

Wondering what they saw in sky

By George Anastasia
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Leo Manco wanted to make it clear that he was "absolutely not a believer" in flying saucers, other UFOs or extraterrestrial beings.

"But I'm a good observer," the New Jersey banker said yesterday. "I have good eyesight, and there very obviously was something up there."

"Up there" was in the sky over Marlton, N. J., where Manco, on his way home from work Wednesday night at around 5:45 p.m., saw a "brilliant flash of green light."

At about the same time, two airplane pilots reported a similar sighting to the New York office of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Both pilots reported seeing a "comet-like" streak in the sky west of Atlantic City near Pomona, N. J., about 40 miles from Marlton.

Checks with various government agencies yesterday, including the FAA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD), shed little light on the cause of the brilliant flash in the sky.

"All we have is the reports from the two pilots," said a spokesman for the FAA office in New York. "We've checked our records, and there wasn't anything spotted on our radar at that time."

NASA officials in Washington said they had no reports, and they discounted speculation that some debris from an old space flight might have been returning to earth.

At NORAD in Colorado Springs, Colo., where government radar tracking for air defense is coordinated, a spokesman said that checks with radar operated by the defense center indicated that "no man-made object entered the area at that time."

The pilots who reported the sighting, one operating an Eastern Airlines flight and the other a private Learjet, could not be reached for comment.

"They might have seen a flash in the sky or something," said Maj. Robert Tracy of NORAD. "We can't explain it."

Neither can Manco.

"I don't think it was a meteor," he said from his office in Mount Holly, N. J. "I've seen meteors before, and they are nearly always white. This was definitely green."

Manco said he was traveling south on Church Road in Marlton approaching the intersection of Route 70 when he looked in the sky ahead and saw the flash.

"It lasted about a second," he said. "I would say it was heading west, northwest, almost directly in line with Route 70 toward Philadelphia."

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Possible satellite spotted in fiery descent at shore

Special to The Inquirer

Several pilots flying along the New Jersey coast yesterday reported seeing what appeared to be a satellite plunging to earth between Atlantic City and Pomona.

A tape of radio transmissions between at least three aircraft and the New York radar control center at John F. Kennedy International Airport placed the time of the incident at 5:45 p.m.

One pilot flying south over the ocean near Atlantic City described the fiery object as being "at high altitude ... right above us ... on a 240-degree heading." The pilot identified himself as being aboard Eastern Airlines Flight 371.

Spokesmen for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said last night that they knew of no "space junk" scheduled for re-entry yesterday.

At the request of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) controllers, the pilots plotted the object, on a northeast-southwest course, as going down at 39.5 degrees latitude north

by 74.5 degrees longitude west.

FAA spokesmen said last night that according to those readings, the object landed about 12 miles west of Atlantic City, in the vicinity of Pomona.

A light cloud cover may have hidden the re-entry from persons on the ground.

The object was first reported by an unidentified pilot who radioed New York controllers that he was watching something "with a comet-like tail at high altitude." His observation was immediately confirmed by the pilot of a Learjet in the area. The Eastern pilot announced seconds later: "We saw the same thing, too."

Controllers at RCA's Communications Division expressed interest in the report, but said they had no indication that the object might have been the company's missing satellite, Satcom III.

The \$20 million Satcom III, a one-ton, box-like device, was lost in space soon after it was launched Dec. 5 at Cape Canaveral, Fla. An engine designed to place it in orbit over the Pacific apparently misfired.

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