

# Look Skyward for Rumble, Las Cruces Told

FROM JOURNAL STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

LAS CRUCES — A sonic boom — not an earthquake — caused the tremor felt by some Southern New Mexico residents early Thursday, said a professor at New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology.

Allan Sanford, a professor of geophysics at New Mexico Tech, said the disturbance reported in the Dona Ana and Las Cruces areas was not a disturbance from within the Earth.

"I suspect it was a sonic boom," he

said. "We've been getting them in the Socorro area strong enough to be perceived as an earthquake."

"They're prolonged sonic disturbances that have some of the characteristics of an earthquake."

Sanford said the disturbances, such as the one reported shortly after 7:30 a.m. in Southern New Mexico, can cause windows to rattle and objects to fall from shelves.

Rather than a bang, the disturbance is heard as a low rumbling, he said.

A seismologist from the University of Texas at El Paso, however, said he wouldn't be able to tell anything from the school's seismic instruments until later today.

If it was a sonic boom, the culprit still hadn't been found late Thursday.

Holloman Air Force Base media relations officer Linda Shepard said, "We have restrictions against supersonic flights within the White Sands Missile Range air space," she said. "And I checked with the pilots of all of our

aircraft in the area at the time, and they all said they didn't go supersonic."

Mrs. Shepard said four Holloman jets — two F-15s and two F-16s — were over the western edge of the White Sands corridor, and said the pilots told her they were executing turns at about the time the sound occurred.

Two of the jets banked north and the other two southwest toward the Las Cruces area, she said, but repeated the pilots' denials of having broken the sound barrier.

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## Booms, Flashes In Night Sky Prompt Flurry Of Calls In Iowa

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DES MOINES, Iowa (UPI) — Bursts of bright light and explosions possibly caused by a meteor shower touched off a flurry of telephone calls and reports of airplane crashes in central Iowa on Friday night, officials said.

Many people reported seeing bright flashes of red lights followed by explosions, representatives of the National Weather Service in Des Moines said.

"We can only assume that it's a meteor shower," said weather service meteorologist Dan Ferry.

The activity prompted reports to Story County sheriff's officials that an

airplane had crashed near Nevada, Iowa, but officials "looked all over the place" and found no wreckage, one sheriff's officer said.

Diane Trott, a sheriff's office dispatcher, said the first sighting of the bright flashes was reported at 9:17 p.m. About 20 similar calls followed.

"There is nobody who is able to explain it to us," Ms. Tott said. She said her office had been told that the lights had been seen as far south as the Missouri border.

Story County authorities checked with airports in the area, but none reported any missing aircraft or reports of a possible crash, she said.

## Fireball Streaks Through Sky Near Atlanta

ATLANTA (UPI) — Experts said Monday that a mysterious fireball that blazed through the sky north of Atlanta was probably a meteor or space debris, but that they may never know for sure.

The brilliant object, reported by numerous airline pilots and ground observers, entered the Earth's atmosphere 50 miles northeast of Atlanta about 8 p.m. Sunday.

Gary Beeley, a National Weather Service meteorologist, said the object was probably a meteor. "Most likely it was," he said. "We can't say 100 percent for sure if it was."

"As far as where it actually hit, or whether it was a meteor or something else — space debris or something like that — we have no confirmation," Beeley said. "There's also a large possibility we never will find it."

Bob Hayward, an astronomer at Fernbank Science Center, said the object had blazed across the sky in about 3 seconds, changing color from orange to yellow to white.

"There was a visible trail in the atmosphere as it passed through," he said.

John Lang, also a weather service meteorologist, said another object — possibly a second piece of the same meteor — also was reported.

"It might have come down in two pieces — very fast, at thousands of miles per hour. That's why there's so much heat and light," Lang said.

Lang said the object could have been a piece of space debris.

"We're just speculating like everybody else," Lang said. "But there's an outside chance it was a piece of metal from a rocket or a satellite."

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