

# Army says one UFO may have been flare

By DONALD ST. JOHN  
and JOHN LEANING

News Staff writers

**BOXBORO** — A pair of apparent UFO sightings in the past week here have provoked:

- a) Some wonderment about their origin.
- b) A lot of people with film ready in their cameras.
- c) A possible explanation for one of the sightings.

The answer? All three, perhaps. John Rasmussen, a public affairs officer at Fort Devens in Ayer, said a reserve unit was firing flares from mortars last Saturday night, the night two town police officers spotted a UFO over Woodchuck Hill in Harvard.

Rasmussen added that Devens personnel were not doing anything which might explain a Friday morning sighting at 7 a.m. off Prescott Road.

Marcie Robinson was on her way to work with her two daughters Friday morning when she spotted "two round orange balls high over a pasture off Prescott Road.

She said she is normally skeptical about UFO reports.

"I'm someone who always says, 'Ah, well,'" she said.

She said the lights did not go out as she passed by and went to work at Emerson Hospital.

Robinson said she mentioned what she had seen to a fellow worker, who said Ft. Devens was not far away. But Rasmussen indicated it was not clear whether any activity at the

sprawling U.S. Army base was responsible for the sightings.

"The flare hangs on a mini-parachute and floats down very slowly, creating a bright light before going out," Rasmussen said. "Harvard is right next to Ayer. It's conceivable that that could have caused it."

He said that he didn't know when the reservists stopped firing, but that it was after dark and that the shots were "fairly high-altitude."

Patrolman Stephen Tretry, one of the police officers who saw a pair of lights near Woodchuck Hill last Saturday, said there was "no way" flares could have accounted for the sighting.

"They were going up on a diagonal, and blinked on and off at one point," Tretry said. "Flares wouldn't do that."

He said representatives from a UFO investigating center were due to interview him Sunday about the sighting.

Tretry and special police officer Robert Morrill reported an unidentified object after tracking a pair of bright yellow lights at 10:19 p.m. last Saturday night.

He said the round lights, about 20 feet apart and the size "of a car door," followed a definite direction over Woodchuck Hill. When the officers reached the top of the hill, they had disappeared, he said.

The policemen searched the area for an explanation and, upon finding none, filed a police report and notified the National UFO Reporting Center in Seattle, Wash.

A spokesman from the UFO Center said there hadn't been a second report of any sightings in the area, and said that the center only had four to five nation-wide reports coming in per day.

Robert Gribble, a UFO center spokesman, cautioned that they find 90 percent of sightings to be attributable to known phenomena, such as military or other aircraft or atmospheric disturbance.

But he said any contact of 500 feet or closer — a close encounter — would be enough basis for an investigation.

"If there's any possibility of a physical contact, we'd definitely look into that," Gribble said. "But even if there were no landings, we'd want a very detailed sketch of the object, and any other information the person had."

The reporting center does the initial evaluation of a sighting and, if it warrants investigation, refers it to either the Aerial Phenomenon Research Organization in Tucson, Ariz., or the Mutual UFO Network in Squibb, Tex.

Gribble said the armed forces are helpful to an extent with confirmation of their activities.

"They'll tell us some things, and not others," he said. "We deal with them strictly on an inquiry basis."