

# Some Say Lights in the Sky Aren't Just a Flash in the Pan

by David Thompson

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Just after 10 p.m. on Dec. 11, the Boone County Sheriff's Office received a report of two strange purplish-pink lights hovering over a horse corral on a farm northwest of Nebraska City. Deputy Rich Tilson investigated. Tilson said that on the way to the farm he saw a flash in the sky.

"It was a bright light, then part of it lit up at an angle, part of it down," he said. "It lasted about as long as a flash on a camera. We thought at first it might be an airplane exploding, but there was no noise."

Tilson, who was acting sheriff at the time, said another deputy with him saw a flash, too. They decided, at first, not to say anything about what they saw. But then they heard on their police radio a Johnson County deputy sheriff discussing the flash with a Nemaha County deputy, Tilson said.

The sighting by the deputy sheriffs has drawn the attention of a fledgling organization called the Nebraska Association for the Study of the Unexplained.

The society, currently a small group of individuals interested in unidentified flying objects and other unexplained happenings, will hold its first meeting at 2:30 p.m. March 20 in the American Charter Savings & Loan Association building, 40th and South Streets in Lincoln.

Director Ray W. Boeche of Lincoln said the organization is investigating the Nebraska City sightings and hopes to study other reported unexplained phenomena in the state.

Boeche, a 28-year-old former school teacher, said he has been "hooked" since his early youth on looking into unexplained phenomena.

He said he and his associates look first for a natural explanation. In the Nebraska City case, he said, they have

ruled out aircraft, stars and other normal sources of light.

Deputy Tilson said he called the Offutt Air Force Base control tower and also the radar station serving Eppley Airfield in Omaha to determine if there were any planes in the area.

Sgt. Paul Shoup, Offutt public information officer, said that a call was made to the base's control tower early on the morning of Dec. 12.

"Our radar showed nothing," he said. "We verified that we had no planes in the air and there was nothing."

Boeche said the light "was bright enough to cast shadows." It was seen by four law enforcement officers in three counties and by four people in Lancaster County, he said.

"There was no hoax involved and there were multiple witnesses," he said. "It has to go down as an unexplained phenomenon."

The Society for the Unexplained is interested in obtaining reports of other such sightings, Boeche said. It now op-

erates through a post office box in Lincoln, but eventually members hope to establish a "hot line" to receive reports of such events, he said.

The organization will serve a good purpose, Boeche said. People who have seen unusual lights in the sky and other phenomena are reluctant to report them to law enforcement agencies, he said.

Those who see such occurrences often are subjected to ridicule, he said.

Tilson said he was kidded by a number of people after he reported his sighting. Even one of his children joined in, giving him a card that said, "E.T. was here, but you were out."

Several years ago when he was working as a police officer at Central City, Neb., Tilson said, he saw what he thought were lights on the town water tower, but when he approached the light moved away.

"The only one I told about it was the (police) chief, and he said to keep it quiet, because it would only cause problems."

In some cases, Boeche said, there are natural explanations of sightings.

Sometimes, especially during hazy or foggy weather, it could be an aircraft that is misidentified, he said.

"People's eyes also may play tricks on them," he said.

The society also is looking at other unexplained phenomena:

—Mutilation of cattle near Norfolk, Neb., in December and near Imperial, Neb., last June.

—Reports from the Lincoln area and northeast Nebraska of "phantom cats," where people said they saw large cat paw prints in the dirt but no cats.

— "Big Foot sightings" in northeast Nebraska.

Boeche, a Nebraska City native and Peru State College graduate, has lived in Lincoln about 18 months after returning to Nebraska from Pennsylvania, where he had worked. He taught art at Monroe Junior High School in Omaha in 1978-79.