

Sign Oral History Project

Oral History Interview with

Kim (Werlich) Flippo and Melody (Werlich) Gibson;

surviving daughters of Minot AFB investigating officer

Lt. Col. Arthur Julian Werlich

Date: 12 and 18 February 2001

Interviewer: James Klotz

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Thomas Tulien

Sign Oral History Project

In the process of locating witnesses listed in the Project Blue Book file for the 24 October 1968 Minot AFB case, I came to the 862nd Combat Support Group, Operations Division Chief, Lt. Col. Arthur Julian Werlich. Col. Werlich conducted the local (Minot AFB) UFO investigation and is referred to in the documentation as the Minot "UFO officer." Calling the Werlich listings I eventually contacted family members who offered to assist in our search. On 17 February 2001, Dorothy Werlich, the widow of Arthur Werlich's older brother John, contacted me.

Dorothy turns out to be an extraordinarily energetic woman in her 70s with a great memory. She is a National Science Foundation Fellow and taught math and sciences in California for years. She had lived in Dayton (apparently her husband Lt. Col. John Werlich was stationed at Wright-Patterson at some point) and knew of FTD and Project Blue Book.

Dorothy provided the following information: Both Arthur and his brother John had exemplary military careers, and John stood three tours in Vietnam. Arthur was the public information officer at several of the bases to which he was assigned. He was aide to General Ryan at Offut AFB or Fairchild AFB, and to General Wade at Vandenburg AFB. Arthur retired from the

USAF in the early 1970s. After retirement, Arthur worked in a local hardware store but found that this did not suit him. Later he worked as a civilian at Scott AFB with maps for aircraft. Dorothy affirmed that Arthur (and his wife) were both deceased; Arthur died March 6, 1992 at St Louis. He was survived by two daughters, Melody Gibson; and Kim Flippo. The following conversations are with these two daughters.

—Jim Klotz

Conversation with Kim Werlich-Flippo

12 February 2001

KF: Kim Flippo

JK: Jim Klotz

KF Hello

JK Yes, is this Kim?

KF Yes it is.

JK Kim, my name is Jim Klotz. I don't know if [your great aunt] Dorothy talked to you about speaking with me?

KF Yes she did.

JK Do you have a minute now?

KF Sure.

JK I've been interested in UFOs for a long time. I've been working with government documents for about ten years, and for the last couple of years with a group of people who have taken on the task of trying to preserve [historical materials]. One of those efforts is an oral history project where we locate witnesses and do in-depth videotaped interviews. And right now we're working on a case that occurred October 24 of 1968 at Minot AFB.

KF OK. My dad was Base Ops officer.

JK I'm looking at a telex right now, "862nd Combat Support Group Operations Division Chief Arthur J. Werlich."

KF That's him [laughs].

JK Now that was actually a report that he made on this UFO situation to the then-Project Blue Book.

KF OK.

JK The job I have taken on is to try and locate the witnesses to talk with them, try to verify the information in the documents and so on. I've located 5 of the 6 people who were onboard a B-52 that was involved. I've spoken with all of those fellows. Now I'm working on the missile security police. Dorothy phoned me and talked quite a while about her memories and her late husband's career.

KF Yes, they were both avid Air Force men.

JK It sounds like they both had quite distinguished careers. Dorothy indicated that she wanted to contact you and your sister to ask if you might have any memories or whether there might be any papers or anything like that.

KF Yes, well you know that was quite a long time ago. I mainly have, I guess, feelings about the situation and I do remember things that my dad had said. But I was sure aliens were going to come down and get us for a long time [laughs].

JK Oh, from things he said?

KF Yes.

JK That was going to be one of my questions: do you have any sense of what he thought was going on?

KF As I recall this, there was a call my father got a call late at night. I think it was late, I don't know. I do know it was after dark and there was something about—there was some guys in a plane as well as some crewmen in a jeep or something on the ground, if this is the same one.

JK That is in agreement with the documents.

KF I'll be darned! OK, and they had this three-way conversation going and I guess—I want to say that the missile guys, you know, in charge of the silo there? As they would either raise or lower the lights—I'm not sure that is correct, but as they did something the UFO would react. And one of the comments I believe I heard my dad say, because, of course you know he wasn't allowed to speak about it—I mean he honored his clearance, but of course he was at home when this was happening and we did hear. But it was almost as if the craft was taking the energy from the silo.

- JK Oh! Interesting.
- KF And I don't have any idea what's in that report; I mean I wasn't privy to that.
- JK I'm in contact with these guys that were in the B-52—they had been out about ten hours, and they had done aerial refueling, high altitude work, and they had come back to the base and were doing runway approaches. On their penetrations they start at 20,000 feet and work lower as they approach the base, and then either touch-and-go, or a low approach and go around again, and all of a sudden this thing comes on radar. It was seen to move at a very high-rate of speed on the radar, higher than any normal aircraft. Prior to this, some of the air police at various missile sites had seen lights in the sky. And two guys in a truck both were on the road when they saw this thing and reported it by radio. As you recalled, they patched those guys on radio through to the tower operator who was in contact with the B-52 so they could coordinate what the people on the ground were seeing versus what the B-52 was doing. So some of what you say is right on to the report.
- KF Yeah.
- JK Now this B-52 went around again at low altitude and the two saw an object, a self-luminous large object on or near the ground. This was early in the morning.
- KF OK.
- JK And if he [Col. Werlich] was called out he probably would have been on base by the time these guys [B-52 pilots] saw this thing, and they got a pretty good look at it. There are about 120 pages of documents in the National Archives in the records that came from the Headquarters of the United States Air Force, Project Blue Book.
- JK Now is Melody your older sister?
- KF Yes, she's a year older than I am.
- JK OK, do you think she would speak with me?
- KF She'd probably be glad to.
- JK We're appreciative when people talk to us.
- KF You know I just found it exciting and actually terribly scary back then, and I like to talk to people that—you know when my dad had some kind of—you know, something to do with something.
- JK Right.

- KF I do remember something else that he had said too about that. I want to say that he went out there with like a Geiger counter or something like that—and that the measurements, you know, were just way off the chart.
- JK Oh, OK, that is interesting because that is not mentioned.
- KF Really!
- JK No, but he was trying to get the best information he could to submit to the people at Wright-Patterson who ran the UFO project.
- KF Does it say anything in there about the—like the controls that are—I wanna say are on top of the silo, on top of the missile thing that were changed—
- JK No.
- KF —or were different?
- JK The co-pilot of the B-52 recalls that when he was at a debriefing the next day at the Air Division Commander's office, he was told that one of the blast doors on one of the silos had been tampered with.
- KF OK!
- JK The documents, and this is your father's words, say that at one of the silos both the outer and inner security alarms were sounded during the time the UFO was flying around, and that when one of the two man teams got there they found the outer gate standing open and the access hatch—and this would be like one of those hatches you'd see in a Navy submarine—
- KF Yeah!
- JK —one of those hatches was open and the combination lock inside of that had been moved.
- KF Yeah! That jibes with what I can recall my dad talking about. I didn't know it was a combination lock or anything, but yeah it was a hatch—he said that hatch had been opened.
- JK In that same document he makes the statement that they'd had two or three incidences and they thought it was pranksters or ex-Air Force guys that still had keys fooling around. I've been through that country out there and there's nothing out there.
- KF It's desolate. We hated every minute of it! [Laughs]

- JK Right, in the documents it says the next day he took a helicopter and went out where these guys said they saw this thing stationary close to the ground. He over flew the area and said there was nothing there that could have made that kind of light.
- KF Yeah. It's kind of funny, this is just a total—now I'm just being wordy but when my father got ill and went to the hospital, it was really kind of a sudden type of deal, within several weeks he had pancreatitis and he was in the intensive care room, and I was in there with him. He was trying to tell me something, you know? I thought, 'oh my God, he's going to finally tell me the secret' and I kept saying 'I can't hear you Dad, tell me again, tell me again' and I kept putting my ear right down there and I'll be darned, he didn't tell me [laughs].
- JK I hope I'm not dredging up unhappy memories for you here.
- KF No, I loved my dad so much, and we miss him still so much to this day, and it's just good to be able to speak and hear things that he had said. I enjoy that.
- JK I cut you off earlier; did your dad say what he thought was going on there? I'm just curious.
- KF No, you mean when he died?
- JK Well at any point.
- KF Well, he would hold himself back from telling, you know, everything.
- JK You had the sense that there was more to say though?
- KF Yes, I sure did, and I only know what I overheard, I mean you couldn't help.
- JK You weren't hiding on the stairway were you?
- KF [Laughs]. Let's see, in '68 I was 13, yeah, so I probably would have been prone to do something like that. And definitely in the middle of the night when the phone rang and you heard what was going on, you know.
- JK Sure, exciting stuff.
- KF Oh yes, and especially back then. That was right about the time I believe we sent someone to the Moon. It was right between '68 and '70 you know, and it was all the space stuff—yeah, exciting times.
- JK Is there anything else you can think of?
- KF No, that's really about it.

JK Do you recall other instances when he talked about other cases or other incidents?

KF Not really, but my sister might.

JK Well anyway, thank you very much Kim, I appreciate chatting with you.

KF You're more than welcome and I'm sure my sister would like hearing from you and she might remember things that I don't. She has a much better memory than I do.

[Transcription end]

Conversation with Melody Werlich-Gibson

18 February 2001

MG: Melody Gibson

JK: Jim Klotz

MG Hello.

JK Hello, is this Melody?

MG Yes.

JK Melody, my name is Jim Klotz. I spoke with Dorothy Werlich yesterday and I just got off the phone with your sister Kim.

MG Yes.

JK I wondered if you might have a moment to chat with me?

MG Well, who are you with? [Laughs].

JK My name is Jim Klotz. I live in Seattle and I have had an interest in UFOs for a long time. Anyway, I've been working in government documentation and that sort of thing, working with the National Archives, and—

MG And how did you find my father?

JK Well, something happened very near Minot on October 24 of 1968, one of the fellows in a B-52 made a report to one of the civilian UFO groups in February of last year and brought up some details of this case. We went to the National Archives and obtained the documentation that was available from the Project Blue book files. There are about 130

pages of documentation on this incident, and in that file there are a number of memoranda and a report and telex either from or mentioning your father.

MG OK.

JK I work with a group called the Sign Historical Group and one of the projects is an oral history project where we locate witness and other people who have had some involvement and interview them on videotape.

MG I see.

JK I started with this B-52 crew and interviewed all of them, so the next step in working on the case was locating the missile security police. In the documentation, here's a line from a telex that says: "862nd Combat Support Group Operations Division Chief Arthur J. Werlich." Gives his duty phone and home phone, and summarized his comments on this incident, as he was the local—

MG At the missile site?

JK Yeah, because he ended up being the investigating officer for Minot on this incident and they referred to him as a "UFO Officer."

MG [Laughs] yes.

JK So apparently he got the assignment when this happened.

MG He got the phone call.

JK Kim had certain memories of it and that's what I'd like to ask you, if you have any memory of it.

MG You mean at the missile sites.

JK Yes, and also regarding the B-52.

MG Yeah. I remember mostly the missile site as opposed to the B-52. What crew was it that you interviewed? What were their names?

JK They were Standardization and Evaluation so they were the guys that were putting other crewmembers through paces and certifying them for missions. The pilot's name was Don Cagle and the co-pilot's name was Brad Runyan. He's the person who came forward a year ago February.

MG What got him to come forward out of curiosity?

- JK I'm not sure except I know from his comments that this has been on his mind for all these years because frankly, they got a pretty close-up look at this thing.
- MG You know, my father was approached by someone else after he retired. And I tend to think it was the same group that published 'something of the gods,' it was a book. Not 'Chariots of the Gods,' what was it? I mean he was approached, and he refused to divulge any information at the time.
- JK Right, now the Blue Book documents have been declassified. I've got the names of I think about fourteen witnesses among the missile security police.
- MG Yeah, I remember that my father got the phone call, you know, in the evening, and from what he told us a young crewman told him that there was a hotel that was lit up right over the top of the missile site. That jiving with what you've got?
- JK Well they were certainly the first to report something, yes. I mean there are certain aspects of—
- MG Yeah, 'looks like a hotel on it's side, Sir.' [Chuckles].
- JK Now, I hadn't heard that. There are certain things that are in the documents, and there are things I'm being told by people who were there that go beyond what's in the documents.
- MG OK, that's what, you know, the phone call was a frantic phone call—some missile guy to my dad and he said it's right above the missile site and it looks like a lit-up hotel and it's turned on it's side, so that's—now I don't know who that missile person was.
- JK Well, according to the documents here, and I've been trying to locate these guys, but there were two—you know they have these security teams in a little 4X4 truck and it's two man teams—
- MG Yeah, and they're young.
- JK Yeah, 21 years old, and the two guys that reported something first were named Isley and O'Connor.
- MG I don't recognize the names. Well, the phone call was to our home.
- JK Right, but that would probably be from the Base Operations I would guess.
- MG No, it was from a guy.
- JK Oh really!
- MG Yeah.

JK Oh! That's interesting! Yeah, because the documents say that Isley and O'Connor saw something, they notified their security controller back at the Launch Controller, and the notice went on into other organizations from there. But it doesn't mention how your dad got notified, but he was the investigating officer.

MG And he talked to them by phone from our home. At the base, it was in the evening, of course, and I remember him going out there, but I don't remember if he actually saw anything other than he told me that—I guess they went—the lid to the missile was open?

JK Yeah, we're getting two variations of that.

MG And that they used—it was like a Geiger counter maybe? And it was either the Alpha wave or the Gamma wave, whichever one is not a normal occurring thing and it was that particular wave that they picked up, yeah.

JK In his report he talks about flying out in a helicopter the next day and looking at the location where the B-52 people saw this object.

MG That makes sense, yeah.

JK But it seems to me that he said he wanted to go out there with a Geiger counter.

MG Well they did.

JK Yeah, well that's what your sister recalls also.

MG Like I said, I can't remember which particular Alpha wave or Gamma wave, you know, is the most prevalent, it was the other one, the one you don't really find very often—is the thing that was around the fence around the fence particularly, at the missile top—it had moved the slab—

JK Yeah the blast door—the silo door—

MG —extremely heavy—and that some dial was turned but there were these Gamma waves or Alpha waves that were real apparent.

JK Well let me tell you what's in the documents. During this UFO stuff there were security alarms from one of the silos, and a two-man crew was sent out there. When they got there the gate was standing open, and not the big blast door but the hatch like a Navy hatch where a person would access it normally—

MG Right, where the thing had to be turned?

JK —that was open and there was a combination lock inside—

MG Right.

- JK —and he said that had been moved—turned like somebody had turned the combination lock.
- MG Yeah.
- JK And the other story that we are hearing is much more dramatic. The two men that were sent out to these security alarms didn't report, so another team was sent out and they were found unconscious with the paint on the top of their truck blistered, and that when they got to the silo, the fence itself was smashed down and the big blast door was moved.
- MG OK.
- JK And the documents do not support that. I'm not saying it didn't happen, it's just not what's in the papers.
- MG But I remember, you know the top being off, now I don't know if that was the blast door or the hatch—but I do remember something, you know, one of those being open, or open and a combination being turned, and the presence of whatever waves those were, Gamma or Alpha.
- JK Yeah, there's no mention of that result either, but that's interesting because that jibes with what your sister recalls also.
- MG Yeah!
- JK Kim [sister] said that she was quite affected by that occurrence and the conversation that she overheard your dad having on the phone that night, and that it bothered her.
- MG Oh really! I thought it was cool [laughs].
- JK Well later she thought it was cool too, but it made her think that maybe something was going to come down and get her.
- MG Oh really? Yeah, she'd think that, but I just thought it was cool, I mean, 'tell me more, tell me more!'
- JK Now do you remember him saying anything later about it?
- MG No, he's mentioned it, he did mention it a couple different times but it was always the same, you know, it never deviated from what he said.
- JK Right, I'm just curious about what he thought was going on.
- MG Yeah, he had mentioned other things that happened to him as he was flying. I don't know how long ago, but whatever mission that they had on their radar, they had a blip appear

on one side of their bird, and then on the other side of the bird, you know [laughs] a lot faster than that should have gone and so it's, you know, they had something appear there and then all of a sudden on the sweep it's all of a sudden on the other side.

JK Yeah, that's exactly what happened to this B-52.

MG Yeah, and dad mentioned a couple occurrences like that or he'd see something that he couldn't explain. No logical explanation. But he mentioned those few things. That was after he had retired. Well, I hope Kim and I have helped. I'd be interested to know who the hotel guy was [laughs] he said it looked like a hotel.

JK Yeah! I have no idea. Well in this case they said "most likely a ball lighting of the plasma type."

MG Yes. As a matter of fact, I saw a fireball. I was driving northbound on Highway 55 between Arkansas and Missouri, and I saw two fireballs. I called my dad [laughs] like the Airman 'dad! This is what I saw!' you know, so he got the phone number for me to report that to the National Atmospheric whatever in Washington DC. They were meteors that landed in Oklahoma—

JK Oh! Interesting!

MG Yeah, but that's what they turned out to be but they were like balls of fire going across the sky, it was just so neat.

JK Yeah, I saw one. I presume it was a meteor, came over directly above me and it was the brightest green, just unbelievably bright, I mean it lit everything up around us.

MG Oh, mine was bright red.

JK Oh interesting. I suppose it's the different things they are made out of

MG Right that's what color they burn. It was just the neatest thing. But then I was in rural, very rural Missouri we were fly fishing along a stream when I guess it was a piece of Russian satellite broke and came down, do you remember that? It was about five maybe six years ago. Anyway we saw that, we were out there, and to my mind the first thing I said was 'Oh my God, it's a UFO!' [laughs]. And my husband's nieces got all frightened, and I said 'hey! Think of Star Wars,' you know, 'it's really cool.' But the local Sheriff was swamped with phone calls, and they came on with a thing on the TV saying it was the satellite parts burning up. Well, this has been a totally interesting conversation.

JK I'm glad you enjoyed it and I appreciate you speaking with me.

MG Yeah! Thanks for tracking us down.

[Transcript end.]