

Spot a UFO? Blame an earth tremor

By John Picton Toronto Star

That light in the sky you saw last night wasn't a flying saucer. It wasn't marsh gas, the heebie-jeebies, or any of the other familiar explanations.

Chances are that "UFO" was caused by a mysterious process on earth that scientists are just beginning to observe and understand.

Blame an earth tremor.

That's what Michael Persinger, a psychologist teaching at Laurentian University in Sudbury, and Brian Brady, a geologist at the U.S. Bureau of Mines in Denver, believe.

Fed into computer

"More than half the UFO sightings are because of earthquake lumination," Persinger told the Sunday Star.

Of the remaining sightings, he says: "The concept of explaining all UFOs is out of date, anyway. The average person must realize that not all sightings are from the same

source."

He adds that such sightings may be a warning of earthquakes to come weeks, months or even years later.

Persinger, who majored in geophysics, began studying unusual phenomena in 1971, feeding all the data he gathered into a computer.

"When we did an analysis, the trend jumped out with unbelievable intensity," he says. "It went back to the 19th century in England and the U.S. when these lights were called devil stars and comets and aero ships."

One area he's researched, one he says proves his theory, is the New Madrid region where the borders of Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas come together.

The most severe earthquakes in North American history occurred there in 1811-1812. In 1958, earth tremors were recorded there again, and "there was an eight-fold increase in the number of luminosity reports in the region in the

previous six months."

Over a fault line in the earth's crust running from Quebec City to Chicoutimi, there were as many as 30 UFO sightings reported between 1975 and 1979 — "and there was a marked increase in the number of luminosity reports."

Intense as lightning

Persinger and Brady have discovered that when quartz-bearing rock breaks up, balls of light are produced — short-lived, but as intense as lightning.

Laboratory experiments showed the luminescence from a single crack would last only for microseconds, but in that time it might streak away, hover, and then move again in the characteristic movements of UFOs.

The movements are explained by complex theories of ions, electrons and electro-magnetic fields.

The Chinese already call such luminosity "earthquake lights."

One case the scientists studied

was a series of sightings made from an aircraft flying a midnight run from Wellington to Christchurch, New Zealand, on Dec. 30, 1978.

The crew had spotted brilliant and mysterious lights in the sky a few days before and a TV crew was on board in case they happened again. About 25 minutes out of Wellington, the light appeared and seemed to follow the plane's flight path, sometimes hovering and then speeding away.

The position and altitude of the lights from blips was confirmed by blips on radar screens.

On the ground, researchers looked for rational explanations — fishing boats, meteors, secret aircraft, sightings of Jupiter or Venus, city lights or simply a hoax. None seemed reasonable.

The sightings remained a mystery until Brady laid a geological map alongside the flight path of the plane and realized it had been flying parallel to one of the earth's great fault lines, the Alpine Fault.