

Feb 18
1985

Cause of lights disputed

Times Staff

Colored lights that hovered over East Anchorage and sparked a flurry of concerned telephone calls to police late Sunday were apparently caused by hot air balloons, federal officials said today.

But the head of a local balloonists' group countered that the city's hot air pilots were attending a banquet when the lights were sighted, adding that "nobody in their right mind" would have attempted a night flight over the city without special gear.

The lights, apparently visible over the city between 10:30 and 11 p.m., were reported to the FAA's Anchorage Air Route Traffic Control Center as "foreign" objects, agency spokesman Paul Steucke said this morning.

Observers said up to a dozen of the bright, colored spots — apparently similar in appearance to aerial flares — seemed to move quickly over the Chugach Mountains near Anchorage, then gather over the city itself.

"We had some people call, we did a little checking and it turned out they were hot air balloons," Steucke said.

But Alaska Air Musers Association president Don Reed said the city's balloonists attended a dinner late Sunday that lasted well beyond the time of the sightings. "There is only one balloon in town that's equipped for night flying, and there's only one set of lights," Reed said. "And that set isn't even working."