

## **Folks Know Truth Is Out There, but Flying Object Is Still Unidentified**

by Stephanie Simon  
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MILLSTADT, Ill.--It drifted ever so slowly over grain fields and railroad tracks and modest little houses, silent and stealthy in the dead of night.

It was immense: As long as a football field. Two stories tall. Triangular, like an arrowhead. Bright lights winked from its rear. Red lights shimmered from its belly.

And no one has any idea what in--or out of--the world it was.

Four police officers on patrol in four rural towns all saw it. So did at least one civilian. Each witness independently described the object the same way. Each was baffled.

Southeastern Illinois, it seems, has a genuine UFO mystery to chew on.

Was the government testing some top-secret, slow-moving, lit-to-the-max mega-blimp? Was nearby Scott Air Force Base trying a quirky new weapon? Did four police officers hallucinate simultaneously? Or were extraterrestrials scoping out the heartland with a 4 a.m. fly-by on Jan. 5?

"It's going to be a long while before we determine what went on that night," said Colm Kelleher, who studies UFOs at the National Institute for Discovery Science in Las Vegas.

### **Sightings Electrify UFO Researchers**

Folks out here don't seem too taken with the mystery. They tend to be pragmatic sorts; they worry about their jobs and their farms and the weather, not giant flying arrowheads. Some think it was an alien craft. Others nod knowingly: secret military project. Either way, it doesn't much affect them.

But the sightings have electrified UFO researchers nationwide.

A team of Las Vegas investigators led by a former FBI agent spent several days interviewing witnesses here. And at the National UFO Reporting Center in Seattle, Director Peter Davenport calls the case "a UFOlogist's dream" because the officers make "excellent to unimpeachable" witnesses.

Based on his interviews so far, Davenport says the UFO "clearly does not appear to be compatible with any conventional terrestrial aircraft that we know of."

The catch is "that we know of."

Even big-time UFO buffs have to admit that it's possible the mystery craft was a top-secret, man-made experiment. The Stealth bomber, for instance, was test-flown in the Midwest for eight years before the Pentagon officially unveiled it. During that time, local UFO societies got dozens of reports of black delta-shaped ships zooming overhead, said Forest Crawford, an Illinois UFO researcher.

"If it was up to me, I'd like [this latest sighting] to be a giant alien craft," Crawford said, "because those are more fun to investigate." He thinks it most likely, however, will turn out to be some sort of stealth blimp.

### **Government Isn't Saying Anything**

Not that the government is about to 'fess up, if in fact it was involved.

A spokesman for Scott Air Force Base says personnel there know nothing about the UFO. (Then again, if it was a classified military project, "I can't imagine that we would know," Lt. Col. Allan Dahncke said. "If we did, it wouldn't be so secret.")

The Federal Aviation Administration is similarly clueless: Air traffic controllers "didn't see anything, didn't hear anything, didn't catch anything on radar," spokeswoman Liz Cory said.

But those who saw the UFO are sure it was for real.

It floated along about 1,000 feet overhead, emitting a low-level buzz and following a southwesterly course for 20 minutes or more. Millstadt Officer Craig Stevens tried to take a photo but captured just three bright lights on film.

Excited and sleepless, Stevens has spent days combing the Internet for clues about the object. (That, and fending off callers who offer to examine him for alien implants.) He now says he's "almost 98% sure" that the craft was man-made. "There is that slight possibility, though," he added, "that it may be from elsewhere."

That prospect pushes Davenport to keep on investigating. "Until you have one of these objects on a laboratory table and are talking to the occupants, you can't say definitively what it is."