

## NTSB AVIATION ACCIDENT/INCIDENT DATABASE REPORT

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**General Information**

Data Source:	NTSB AVIATION ACCIDENT/INCIDENT DATABASE
Report Number:	NYC97SA193
Local Date:	08/09/1997
Local Time:	17:07 EDT
State:	NY
City:	NEW YORK
Airport Name:	
Airport Id:	
Event Type:	INCIDENT
Injury Severity:	NONE
Report Status:	PRELIM
Mid Air Collision:	NO

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**Operations Information**

Category of Operation:	
Aircraft Type:	AIRPLANE
Aircraft Damage:	NONE
Phase of Flight:	000 NOT REPORTED
Aircraft Make/Model:	BOEING B-747-300
Operator Doing Business As:	SWISSAIR
Operator Name:	SWISSAIR TRANSPORT CO. LTD
Operator Code:	
Operator:	
Owner Name:	

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**Narrative**

On August 9, 1997, about 1707 eastern daylight time, the flight crew of a Boeing 747-300, Swiss registration HB-IGF, and operated by Swissair as flight 127, reported an unusual sighting while in cruise flight at 23,000 feet (FL230) over New York, New York. The airplane was not damaged, and there were no injuries to the occupants. Flight 127 which had departed from Philadelphia International Airport, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was conducted under 14 CFR Part 129, and was operated in visual meteorological conditions on an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan.

Flight 127 was en-route to Boston, Massachusetts when the sighting was made. According to a report from a Safety Board Air Traffic Control investigator:

"Swiss Air 127 was in contact with the Danbury Sector of the Boston ARTCC at Flight Level 230. Voice communications with Swiss Air 127 were of a routine nature until 2107 UTC, when the flight transmitted, '...sir, I don't know what it was, but it just over flew like a couple of hundred feet above us. I don't know if it was a rocket or whatever, but incredibly fast, opposite direction.' The controller asked, 'in the opposite direction?' Swiss Air 127 replied, 'yes sir, and the time was 2107, it was too fast to be an airplane.' The controller then asked another flight, Eastern 986 if they saw anything like a missile in the area, 'perhaps off your right.' They replied that they would take a good look, but 'didn't think that if it's going that fast they probably won't get a chance. They had just seen Swiss Air go by a little bit ago.' "

"Swiss Air 127 then reported that they had no warning, & that the object was going way too fast. The controller then asked how far above Swiss Air 127 it was. Swiss Air 127 replied, 'it was right over us, right above, opposite direction, and, and I don't know, 2,3,4 hundred feet above. All that I can tell, 127, is that the three of us saw a light object, it was white, and very fast.' "

"The flight was then cleared direct to Providence, and told to reduce speed to 300 knots before contacting the next sector."

Interviews were conducted with the captain and first officer on August 10, 1997. The flight engineer had not observed the object and was not interviewed.

The

captain reported:

The flight was abeam of John F. Kennedy Airport, Jamaica, New York, at 2106, and proceeding direct to RAALP intersection when the event occurred. The captain was making a public address to the passengers in the cabin when he looked ahead and saw a white object. He saw it for less than a second, and the only movement he could discern was opposite his flight track. He did not observe any wings, and was not sure it was an aircraft. He thought it was cylindrical in shape. He had never been so close to other traffic before. He was not certain whether it was stationary or was moving opposite of the flight. It passed over the cockpit, slightly right of centerline. If it had been any lower, it would have hit the aircraft. As the object passed by, there was no noise, no wake turbulence, and no disruption or anomalies with any of the flight or engine instruments.

At the time of the event, the airplane was flying on a heading of 060 degrees, at 340 KIAS, at FL230. It was clear with cumulus nimbus clouds to the west. The sun was behind them. There was no TCAS warning. In addition, there was no exhaust or smoke, no fire, and he could not accurately discern its size.

The captain reported his total time as 15,000 + flight hours. He had never seen a missile in flight.

The first officer reported:

The flight was cruising at FL230. The captain was making a PA to the cabin. The first officer was putting on his headset, and bent over to adjust the volume. As he looked up he saw the object. It passed overhead very quickly. It was close enough that he ducked his head because he thought it would hit them. He said it was white and had a round shape. There was no smoke or fire visible from the object. He thought it passed about 100 to 200 feet above the airplane and between the right side of the fuselage and the number 3 engine. There was no drift, and it appeared to be flying exactly opposite of the aircraft. No actual movement was discerned, and no markings were visible. The object appeared to be the size of a thumbnail held at an arms length. The engine indications were steady, and the visibility was unlimited. The sun was behind the airplane.

The first officer reported that he had previously encountered a weather balloon over Italy, and the object did not look like the balloon.

The first officer reported his total time as 7,500 hours, all civil. He has seen missile shoots from the ground.

A check

with a Safety Board meteorologist revealed the following:

## WEATHER

**BALLOONS** \* Weather balloons are launched twice a day. \* The normal times are 1100 UTC, and 2300 UTC, plus or minus 15 minutes. \* The time to reach 23,000 feet is normally about 25 to 28 minutes. Sounding balloons are light tan or brownish in color. \* PIBAL (used for wind observations) and Ceiling Balloons are black and red in color. \* The closest launch point to the JFK was Upton, New York, about 43 NM east of JFK on a bearing of 085 magnetic.

A check of winds aloft data from Upton, New York, revealed the following:

Date	Time	Altitude	Velocity	Direction	Temperature	9		
Aug 12Z	500 MB	35 kts		350 degrees	-14 C	10	Aug 12Z	500
MB	15 kts		360 degrees	-12 C	9	Aug 00Z	400 MB	20 kts
	330 degrees	-22 C	10	Aug 00Z	400 MB	20 kts	330	
	degrees	-22 C						

Radar data was supplied by the Boston Air Traffic Control Center (ARTCC), in the NTAP format. The data contained both secondary targets (beacon), and primary targets (non-beacon). The data was plotted and Swissair Flight 127 was identified. There was no evidence of an opposite direction target, either beacon or non-beacon.

## Probable Cause

## Aircraft Information

Number of Seats:	0
Aircraft Use:	
Type of Operation:	14 CFR 129
Domestic/International:	DOMESTIC

Passenger/Cargo: PASSENGER/CARGO  
 Registration Number: HBIGF  
 Air Carrier Operating Certificates:  
 Aircraft Fire:

	Injuries			
	Fatal	Serious	Minor	None
Crew	0	0	0	3
Pass	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Invlvd	0	0	0	3

Landing Gear:  
 Certificated Maximum Gross Weight: 0  
 Engine Make:  
 Engine Model:  
 Number of Engines: 0  
 Engine Type:

**Environment/Operations Information**

Basic Weather Conditions: VISUAL METEOROLOGICAL CONDITIONS (VMC)  
 Wind Direction (deg): 0  
 Wind Speed (knots): 0  
 Visibility (sm): 50  
 Visibility RVR (ft): 0  
 Visibility RVV (sm): 0  
 Cloud Height Above Ground Level (ft): 0  
 Visibility Restrictions:  
 Precipitation Type: NONE  
 Light Condition:  
 Departure Airport Id: PHL  
 Departure City: PHILADELPHIA  
 Departure State: PA  
 Destination Airport Id: BOS  
 Destination City: BOSTON  
 Destination State: MA  
 Flight Plan Filed: INSTRUMENT FLIGHT RULES (IFR)  
 ATC Clearance:  
 VFR Approach/Landing:  
 Event Location:

**Pilot-in-Command**

Certificates:  
 Ratings:  
 Plane:  
 Non-Plane:  
 Instrument:  
 Had Current BFR:  
 Months Since Last BFR: 0  
 Medical Certificate:  
 Medical Certificate Validity:

Flight Time (Hours)			
Total	:	0	Last 24 Hrs : 0
Make/Model	:	0	Last 30 Days: 0
Instrument	:	0	Last 90 Days: 0
Multi-Engine:		0	Rotorcraft : 0

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