

OMNI September 1987 - UFO UPDATE by Sherry Baker

Five TBM Avenger torpedo bombers left the Naval Air Station in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on December 5, 1945, for a routine training mission. But less than three hours later, all five planes and their crews of 14 were missing. A Martin flying boat (a plane that can land on water) was immediately sent to the rescue; but that craft, along with 13 crew members, also disappeared.

Cryptic messages attributed to the flight instructor, including the cry "Don't come after me; they look like they're from outer space," have long fueled speculation that aliens were involved in the planes' mysterious disappearance. And now a Poway, California, man named Wesley Bateman claims he has evidence that extraterrestrials hurled the planes into space. In fact, Bateman asserts, at least one of the Avengers is entombed in ice about 6,000 miles above the earth, just over the Bermuda Triangle.

Bateman, who says he conducts privately funded UFO research "for a group of people who want to remain anonymous," made his discovery while watching a videotape about UFOs. After watching the tape several times, Bateman says, he noticed an object allegedly photographed by Apollo 11 astronauts. What's more, he declares, he realized that the object resembled a TBM Avenger, "The heaviest part of the plane-the nose-is pointed toward the earth," he states. "And you can easily recognize the bubble turret and the tail."

But how did a 1945 propeller-driven airplane get into orbit? Bateman theorizes that depth charges dropped by the Avengers may have damaged an alien craft under the sea. "When the UFO rose out of the water to avoid further damage," Bateman says, "its rapid departure created a propulsion vortex, sucking up a lot of seawater and the planes along with it."

As far as aviation journalist and UFO skeptic Philip J. Klass is concerned however, Bateman's theory is full of holes. "I've personally spent days in the

Navy archives going through the records of Flight 19, and there is simply no mystery to it," he insists. Klass says the craft originally headed east, toward the Bahamas. The flight instructor became disoriented and decided that the aircraft were over the Florida Keys. He thus ordered the planes north, toward what he thought was the mainland. But since the planes were over the Bahamas, heading north pointed them toward Greenland. Greenland was just too far away, and the aircraft simply ran out of gas.

But how does Klass explain the photo of an Avenger some 6,000 miles above the earth? "I could say that the object looks like the face of God," he says. "Besides, our radar monitors every object in Earth orbit. It's powerful enough to detect a six-inch-long metal strap that has fallen off a satellite. An object the size of an Avenger would long ago have attracted attention." NASA spokesman Ken Atchison adds, "I was around during the Apollo days, and I've never heard of the astronauts seeing or photographing anything like what Bateman is talking about." Still, Bateman insists that seeing is believing. "I can't imagine anyone looking at this photo," he asserts, "and saying it's not an Avenger. This is conclusive proof that UFO's exist."

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