

NARCAP International Air Safety Report IR-8, 2015
NARCAP IR-8, 2015

A Review of Suspected Aviation Safety Encounters
with UAP by Estonian Pilots in Estonian and Soviet Union Airspace

Priit Rifk
NARCAP Research Associate

January 2015
Copyright

National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena

Introduction

Estonia was part of the Soviet Union for 52 years (1939 - 1991). A branch of the airline *Aeroflot* was set up in Estonia in 1944; at that time Estonia was called *Estoniskaja Sovetskaja Sotsialistitšeskaja Respublika* and *Aeroflot Estonia Airlines* was the only civil air carrier in the country until 1991. At the beginning of *Aeroflot Estonia Airlines* most of its pilots were of Russian origin but from the 1960's on more and more Estonians were able to get their pilot qualifications and in the 1980's almost half of the *Aeroflot* staff was of Estonian origin. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Estonian Republic was restored and the earlier *Aeroflot Estonia* became an independent national air carrier named *Estonian Air*. Most of the pilots working for *Aeroflot Estonia* were able to continue their job in *Estonian Air* and some of them are active pilots to this day. The interesting part is that some of them have experienced sightings of unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) that remains unexplained to the present day. The cases described here happened during the Soviet era. Nevertheless, they still play an important role that is related to air safety.

During the time of the pilot reports cited here, Soviet airspace was controlled by the Soviet Military Air Force (Военно-воздушные силы). In case of UAP occurring near civil flights the military was always involved. It is important to bring out here those cases where civil flights had UAP occurrences that demonstrated a threat to air safety. Three candidate cases are presented here for the first time in English.

Note: Footnotes (FN) are found at end of report.

Case 1

Perhaps the most significant case in Estonian airspace happened in February of 1982 involving Captain Anatoli Roost and his cockpit crew. They were flying a Yak-40 aircraft (Figure 1) (FN-1) from Kingiseppa (now Kuressaare) to Tallinn with a crew of four.



Figure 1. Aeroflot Yak-40
(Photo: Courtesy of Aeroflot – АвиаРеклама-92)
(FN-1)

The distance between these two cities is about 116 miles. (Figure 2) It was the last flight of the day (at around 8 pm) and the weather conditions were good. When flying above Virtsu village (58deg 37min 41sec N; 23deg 31min 26sec E) the captain noticed something. It was a bright light that moved rapidly towards their aircraft. At first the captain thought it was a military aircraft but as soon as they noticed the shape of the object and the maneuvers it made they were not sure about it any more. Captain Roost then contacted Tallinn Air Traffic Unit and asked if there was any military traffic around. The air traffic controller asked Captain Roost why he wanted to know that. The controller confirmed that all the military jets were on the ground. [FN 2] The unknown object was clearly visible and the flight crew even forgot to check the aircraft radar screen because the object was something so unusual that amazed the crew.

The crew was sure that the object was piloted by someone, i.e., it did not look like a natural phenomenon. The unknown object was so bright that it was possible to read a newspaper in the cockpit. All at once the captain noticed two objects. The lower one had an orange blinking light on top of it. Their shape was clearly visible (see Figure 3) to the flight crew. The second object was at a higher altitude. Captain Roost also heard an air traffic controller telling someone in the background that “they are here again”! The two objects were near enough to possibly have had an influence on cockpit equipment. After



Figure 2. Airplane flight path (blue line) seen on Estonian map. Red dots are Soviet Air Force bases.

observing these UAPs for ten minutes one of it flew upward to the sky by following a parabolic maneuver. The acceleration was so great that a normal aircraft would not be able to match it. The second object remained its position. The aircraft flight heading was now to Tallinn Airport and UAP was in the right side of the aircraft. The flight mechanic even suggested that they turn the aircraft toward the object that remained in sight and follow it. But Captain Roost decided not to follow the unknown object (they had between twenty and thirty passengers on board and it would have been against the airline's safety rules and would also have frightened the passengers because the UAP was unknown and because it could have influenced aircraft systems in case of a close approach). (FN-1.1)

Captain Roost was amazed by the maneuvers these two objects made and he absolutely confirmed it is impossible to make these maneuvers by man-made aircraft. (FN-3) Later Captain Roost was questioned by people from different "institutions" (one person was a high-ranking military officer from Soviet Air Force Intelligence). The main question asked from the military side was whether this was an aircraft that they had seen (General Lieutenant's question). Captain Roost confirmed that these objects were not aircraft; the origin of these objects remained unknown. All the members from the crew

were questioned separately. After that incident Captain Roost understood that it is wiser to be silent on this matter. (FN-4)



Figure 3. Drawing from Captain Roost descriptions made by Nikoli Potapov (From Igor Volke's archive).

Captain Roost was forced to keep this incident silent and not to speak about it publicly. Captain Roost is currently an active civil pilot and flies a Boeing 737-800 as a captain and instructor.

Case 2

The second case to be reviewed involved Mr. Kalle Allikson, who was a member of a Tu -134A flight crew as a flight technician. He was not able to recall the exact year when this incident occurred, but he estimated it in the mid 1980's. The flight departed from Leningrad (St. Petersburg) to Tallinn (Fig. 4) a distance of only about 195 miles. Weather conditions were not particularly good (there was a light haze that evening). With the aircraft flying under autopilot control during the cruise portion of the flight nothing unnatural occurred in the first two-thirds of the flight.

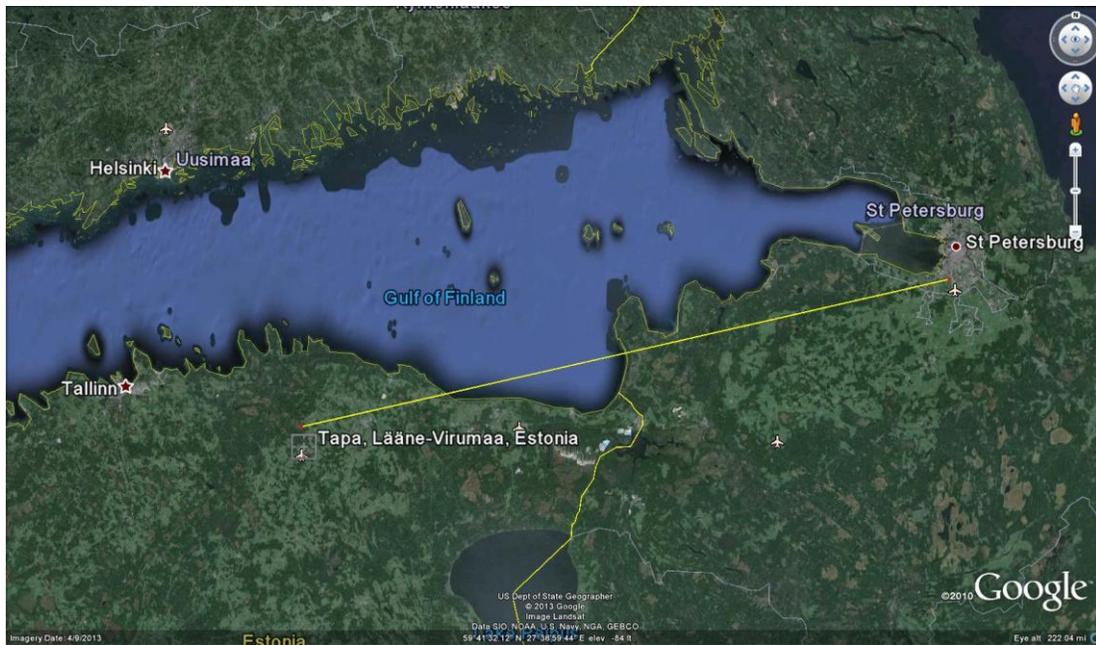


Figure 4. Approximate Initial Flight Path of Tu-134A.
(UAP sighting occurred near left end of line shown)

The aircraft began its initial descent with the autopilot set to heading mode with a vertical descent rate of about ten m/sec. When plane was starting its approach to runway 26 of the Tallinn Airport four white lights appeared on the right side of the aircraft: two in the corners and two in the middle. The middle lights were blinking together. The crew noticed the object at first while flying over Tapa and the plane was descending. Mr. Allikson thought that it could not have been another aircraft because aircraft lights can't be turned right or left while flying. If it would have been other aircraft, it would have collided with the Tupolev. But the object was moving parallel with the Tu-134A for some time (maintaining a relatively constant distance) and then it moved behind them out of sight but soon reappearing on their right side at the same distance as before). Then it disappeared suddenly. The unknown object was very likely an observing aircraft of some kind and it did not change its altitude (it was the same as our own aircraft). (FN-5)



Figure 5. Aeroflot Tu-134A Passenger Airplane in Flight
(Photo: Complements of Aeroflot Aveareklama 92)

The lights were like projector lights (beams) aimed towards the aircraft. In a later interview Mr. Allikson thought that the object was about 1,000 m away from them based on his prior experience flying in similar visibility conditions. He also estimated the size of the UAP to be from 150 to 200 m in diameter. The flight crew was amazed and did not know what to think about it. The unknown object did not have any noticeable impact upon cockpit instrument readings. Mr. Allikson also made it clear that he and his crew were not seriously distracted by the UAP in carrying out their normal duties. Because it did not continue to approach the aircraft but maintained a constant distance they were relieved.

Mr. Allikson has been working in aviation from 1970 to the present. He is currently working in the Estonian Civil Aviation Administration as a head of Technical Department.

Case 3

In the autumn (October) of 1976 Captain Guido Jakobson (FN-6) was commanding a Tupolev 124 (passenger flight) from Tallinn to Ukraine when he and his flight crew encountered a cigar shaped UAP (later, when he drew the object for me, it looked more disc shaped). The object passed in front of the Tupolev 124 (Fig. 6). This flight took place in the evening time when the Sun had already set; the weather conditions were good. Their flight heading was from north to south. When the flight entered Latvian Airspace they had reached a cruising altitude around 10,000 meters. While flying over Rujiena (Latvian village, see fig. 7) the crew noticed a strange object coming from an easterly direction. Captain Jakobson described it as a cigar shape object with illuminators, i.e., ports or self-luminous areas. He recalled seeing around seven to nine illuminators. This object moved fast, they estimated its speed at around 500 to 600 km/hour. The pilots were able to see inside the area of each illuminator where small red light dots were seen moving around chaotically. The background color inside each

illuminator was orange. The object was dark but they were able to see the outline shape of it. It did not reflect any light. It came from the east and headed west and appeared to be climbing at about a 30 degree angle (see fig. 6). The flight crew observed the object for about 30 seconds. The object did not leave any visible track or trail behind it in the sky neither could they see any power source. The crew did not make a report about this incident. This unidentified object did not have any influence on the aircraft's displays. Captain Jakobson also confirmed that there were no other aircrafts flying near them at the time.

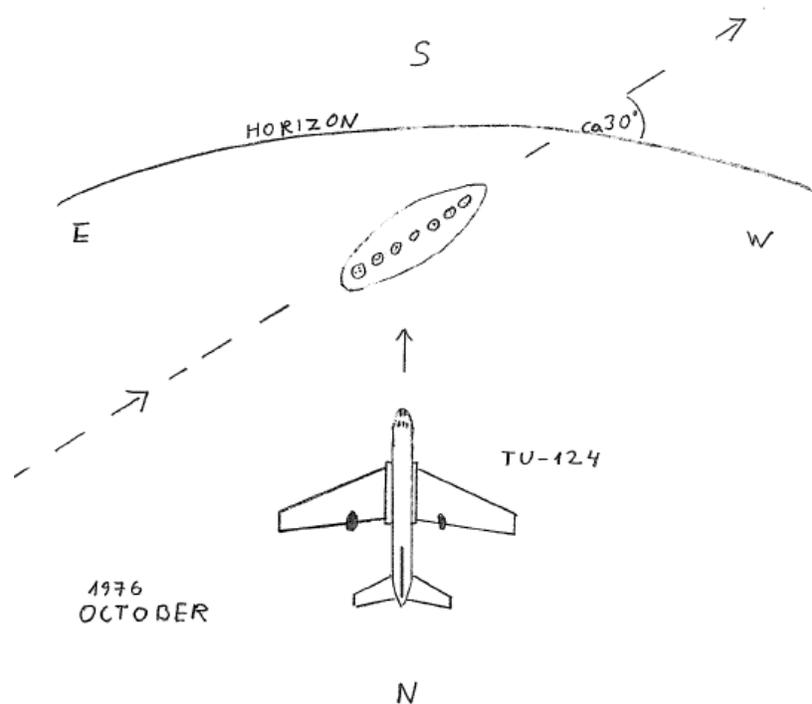


Figure 6. Drawing based on Captain Jakobson descriptions
(drawn by Priit Rifk)

I interviewed Captain Jakobson two different times to make sure he could recall as much details as possible. Details like the flight number, exact date and time, names of crew members (he remembered one crew member who is now 96 years old), aircraft number etc. were not recalled by him. Unfortunately it happened nearly forty years ago.

This case could also have been an air safety issue, an airplane and the object trajectories might have crossed closely. Interestingly, the crew did not make any report to the dispatcher nor to the wing commander.

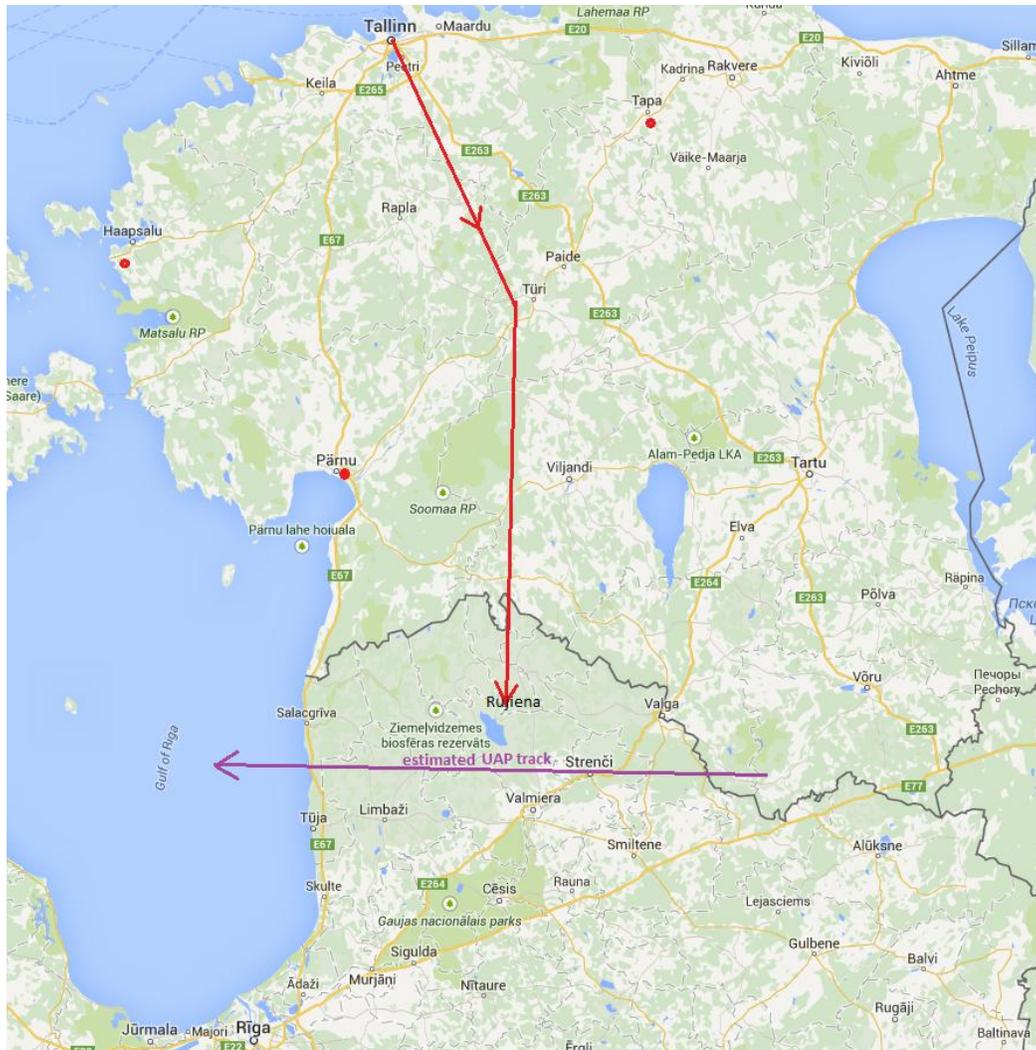


Figure 7. Airplane flight path (red line) and estimated UAP track (purple line) seen on Estonian map. Red dots are the Soviet Air Force bases (see FN-2).

References

1. Interviews (recorded, in Estonian) with Captain A. Roost and Mr. K. Allikson and performed by Priit Rifk, Igor Volke and Meelis Piller.
2. Case 3, interview with Captain Guido Jakobson performed by Priit Rifk.
3. Figure 3 is from Mr. Igor Volke's personal archive and is used here by permission. He has investigated Estonian UAP reports for about forty years and collaborates closely with the author.
4. Figure 2, 6 and 7 was prepared by the author.

Footnotes

FN-1 (on pg. 2). The YAK-40 has three turbojet engines with a cockpit crew of two or three. It cruises at 470 km/hr. and has a range of 1,800 km. Its high power-to-weight ratio makes it possible to take off from high altitude airfields and in high air temperatures.

FN-2 (on pg. 2). A squadron of Mig-23 M (Flogger) jet interceptor of the Soviet Air Force was stationed at Haapsalu at the time (assigned to the 425th IAP), Tapa (assigned to the 656 IAP) and Pärnu (assigned to the 655th IAP, Mig-23MLD). Three squadrons were under the 14th Air Defense Division which was located in Tallinn.

FN-1.1 (on pg. 3). Whenever a flight crew cannot communicate with a nearby airplane or object and does not know what it might do it becomes a safety matter. This is particularly true if the flight crew should attempt fly toward the other object in order to try to evoke some response from it or just gain a better view of it. (Ed.)

FN-3 (on page 3). When Capt. Roost was asked more recently (August 2011) whether the maneuvers and speed of these UAP still exceeded any man-made aircraft he knew about he said, “absolutely!” He had never before seen anything perform such flight maneuvers and still did not have any explanation for the UAP.

FN-4 (on page 3). At the time when the aircraft started to descend for landing the dispatcher at the Tallinn Airport asked if the crew and passengers were safe – it seemed like they were worried. The flight crew did not inform the passengers about the objects while flying. The passengers asked about the objects after the aircraft had landed.

FN-5 (page 5). Personal communication on 7th October 2013.

FN-6 (page 6). Guido Jakobson was born on 16 March 1933 in Tallinn. He graduated from the Tšernigov 57th Fighter Pilot School in 1955. For 10 years he flew out of Bolšoje Savino Air Defense Base in Mig- 15, Mig-17 and Mig-19 jet aircraft. In 1963 he retired from the Soviet Air Force. After that he went to Kirovograd Civil Aviation School to become a civil pilot. He learned to fly different civil aircraft models and, in 1974, he became the first Estonian citizen to command the Tupolev 124. His pilot career lasted until 1982 when he retired. From 1992 to 2002 Captain Jacobson worked in Estonian CAA as a head of the Air Safety Department. During his career he encountered unexplained phenomena in two different occasions.