

'Normalizing' UFOs - retired U.S. Navy pilot recalls Tic Tac encounter

WASHINGTON, June 24 (Reuters) - Retired U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Alex Dietrich has found herself in the glare of media attention ahead of a highly anticipated government report on UFOs, a subject she says she has little interest in, despite actually encountering one on the job.

"I don't consider myself a whistle blower ... I don't identify as a UFO person," the former fighter pilot told Reuters in a Zoom interview, days before the report, expected to feature her own experience and dozens of others like it, was due for presentation to Congress.

During a routine training mission with the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz off the Southern California coast in November 2004, Dietrich and her then-commanding officer, fellow pilot David Fravor, were asked by another warship to investigate radar contacts in the area moving in an inexplicable fashion.

She recounted they first noticed an unusual "churning" of the ocean surface before seeing what she and Fravor have described as a smooth, white oblong object resembling a large Tic Tac breath mint flying at high speed over the water.

When Fravor in his jet turned to "engage with" the object, "it appeared to respond in a way that we didn't recognize" because it seemed to lack "any visible flight control surfaces or means of propulsion," Dietrich recalled.

Footage of what Dietrich and Fravor witnessed that day, now popularly known as the Tic Tac incident, will likely be included in the [upcoming report to Congress](#), along with two other declassified videos taken by U.S. Navy fighter jets in 2015 in similar encounters with what the government calls unidentified aerial phenomena, or UAP.

The U.S. Navy has previously confirmed the videos as authentic.

Dietrich, now a mother of three, has discussed her experience in a recent joint appearance with Fravor on the CBS News program "60 Minutes," and has since addressed dozens of video calls from other journalists asking to know more about what she saw in 2004.

Her answer remains the same, as it has for the past 17 years.

"We don't know what it was, but it could have been a natural phenomenon in human activity. But the point was that it was weird, and we couldn't recognize it," Dietrich said, speaking from a Colorado hotel room she was sharing with her children and two dogs.

Juggling media queries amid a cross-country family move is exhausting, but Dietrich said she wants to reduce the stigma attached to reporting UFO sightings and hopes more people can speak up without fear of ridicule.

"Folks might be concerned about their careers or their church or something like that. They don't want to be the kooky UFO person, so I guess I'm trying to normalize it by talking about it," Dietrich said.

Public fascination with unidentified flying objects has been stoked in recent weeks by the forthcoming report, as UFO enthusiasts anticipate possible revelations about unexplained sightings many believe the government has sought to discredit or cover up for decades.

According to preliminary details reported by The New York Times, citing senior administration officials briefed on the report, U.S. intelligence officials [found no evidence](#) that UAP observed by Navy aviators in recent years were alien spacecraft, but the sightings still remain unexplained.

Senior U.S. officials cited in the Times article said the report's ambiguity meant the government was unable to definitively rule out extraterrestrial origins of the sightings. The Times said the report, to be presented by U.S. intelligence in conjunction with the Pentagon, covers more than 120 documented cases of enigmatic objects exhibiting speed and maneuverability exceeding known aviation technologies.

Dietrich said she has no opinion on the report and was not privy to its contents. She would like to hear more from pilots who have had similar UFO sightings.

"There's a common humanity, I guess, of being a little bit shocked, a little bit delighted, a little bit nervous, confused, all of that. And so, recognizing that in another human, that can be comforting in a way," she said.

But Dietrich also voiced hope that public interest in UFOs would abate as the subject gains more mainstream attention.

"I hope I'm not the UFO, Tic Tac person for the rest of my life. This is not what I envisioned for myself," she said.