

## *Sign Oral History Project*

### **Oral History Interview with James A. Partin (USAF, Major, ret.)**

B-52 Pilot, 5<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Wing,  
Minot AFB, ND, 24 October 1968

Date: 20 January 2001

Interviewer: Jim Klotz

TRT: 21 minutes

Format: audiotape (recorded by telephone)

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Transcription by Jim Klotz with additional editing by Tom Tulien.

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Thomas Tulien

*Sign Oral History Project*

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Note: Partin drawing appended.

**JP: James Partin**

**JK: Jim Klotz**

JP Hello.

JK Yes, good morning is this Mr. Partin?

JP Yes.

JK My name is James Klotz. I'm calling from Seattle. I called and left a message a few days ago.

JP Yeah, I got it and I hit erase and lost the number.

JK Do you recall what I had called about?

JP Yeah.

JK Are you the James Partin I'm looking for?

JP Yes, I spent six years in Minot—B-52's.

[JK provides a summary of the incident including the B-52 crewmember names].

JP These names are not ringing a bell.

JK Well they weren't your crew. We figure that you were being evaluated that day.

JP The name Don Cagle rings a bell, but I can't place it.

JK Do you recall this incident at all?

JP I recall—I don't remember if it was my crew or if I was with someone else. You say the crew number was S-01?

JK S-01 yes.

JP I was S-03 but I was not in the Staneval section. The entire crew we were all instructors in our positions, and of course as instructors we did fly with a lot of other crews. We, as I said, were not a Stanboard crew. S-01, S-02 and S-03 were Stanboard crews when I first got there but the duty inspections, and ORI's, and things like that, some of them disappeared and I ended up with that crew number. But I just don't remember what happened to 1 and 2. However, I did see an object one night that I reported.

JK Right.

JP I don't remember the date.

JK Well, if it's the same thing we're talking about this was toward the end of October 1968.

JP I really don't remember the date.

JK Do you have a problem talking with me about this incident?

JP No. I would have a problem videotaping or something like that though.

JK OK, would you feel comfortable just telling me what you recall?

JP OK, the first thing that I recall we were on a crew mission and we were back in the local area at Minot, and we were about ready to make our penetration and low approach, and I guess we were in the neighborhood of 20,000 feet probably. And the radar called and said he had a return off the left wing and did I see anything? I looked up there and didn't see anything.

JK OK you are in the left seat, is that right?

JP Yeah so all of a sudden he said "God Almighty!" and I said "What's wrong?" he was alarmed, you know, so and he said that whatever that was took off to our left at a tremendous rate of speed, he couldn't even measure it.

JK He's seeing this on the radarscope?

JP Yeah, he watched it go. So we forgot it and went on down and were shooting low approaches in the traffic pattern. I guess, somewhere in the process, I changed seats got into the Co-Pilot's seat. I don't remember doing that but I remember looking off to my right probably about the 2 o'clock position as they used to say, and low and I saw a—it was sort of oblong, there were, looked like windows around it that were lit and it was just hovering there. And that's about the time the Air Police saw something in the same vicinity and then I heard this, according to them, they heard this I believe they phrased it as a 60-cycle per second hum I guess, like electric motors or something.

JK Now these are missile guys hearing this?

JP Yeah, the missile guys. And of course, we could hear nothing where we were. And then all of a sudden it was gone, and so—

JK Now do you think that thing was on the ground or it was close?

JP No, I think it was—we must have been around 1500-1700 feet above the ground and it was—

JK So this was a visual pass this last one?

JP Yeah, I don't know if it was—you could see houses on the ground from that altitude, and they looked like, you know, about the size of dice—a die.

JK Like maybe like a Monopoly house?

JP Yeah, right and this was much larger than that.

JK OK so that gives you some idea of size?

- JP Yeah, but as far altitude or on the ground, I really don't know. It was, as I said, I think early in the morning, like 2 or 3 o'clock and we had of course flown all night and get a little bleary-eyed, but that's what I heard and that's what I saw.
- JK OK. I had a lengthy talk with several of the other guys. They all recall—well the documents themselves identify you as being with that Stanboard crew that day.
- JP OK.
- JK They remember your name and one of them remembers you being on board and the others remember an extra pilot being on board.
- JP Yeah. Let me interrupt you real quick and tell you one more thing that I recall. When I described to the crew over the interphone what I was seeing, the Navigator, the Radar-Navigator and everybody tried to get up in our lap in the cockpit and—[laughs].
- JK The memory from Brad Runyan is that you were in the left seat and that he was in the right seat, and that Cagle had been in the instructor's jump seat for a while and that when you guys were at 20,000 and had this object on radar, that Cagle decided that he he had something happening the next day that he didn't want to miss. And so the memory is that Cagle got up out of the jump seat and went and got in the bunk and that you continued the flight until full stop.
- JP You know, thinking back, I could have unstrapped and raised up and looked over the right side, but it seems like I was sitting on the right in the Co-pilot's seat.
- JK Now Runyan made a drawing for us and you made a little tiny drawing in your report, [which] shows a little circle, says "orange ball of light," and then I'd say an appendage out the side maybe twice as long, it says "a very dim ring of soft white light." And then it says "the angular size judged by holding a match at arm's length," and you showed a circle with a small dot which means that the match head would not cover very much. However, Runyan's drawing is very detailed, and he has you guys approaching this object—and it would have been when it was low and you guys were—
- JP Yeah that we were above that object?
- JK What he says was, that on the last go around, which was at low altitude, you guys approached it and it would have been at approximately at 11 o'clock low, and that you had a good view of it out of the left seat as you made a left turn around this thing, and he said the way he saw it was looking across the flight deck and out the window on the pilot's side.
- JP Umm! Well heck, I don't know, like I say, it's been a long time but I thought—
- JK —when the plane banked he said he could see it clearly through the pilot's window at that point, and that's when he saw all the detail.

JP OK.

JK Now like I said he [Runyan] made a very detailed drawing.

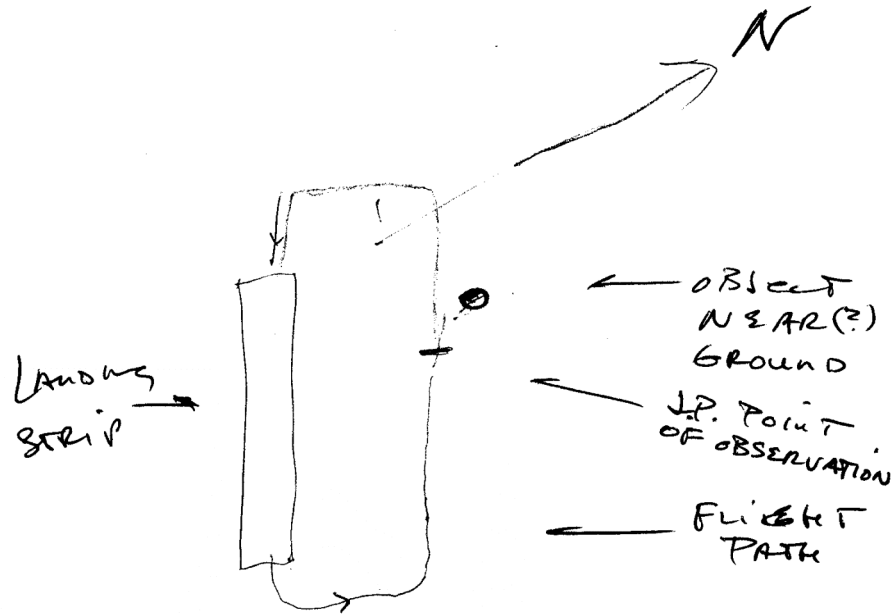
JP But it's similar to what I did?

JK Like I say, the color is the same and the general shape is the same. I don't want to describe it any further, in case—

JP You know I haven't thought about that in years. Let me get your number and then let me give that a little more thought to see if I can recollect anything that I didn't tell you.

[End of initial conversation.]

A few days later, a follow up call did not provide any additional information. One month later, I (Thomas Tulien) met with James Partin on 23 February 2001 near his home in Texas. Though he was cooperative in responding to questions, he preferred that I not record our conversation. His recall was generally vague after 33 years, though he recalls being onboard during the UFO incident and was able to recall viewing the object from above. He provided a drawing of the flight path of the B-52 and relative location of the UFO. The notations are mine.



2/23/01

\* 2nd Approach  
Following Low  
Approach.

Partin Drawing

This was not Major Partin's regular crew assignment at Minot AFB. He was onboard this flight being routinely evaluated by the aircraft commander and instructor pilot, Captain Don Cagle. Being the senior officer, he attended the debriefing at Base Operations following the terminal landing of the B-52. He did not attend the debriefing in the offices of General Holland later in the morning along with the other crewmembers. In our initial telephone interview he recalled being in the right seat during the observation, but subsequently corrected the recall and remembers being in the left seat and unstrapping in order to lean over the co-pilot to view the object below the B-52. Partin was the only crewmember to complete an Air Force Form 117, *Sighting of Unidentified Phenomena Questionnaire* on 30 October.