



Airliners And F-15s Involved In Bizarre Encounter With Mystery Aircraft Over Oregon

The FAA, the USAF, and air traffic control recordings all confirm the bizarre event did indeed occur last October.

By [Tyler Rogoway](#) November 15, 2017

- [The War Zone](#)



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Something quite out of the ordinary occurred in the skies over Oregon on October 25th, 2017. A mystery aircraft was flying in daylight hours among the steady stream of airliners that traverse from south to north, between locales in California and Nevada and cities like Portland and Seattle and beyond. The incident began, at least as best we can tell, around 4:30pm near the California-Oregon border and resulted in multiple pilot eyewitnesses, recorded air traffic control audio, and eventual confirmations from both the FAA and North American Aerospace Command (NORAD) that it did indeed occur.

Author's note: We have posted an update to this story [linked here](#) that not only has full radio communications from the event but also all the FAA phone conversations that took place during and after the incident occurred. Read this post in full first and then go to the update for full context.

The first inklings of the story came to me shortly after the incident occurred from friends of mine in the aviation world. Sparse on details at the time, it sounded like it was probably just another one of the often misconstrued incidents that happen in the skies around the US everyday—ones where aircraft with inoperable radios or transponders stray into areas they shouldn't. And sometimes these occurrences result in local fighter jets paying the wayward aircraft a visit at the direction of NORAD. But days after initially blowing off the incident, it later began to seem that there was indeed more to the story than just than another "[NORDO](#)" private aircraft or lackadaisical pilot.

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I came upon one Reddit thread that was of particular interest that seemed to not only corroborate the strange account, it also added critical details. The post was supposedly penned by a pilot who says they were in the sky over the Northwest in the early evening when the incident occurred, with the post coming shortly after the incident. The [entry by Reddit user "Duprass"](#) reads:

"Just landed in Seattle coming from the bay area. Beginning over Southern Oregon we kept overhearing Seattle Center attempting to track an airplane with no transponder who wasn't talking. A handful of crews were able to track it visually, best they could tell it was between FL350-370 [35,000-37,000 feet], northbound. Nobody close enough to see the type.

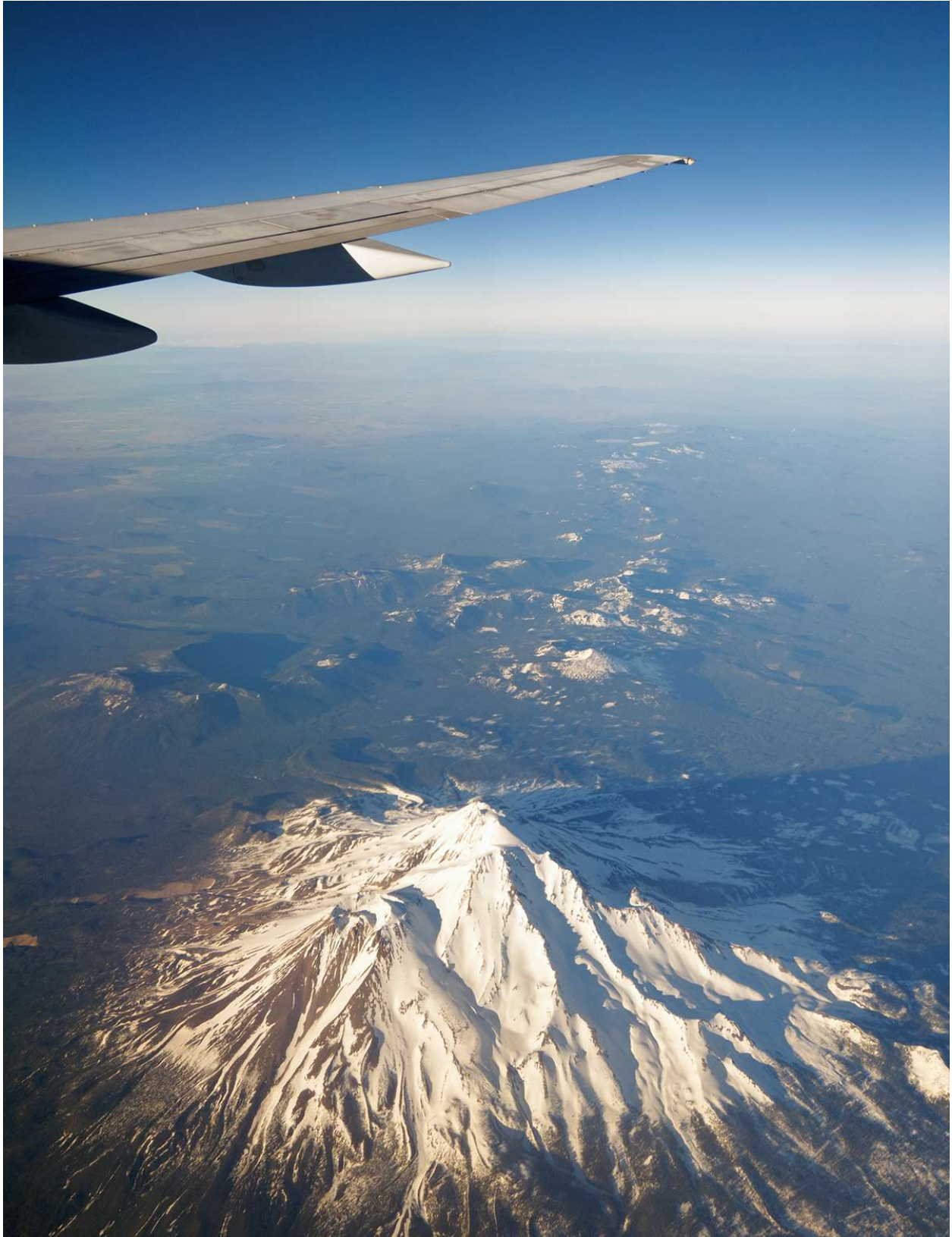
Last we heard it was over the Willamette valley northbound and some fighters, perhaps out of PDX [Portland International Airport], were scrambled to go take a peek. Center had trouble tracking it on primary radar.

Strange! My theory is they were running drugs to Canada. No news yet, not that I could find.

**Update 0500z. Called SEA ARTCC. The gentleman I spoke with said that they initially got alerted to the aircraft from Oakland Center who was painting it on primary [illuminating it with radar, but without transponder information]. For whatever reason they couldn't track it themselves on primary, and that's when I overheard them using airline aircraft to track it visually. The last airplane to see it had to descend into Portland and lost sight of it. The fighters were scrambled out of PDX but flew around for a while and did not find it. And that's that."

Air traffic control audio recorded over at LiveATC.com of Seattle Center Sector 14 is available from the time of the incident and it corroborates much of this information. You can listen to the entire series of [exchanges here](#) starting at around the 20 minute mark and through to the first part of the next time interval recording that can be [found here](#).

The audio is fantastic as it illustrates that there were many communications between various jet crews and Seattle Center whose controllers tried to track the aircraft as it made its way north towards the Willamette Valley. The aircraft was not able to be tracked on radar nor did it show up on crews' digital [traffic collision avoidance systems \(TCAS\)](#), but it was clearly there, although never quite close enough to positively identify what its exact type was.



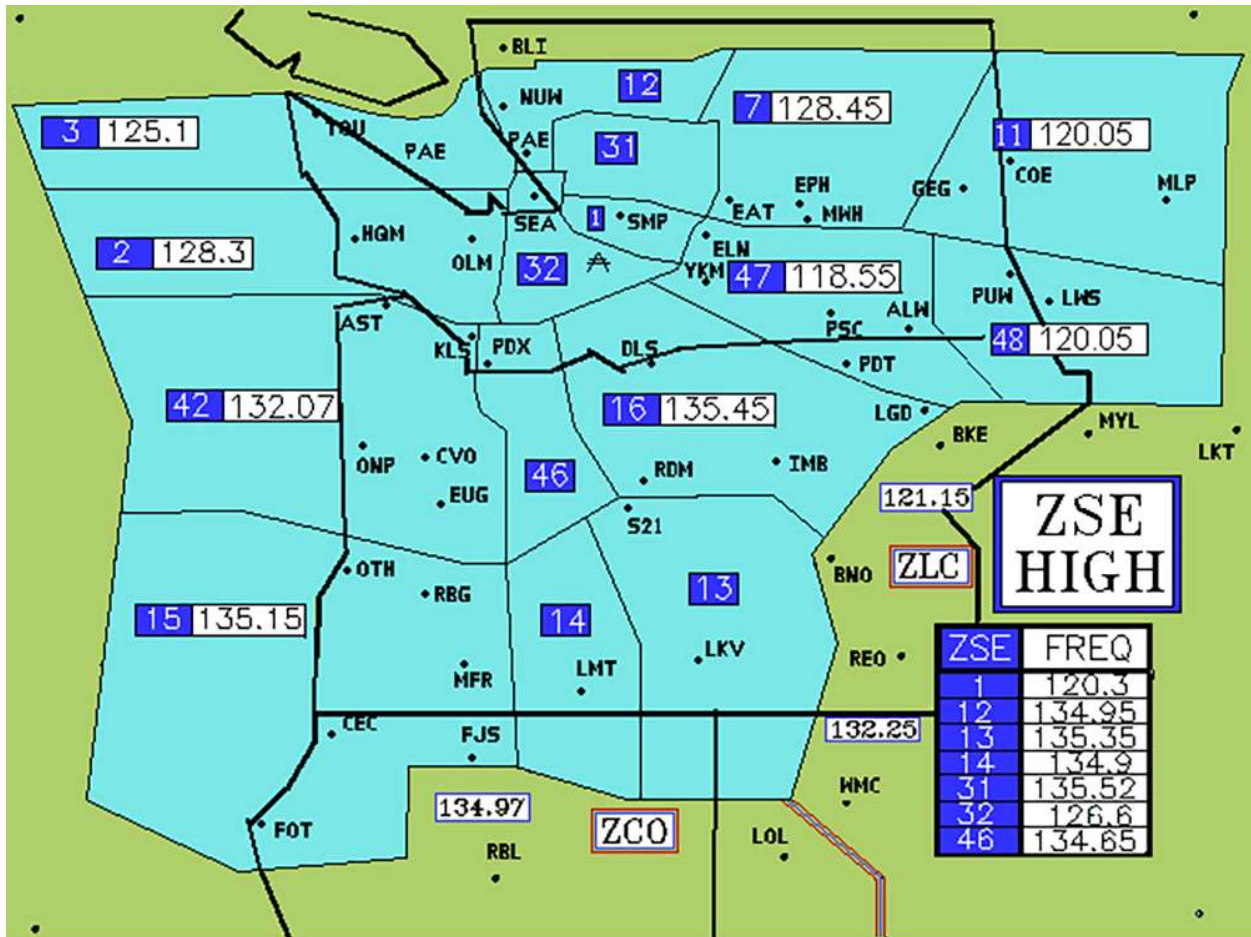
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The activity seems to have begun in the far reaches of Northern California, around Mt. Shasta, and continued on into Southern Oregon, past Crater Lake and up through the Willamette Valley (Stock Photo).

The back and forth between air traffic control and various airline pilots lasted for roughly half an hour. Recordings from other Seattle Center Sectors, such as those closer to Portland (namely 42 and 46) are not readily available and it's very possible—if not probable based on other reports—that the incident continued up the Willamette Valley. We did review PDX approach and tower exchanges from a half hour before to two hours after the event occurred and didn't find anything that stood out, although it was unlikely we would have as aircraft have descended when using those frequencies.

After reading this account and listening to the audio it was clear that the incident was worth looking into on a much deeper level, and that's what we did, inquiring with the 142nd Fighter Wing based at Portland International Airport, North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), and the FAA about the odd ordeal.

NORAD's reply was quick and clear. An incident involving multiple airline crews, air traffic control, and F-15Cs from the 142nd Fighter Wing based out of Portland did occur. According to the limited information NORAD supplied, airliner pilots were asked by FAA air traffic controllers to help track and possibly identify a "white aircraft" traveling in the flightlevels nearby—roughly between 35,000 and 40,000 feet based on the radio recordings. NORAD also said that the incident did result in F-15s from Portland being scrambled to investigate, but by the time they got up and "looked around" the mystery aircraft couldn't be found.



Seattle ARTCC

Seattle Center sector map.

A quick note on the fighter jet aspect of this story—the 142nd Fighter Wing operates F-15Cs upgraded with the most capable air-to-air radar set in the world (AN/APG-63V3) and Sniper advanced targeting pods for long-rang visual identification. Their pilots are some of the best in the world and are highly trained in the homeland air defense mission. The fact that they "didn't find anything" is surprising to say the least. Maybe this was due to the nature of the aircraft being searched for, or the possibility that they launched long after it was first sighted, or that we simply aren't being told the whole story.

As for the F-15's launch time, it seems that this mystery aircraft was moving fairly fast—at least at the same speed of the airliners around it or greater. It's also worth noting that Oakland Center, which controls airspace to the south of Seattle Center's responsibilities, could have been trying to track the aircraft before the communications began on Seattle Center's frequencies if the object emanated from farther south. We have reviewed the PDX air traffic control audio up to two hours after the first radio traffic began regarding the mystery aircraft between Seattle Center and airliner pilots and we did not readily hear the tower clear the F-15s for launch. As such it's not clear when exactly the fighters took to the skies in search of this unidentified aircraft or why they were launched so late if that was the case.

It is also possible, albeit somewhat unlikely, that a fighter patrol could have been diverted if they were already airborne. Also, once in the air the F-15s are capable of traversing the entire state of Oregon in just a matter of minutes if need be, so if they were launched promptly it seems unlikely they wouldn't have been able to intercept the aircraft being pointed out by commercial pilots over Southern Oregon.

The FAA wasn't as forthcoming as NORAD, taking nearly a week and multiple emails to respond to our initial inquiry, only to say simply that they have nothing further to add to the description of events I provided to them. As such, they did acknowledge that the events occurred, but did not expand upon them. The 142nd Fighter Wing did not respond to our inquiries.

Clearly there had to be some level of after-action investigation into this event. Having an unidentified aircraft that doesn't show up on radar flying among civilian air traffic in the flight levels for extended periods of time isn't something you just brush off, especially considering the current global security situation and the circumstances that have existed since 9/11.



Washington Military Department

Western Air Defense Sector (WADS), which goes by the callsign "Bigfoot," keeps a close watch on airspace over the Northwest and directs alert fighters and fighter patrols to targets of interest on short notice.

One of the Reddit posters with the handle "The Flying Beard" from the same thread, who supposedly is an air traffic controller, claims to have some inside knowledge of the event, stating:

"...Was just going to post about this actually. I was working an adjacent sector and was helping to coordinate some of the military stuff. They ended up launching F15s off of PDX to try and find it but no joy... [posts one of the audio clips linked above]... The crazy thing is, we didn't have a primary target or a mode C intruder, and it was out running 737s abeam it.

Also, (cue conspiracy theory) our QA department was working on this today, and got a call from the commander of the 142FW at PDX and was basically told to knock it off, and we know nothing.

A couple guys at work seem to think it may have have been [this plane](#) [unlikely, and that's an article I wrote] based of the description, and also the 'lack' of military interest. FWIW, I think the FAA is pursuing this at higher levels. From a safety standpoint, if the military is running super secret test stuff in the NAS [National Airspace], that's bad. If I were one of the pilots that had a sighting, I'd definitely be filing a NASA form and any other official reports that you can...

...If the 'aircraft' continued on its presumed heading/course altitude, the F15s were sent the wrong way. The last known position was around the EUG area heading North around 750kts and the fighters went South when they launched ~25-30 min after the first report in the Shasta area...

...The time of day made it hard. All the guys on the east side couldn't see it due to the setting sun and the North bound traffic on the west side was pretty sparse. I guess ZOA [Oakland Center] had a good primary/mode C on the guy for a bit in the RBL [Red Bluff Municipal Airport] area. It was initially heading SW and it made a pretty sharp turn to the North. Way harder/faster than what a commercial aircraft could handle at that speed/altitude without ripping the wings off."

We have no way of confirming this poster's information, although based on past Reddit posts their occupation description *seems* accurate, and their account certainly does add to the story if true.

We have filed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests with the FAA and NORAD, as well as other federal parties involved in the incident. Hopefully we will find out more eventually as to what really went on that day so we can provide a more complete picture for our readers.



Tyler Rogoway/author

An F-15C belonging to the 142nd Fighter Wing blasts out of Portland International Airport on a typical rainy day in the Northwest. Portland Air National Guard Base (PANG), which is co-located across from PDX's passenger terminals, is seen in the background. The 142nd's Eagles cover the airspace from northern California to the northern tip of Washington State and sometimes beyond. Two primary fully armed jets are always on quick reaction alert (QRA) and can launch within a few minutes of the klaxon howling. An armed spare jet is also usually available as well as one armed with a full magazine of 940 20mm cannon shells.

In the meantime, I would suggest reading the [Reddit thread](#) related to the event after listening to the [air traffic control audio yourself](#). In it, some say it could have been a smuggling aircraft or even a secret military airframe. It seems odd that a smuggler would fly in broad daylight in an area they know they will be spotted, not to mention the question of how they stayed off the FAA radar scopes.

When it comes to a secret military aircraft, flying such an asset among jetliner traffic in daylight, albeit it was around sunset time, certainly seems like an odd choice for a secretive program, but that doesn't make it impossible. There are vast and remote training ranges that could be taken advantage of in Alaska for clandestine aircraft programs, and it is a long flight to get there. Still, the idea that U.S. military would willingly fly an aircraft through a major air traffic route at common jet operating altitudes without radio, transponder, or even radar contact would be highly concerning if true.

Amongst all the questions that remain, one thing is certain, an unidentified white aircraft was indeed flying over Oregon on that day in October, and the USAF and the FAA are both willing to admit that the event occurred. In the Air Force's case, the fact that they are even willing to tell us that they couldn't catch or even find the unidentified aircraft with their sensor-packed and fast F-15s is interesting to say the least. On the other hand they may not be sharing the entire story with us.

Whatever the case, we'll keep you updated on this white flying mystery machine of sorts and the circumstances surrounding its presence over Oregon when, or should I say if, new information becomes available.

Contact the author: Tyler@thedrive.com

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