he was joined by Captain Thomas W. Riggs, of the same squadron, who sighted an object flying low near the coastline but could not identify it.

Similar flashes were reported by a Navy pilot from Norfolk and Gerald Midget of Oriental, N. C. Mr. Midget told of the flash being followed by a ground fire but no explosion. Marine helicopters searched the area and found a small forest fire but no traces of a crash.

The object was first reported