

UFO 'escorts'

Soviet airliner

FT 45

MOSCOW (AP) — Amazed crew and passengers on a Soviet airliner say they saw a starlike UFO beam a thin ray on the ground, suddenly turn its dazzling light on the aircraft and — just as abruptly — become a green cloud that "escorted" the plane, a newspaper reports.

Gennady Lazurin, co-pilot of the Aeroflot flight, told an air controller in Minsk about the sighting and was told at first that nothing could be seen on ground radar, the newspaper Trud reported Wednesday.

"Oh well, they'll be saying we're not normal," Lazurin was quoted as saying.

But then, ground control "registered splashes on its screens in the same part of air space," Trud said. The date of the flight was not given.

Nikolai Zheltukhin, a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and deputy chairman of a state commission on unexplained phenomena, told Trud the occurrence "is indeed of interest, although the commission already knows of similar cases.

"That the object reversed course instantaneously and reached the ground with a ray of light of unusual intensity from a very high altitude is undoubtedly abnormal," Zheltukhin was quoted as saying.

The plane was flying northwest from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to Tallinn in Estonia and was approaching Minsk when "what appeared to be a large, unblinking star suddenly shed a thin ray of light which fell plumb down on the ground" from an altitude of 25 to 30

miles, the newspaper said.

All four crew members reported that they "could see distinctly everything down in the sector of the ground illuminated by the cone-shaped shaft of light — the houses and the roads," the newspaper said.

It said the ray suddenly focused on the plane.

"The pilots saw a dazzling white spot surrounded by concentric colored rings," Trud said.

The UFO then reportedly came toward the airliner "at flashing speed," leaving a green cloud in its wake and hovered next to the plane at an altitude of 33,000 feet for the rest of the flight "like an honorary escort," the newspaper quoted one of the pilots as saying.

Nervous passengers asked the flight attendant what was happening.

"Tell them it is some sort of cloud,"

See UFO on page 7

From page 1

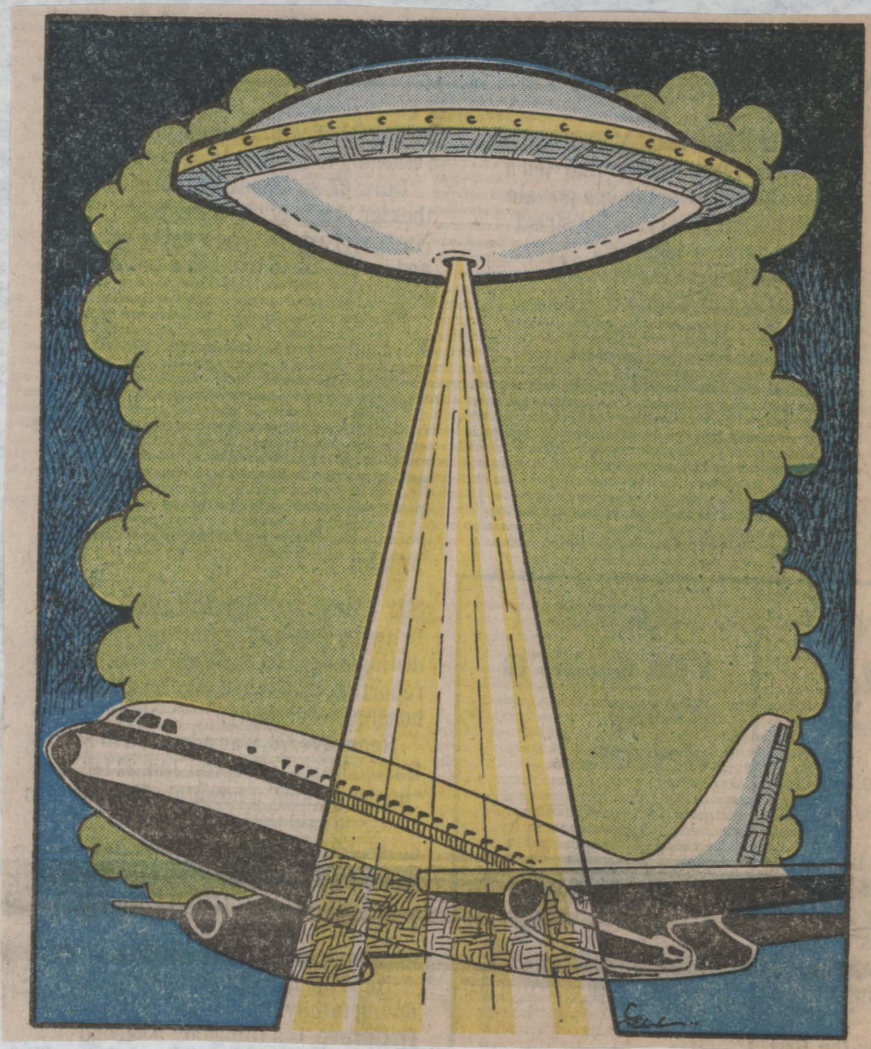
UFO

the captain, Igor Cherkashin, reportedly replied. "Say the yellow thing is a reflection of city lights, the green thing of polar lights."

In 1967, the Soviet Union established a special air force commission to investigate UFO sightings, but few details of its work have been released.

Belief in unverified phenomena like UFOs officially has been discouraged in the past, although Soviet media report unusual sightings.

Russian UFO enthusiasts give lectures and circulate underground reports on their views. There also have been several expeditions to the Himalayas in search of the Abominable Snowman.



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