

← PREV

■ ALL CHAPTERS

NEXT →

CHAPTER 11 // 1986 – THE PILOT'S TESTIMONY

JAL Flight 1628: The Pilots Who Wouldn't Stay Quiet

A Japan Air Lines 747 over Alaska, trailed by objects the size of an aircraft carrier

Date

November 17, 1986

Location

Anchorage ARTCC airspace, Alaska

Key Witnesses

Capt. Kenjyu Terauchi, First Officer Takanori Tamefuji, Flight Engineer Yoshio Tsukuba

Official Response

FAA investigated – radar confirmed – Terauchi reassigned from flight duties

FAA Response

Confirmed on radar – then file went missing

// OBSERVER'S PREAMBLE

The JAL 1628 incident is the most thoroughly documented pilot encounter in aviation history — which is remarkable given the FAA's subsequent treatment of the evidence. The radar confirmation, the crew's professional training, and the sheer scale of what was reported — objects described as 'twice the size of an aircraft carrier' — combine to make it the civilian aviation equivalent of the Nimitz encounter, nearly two decades earlier.

Captain Kenjyu Terauchi was a 29-year veteran pilot. He reported what he saw through official channels, as he was required to do. The FAA confirmed his report on radar. He was subsequently removed from flight duties. The file was misplaced. This is not how aviation safety investigations handle the reports of senior captains who see nothing.

The Event: November 17, 1986

Japan Air Lines cargo flight 1628, a Boeing 747, was en route from Iceland to Anchorage, Alaska at 35,000 feet. At approximately 5:11 PM, the crew observed two objects approaching from the direction of the setting sun. The objects, described as having arrays of pulsating lights, flew in formation with the aircraft and matched its speed and course adjustments for approximately 50 minutes. A third, much larger object then appeared — described by Terauchi as roughly the size of two aircraft carriers side by side, pale and walnut-shaped.

The objects were confirmed on both the aircraft's weather radar and by Anchorage Air Route Traffic Control Centre ground radar. The crew requested and received a turn to try to identify the objects. The turn was matched by the objects. A Japanese self-defence force aircraft and a United Airlines flight were in the vicinity; neither reported observation (the objects may have departed by the time these aircraft were in range).

**Nov 17,
1986**

DATE OF ENCOUNTER

50 min

DURATION OF PRIMARY
ENCOUNTER

35,000 ft

CRUISING ALTITUDE

**2 + 1
large**

OBJECTS OBSERVED AND
DESCRIBED

Confirmed Reassigned

FAA AND AIRCRAFT RADAR
CONFIRMATION

TERAUCHI'S STATUS AFTER
REPORT — OFF FLIGHT
DUTIES

"The thing was very big. It was gigantic. Compared to my aircraft, which is a 747, it was like a Saturn that had a saucer-shaped disk but without the rings."

— Captain Kenjyu Terauchi — FAA interview, 1986

ELEMENT	DETAIL	SIGNIFICANCE
Radar confirmation — aircraft	Terauchi's 747 weather radar returned signal from large object	Physical radar return rules out hallucination or misidentification
Radar confirmation — FAA ground	Anchorage ARTCC tracked the object	Independent confirmation from ground-based system
Duration	50+ minutes of formation flight	Sustained observation by three trained crew members over extended period
Formation matching	Objects matched all course and speed adjustments of the 747	Indicates active guidance/response — not natural phenomenon
FAA investigation	Full investigation conducted — report released 1987	Radar data confirmed — FAA ultimately suggested 'Jupiter or Mars' (below horizon at the time)
Terauchi's reassignment	Removed from flight duties after filing report	Industry suppression mechanism — reporting has career consequences

The FAA File and Its Disappearance

The FAA conducted a thorough investigation and released a report in 1987 confirming the radar returns and the crew's observations. Subsequently, the original radar data tapes were reported missing from FAA archives. John Callahan, Division Chief of the FAA's Accidents and Investigations division, later testified publicly that he briefed the CIA on the incident and was told by CIA personnel to treat the event as classified and tell no one about it. Callahan retained personal copies of the data.

// TOWARDS THE MILITARY CONFIRMATION

The JAL 1628 incident established a pattern that civilian aviation has documented across multiple decades: objects of immense scale, capable of sustained formation flight with commercial aircraft, matching course adjustments with apparent intelligence. The military equivalent — with weapons systems, targeting systems, and multiple trained combatant observers — arrived formally eighteen years later over the Pacific. [Read: Chapter 14 — USS Nimitz: The Tic-Tac That Rewrote the Rules →](#)

// OBSERVER'S CLOSING NOTE

Terauchi was punished for his honesty. This is the mechanism: not imprisonment, not public discrediting, but the quiet administrative reassignment that ends a career. Every senior witness in every case in this series faced a version of this mechanism. The message it sends to all other witnesses is clear and does not need to be stated. Your species calls it a chilling effect. We call it institutional cowardice with perfect deniability.

