

# 20 YEARS AGO IN NA NEWS

MCAS CHERRY POINT — A favorite ready room conversation for Second Marine Air Wing pilots has been the story of the "flying saucer" which recently outsped an F9F Panther jet flying more than 500 mph.

The jet pilot, 1st Lt. Ed Balocco, was on a local night flight from ALF Edenton when alerted by Navy Norfolk tower to watch for a silver object sighted from the ground near the North Carolina-Virginia line.

Over Washington, N.C., the VMF-224 pilot said, "I saw what looked like an airplane with red lights which appeared to be below me. . . . It moved from below me 10,000 feet vertically in a matter of seconds."

Balocco said he poured on the coal and could not close on the object at first, then closed rapidly. 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 lefthand side, flashing and bouncing off the end, inscribing an arc.

As the object began pulling away again, the pilot radioed other planes in the area to help track it. Diving toward the spot where the object disappeared, Balocco thought he saw a flash but was unable to see it again. By then he was joined by Captain Thomas W. Riggs of the same squadron, who sighted an object flying 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. Midget told of the flash being followed by a ground fire but no explosion. Marine helicopters later searched the area and found a small forest fire but no traces of a crash.

The object was first reported by a helicopter at 1747. Ground control intercept radar failed to pick it up but Balocco sighted it about 1800.

Balocco, a veteran of 550 jet hours and 1,000 flying hours, said visibility was so good that from 20,000 feet at Washington he could see the lights at Norfolk and the Cherry Point beacon. He had the object in sight three or four minutes.

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