

CASEBOOK

FAA Controller Recounts '69 Sighting

Witnesses Spot Four UFOs From United Cockpit

Six months after the release of the Condon Report many individuals considered the UFO question "closed."

At least five highly qualified observers appear willing to refute that conclusion following their sighting of four UFOs during the afternoon of June 5, 1969.

James V. Beardsley of Sterling Park, Va., is one of these individuals.

Beardsley, an FAA controller assigned to the Leesburg Control Center, was on an authorized "familiarization flight" on American Airlines (flight 112) from Phoenix to Washington, D.C. He was observing flight procedure from a "jump seat" located directly behind the pilot's seat. Across the small aisle from Beardsley was the flight engineer.

Beardsley's 707 was heading east at 39,000 feet. Eight miles behind him and travelling in the same direction at 37,000 feet was a United Airlines plane. Four miles behind the second craft and also flying in the same direction at 41,000 feet was a National Guard aircraft.

Everything was routine up to this point, according to Beardsley, and the pilot had temporarily left the flight deck around 4 p.m. to use the washroom. The co-pilot had taken over the control as the plane crossed the Missouri River and entered the St. Louis air traffic control area.

Flying conditions that day were ideal, clear with no clouds or turbulence, according to the witness.

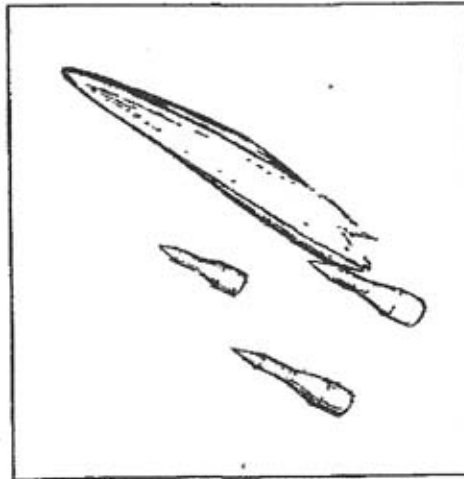
"I was leaning over talking to the flight engineer when the co-pilot suddenly hollered out, 'Damn, look at this.' I swung around and there it was — a flight of four — whatever they were — flying in a square formation," recalls Beardsley.

Beardsley, with the pilot temporarily out of his seat, had an unobstructed view of what the co-pilot was seeing — four UFOs approaching their plane from almost directly ahead.

Within three to five seconds, the formation of UFOs, approaching from an "11 o'clock position," passed within 300 feet of the craft on "the left side at no more than a thousand feet above us," according to Beardsley.

Leaning forward, Beardsley followed the UFOs as they swept by.

"There were four of them, one large and three small ones. They were in a square formation [arranged in a vertical plane] — with one in each corner . . . the



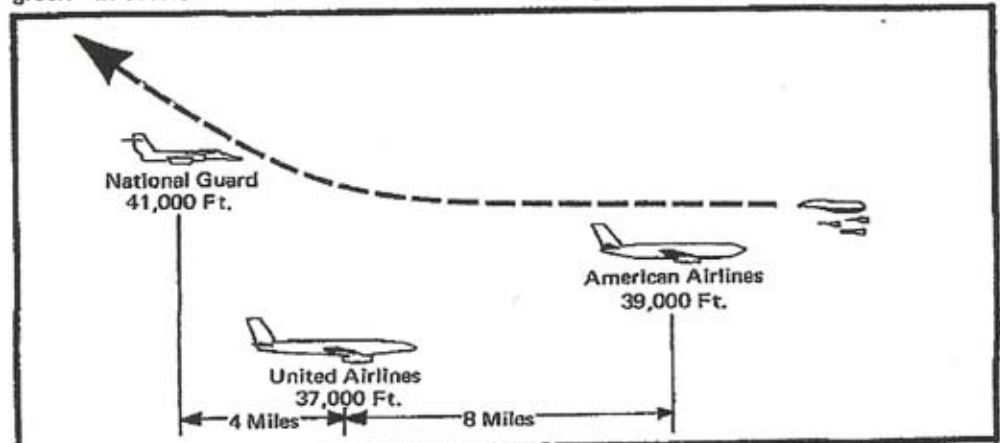
Beardsley's description of four UFOs as seen from the cockpit of his American Airlines 707, eastbound from Phoenix to Washington, D.C.

larger one was in the upper left-hand corner. The one in the lower right-hand corner was on a collision course with us . . . all of a sudden they looked like they went up to [the large] one . . . as they went by they were still separated . . . about 20 feet apart," Beardsley recalls.

The larger of the four objects was described by the witness as "hydroplane-shaped," about 18 to 20 feet in length, 7 to 8 feet thick, and about 12 to 14 feet across at its aft portion.

The three remaining objects were described as smaller and shaped like the front portion of a dart. All of the objects, according to Beardsley, were the color of "burnished aluminum." Had there been any clouds, they would have blended right in, he said.

Although no sound was detected or contrail observed, Beardsley noted what appeared to be a power source on the back surface, similar to an "old-fashioned" gas stove burner. It was "bluish-green" in color.



Artist's drawing depicts approximate position of planes and flight path of UFOs as observed by Beardsley, June 5, 1969.

Meanwhile, the co-pilot, checking with ground radar at the St. Louis FAA Center, asked controllers if they had anything in the vicinity. In a matter of seconds, the controllers came back and confirmed two "paints" of unknown objects in the vicinity of the airliner.

Within a second or two after the formation had passed, a pilot in the United plane eight miles behind them exclaimed excitedly, "We see it too!" recalls Beardsley.

A few seconds later came another comment, "Damn, they almost got me!" — this time from the pilot of the National Guard plane.

The pilot of the National Guard plane later claimed the UFO formation had approached his craft from almost "directly ahead" before altering its course abruptly and ascending quickly at the last moment.

Following the sighting there was a lot of conversation on the radio and among the crew of flight 112 as to what the objects had been. All participants agreed they had seen a flight of UFOs but none seemed willing to pursue the matter further, at least officially, remembers Beardsley.

The only official mention of the sighting, according to Beardsley, was a brief mention of it in his own flight report, filed later with the FAA. No investigation of the incident, either by the FAA, the airlines, or other government agencies ever took place.

The lack of interest or follow-up in the sighting was not surprising, according to Beardsley, considering the skepticism and caution expressed by most aviation people following release of the Condon Report.

NICAP intends to investigate this case further. Interviews with other crew members, the names of which Beardsley could not recall when he was interviewed recently, will be conducted as part of the investigation.