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Alaska-UFO, FAA Studies UFO Report

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Federal Aviation Administration officials say they will send on to Washington their radar tapes and records from an inquiry into a Japan Air Lines pilot's report that a UFO followed his plane over Alaska.

Because of public interest in the case, the agency interviewed the pilot, Kenji Terauchi, a second time Friday, said FAA spokesman Paul Steucke.

Terauchi told investigators three lights started following his Boeing 747 cargo jet Nov. 17 just after it crossed into Alaska from Canada, and stayed with him for 55 minutes.

He said two of the lights were about eight feet across, while the third appeared to be part of a darkened globe with a diameter of perhaps two aircraft carriers placed end-to-end, Steucke said.

The pilot said the large unidentified flying object registered on his cockpit weather radar. But images on military radar screens at the time were dismissed as "clutter," and a blip that showed up on FAA screens was considered a coincidental "split image" of the aircraft, Steucke said.

A JAL spokeswoman said Terauchi was on a flight to Europe and was unavailable for further comment.

Flight 1628, with a crew of three, left Iceland on Nov. 17 with a load of wine bound for Tokyo from Paris. Terauchi and his crew picked up the plane in Iceland for the Polar leg of the flight to Anchorage.

The sky was clear as the jet, cruising at 525 knots, crossed into Alaska from Canada just northeast of Fort Yukon at 35,000 feet. Terauchi said he then saw the wavering lights eight miles in front of his aircraft.

The pilot reported the lights were yellow, amber and green, Steucke said, but not red, the international color for aircraft beacons.

"His main concern was trying to determine whether he was overtaking another aircraft," Steucke said. He said the pilot reported he dimmed cockpit lights to ensure he was not seeing a reflection.

After about six minutes, Terauchi reported the lights and air traffic controllers told him to take any evasive action needed. Terauchi decreased altitude to 31,000 feet, but said the lights went down with him "in formation," Steucke said.

South of Fairbanks, Terauchi turned the plane in a complete circle to see if the lights would follow. They did, and moved to the left side of the jet, Steucke said.

The FAA and the military in Alaska use the same long-range radar in Fairbanks, Steucke said. The FAA also uses sophisticated computer systems to remove clutter from radar images, but the military does not, he said.

"The military decided about a minute into this exercise that what it was seeing was clutter," he said. The Air Force did not send up an interceptor and is not investigating the matter, Steucke said.

At the FAA center in Anchorage, controllers following the flight noted occasional second blips, or "split targets," on the screen near Flight 1628, Steucke said.

"That happens when the transponder aboard the aircraft is not electronically in sync with radar bouncing off the plane," he said. "We

get an intermittent blip every three sweeps of the radar screen. It's not unusual. It has happened and it does happen."

The lights vanished, heading east, when the JAL jet was about 80 miles north of Anchorage, Steucke said.

[From AP newswire. Copy courtesy of Mark A. Hall.]