



The flight engineer had barely glanced outside when he said:

"Commander, we must report this to the ground."

But the beam of light suddenly opened up, turning into a brilliant luminous cone. From this moment, everyone saw what was taking place outside on the right. A second cone emerged, wider, but not as bright as the first one. Then a third one, broad and quite bright.

"Wait," the commander said, shrugging his shoulders, "what do we report? We have to see what happens further. And in general--what could this be?"

If anyone understands that you cannot ascertain distance by eye, pilots do. Nevertheless, all four had the same perception--an unidentified object is hovering over the earth 40 to 50 kilometers away. The copilot hastily began sketching a drawing of the unusual phenomenon. It was unbelievable, but on the ground, illuminated by the cone-shaped beam of light, everything would be clearly visible--houses, roads. How powerful this "projector" must be!

The beam of the "projector" rose from the ground and focused on the aircraft.

Now they saw a blinding white spot, surrounded by concentric colored circles. The commander was still hesitating: should he report what is taking place or not? But something that put an end to the doubts happened here. The white spot flashed up, and a green cloud emerged in its place.

"He cut in the engines and is running away," the copilot said, automatically shifting the phenomenon to the plane of an aviator's customary experience.

But it seemed to the commander that the object began coming closer at tremendous speed, intersecting the aircraft's course at a sharp angle. In short, it was rushing to intercept the path of the aircraft.

Cherkashin shouted to the navigator:

"Tell the ground!"

But there was a strange coincidence: after Ognev's very first words, the object stopped. It stopped coming closer, it seemed to the commander. It stopped moving farther away, the copilot decided.

The Minsk controller took the crew's report into consideration and politely said that he himself, unfortunately, sees nothing--either on the screen of the surveillance radar or in the sky.

"Well, now they will say that we're not in our right minds," Lazurin said, offended.

But the green cloud suddenly dropped down, rushing past the aircraft's altitude. Then it climbed vertically the same way. It was cast right and left. And again down and up. And finally, it fixed itself exactly opposite

to the aircraft. It flew after it as if it were attached to it--at an altitude of 10,000 meters at a speed of 800 kilometers per hour.

"An honorary escort," Cherkashin muttered, "what an honor for us..."

Inside the cloud little lights "sparkled"--they blinked on and off like the string of lights on a New Year tree. Then fiery zigzags glided horizontally. The navigator conscientiously reported everything to the ground.

The controller's excited voice was heard to respond:

"I am observing the northern lights on the horizon. Where do you see your cloud?"

The navigator responded.

"It coincides," the controller said.

The cloud continued to change. A "tail" grew out of it, like a tornado--wide at the top and thin at the ground. A "comma" was formed. Then the tail began rising "to the horizon" and the cloud changed from an elliptical shape into a quadrangular one.

"Look," the copilot said, "it's imitating us."

Indeed, they were now being escorted by a sharp-nosed "cloud airplane"--without wings, with a tapered tail. It was shining with yellow and green light. There was a sense of a dense nucleus where the real aircraft's nozzle was situated.

A flight attendant entered the cockpit.

"The passengers are interested in knowing what is flying alongside us."

Cherkashin sighed:

"Tell them it's a cloud of some kind. The yellow is city lights breaking through from below. The green... tell them it's the northern lights."

At this time one more real aircraft entered the Minsk controller's control area. A Tu-134 from Leningrad was flying in the direction opposite to that being flown by the crew from Tallin. About 100 kilometers separated the two airliners. It was impossible not to notice the huge cloud airplane from such a distance. However, the commander of the other "Tu" [Tupolev aircraft] responded to Cherkashin's question that he...observes nothing. The Minsk controller, who now saw the cloud airplane, gave the Leningrad crew the coordinates, the direction in which they should detect the unusual phenomenon. But it was as if they were blind. And at a distance of only about 15 kilometers before the encounter they recovered their sight. They described the cloud airplane exactly.

Much later, in attempting to explain to themselves what they had seen,

Cherkashin's crew will assume that the light from the object was polarized, that is, it was not dispersed in all directions.

When they were coupled with the cloud airplane they passed over Riga and Vilnius, and the controllers of these cities consistently positioned the odd tandem. Passing over the Chudskoye and Pskovskoye lakes, Cherkashin's crew were able to estimate the dimensions of the cloud airplane.

These two lakes, oblong in shape, are separated by a small strip of land. The Tu-134A was flying 100 kilometers to the left of them. And the cloud airplane was on the right, closer to Tartu. From the point where it seemed they guessed there was a dense nucleus, a beam again appeared. A luminous spot fell on the clouds and slid along the ground. The object automatically gave its coordinates. It was now possible to estimate that it itself was equal in length to the Pskovskoye Lake.

The combined flight continued until Tallin itself.

And after their landing, the Tallin controller told the crew these curious details. The Tu-134A was not seen alone on the screen of the Tallin Airport's surveillance RLS [radar]. Two more blips followed its radar return on the screen, although there was not one more aircraft in the air. In addition, these two blips were continuously visible, as also assumed. But the illuminated speck for the "Tu" first vanished, then reappeared. "I would understand if you had 'flickered' on the screen of the landing radar," the controller said. "But this does not happen on the surveillance radar; it cannot be."

We asked N. A. Zheltukhin, deputy chairman of the Commission on Aerodynamic Phenomena attached to the All-Union Council of Scientific and Technical Societies and corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, to comment on our correspondent's report.

"The commission is conducting a systematic study of NLO [unidentified flying object--UFO] sightings over the territory of the Soviet Union. There is already plenty of material to work on. However, we have to note that regrettably, all the accounts which we have at our disposal suffer from being one-sided or fragmentary to one degree or another.

"The sighting made by the Tallin crew has been investigated by the Estonian section of our commission (I. Volke, E. Parve and others). The case is really interesting, although we know of similar cases. The fact that the object instantly changed its movement to the opposite direction and reached the ground with a beam of light from a very high altitude is unquestionably atypical.

"However, in determining the nature of a phenomenon, the commission is guided first of all by the character of the locality. That is, if the phenomenon is indigenous, limited in range, it may be claimed as an anomaly. But the dimensions of the object which the aviators saw automatically alerted them. It was really very huge. It was natural to assume that somewhere distant,

many thousands of kilometers away, a global atmospheric or geophysical process of a type still unknown to science is taking place. But it seemed to the aviators only that it was somewhere close by--a typical optical illusion, so to speak.

"But in the final analysis this explanation proved to be untenable. After all, the aviators succeeded in determining the distance to the object.

"For this reason, there is only one conclusion that may be drawn: the Tallin crew dealt with what we call a UFO. The fact that we now have a consistent and detailed picture of the transformation of an unidentified flying object is especially important. G. Lazurin's drawings also provide it with word descriptions.

"We are again requesting the readers of TRUD to report all similar sightings to this address: 101000, Moscow, Glavpochtamt [Main Post Office], Box 764, the Commission on Aerodynamic Phenomena."

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