

FAA looks deeper into unidentified lights that dogged jet

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Anchorage, Alaska

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has stepped up its investigation of wavering lights that dogged a Japan Air Lines (JAL) cargo jet across Alaska's night sky for nearly an hour in November, an official said Sunday.

"We're looking at it to ensure that somebody didn't violate airspace we control," said FAA spokesman Paul Steucke. "We looked at it about six weeks ago, but since then we've gotten a lot of public interest, so we went back and reinterviewed the pilot."

The veteran pilot, Kenji Terauchi, told investigators that two of the lights were small, perhaps no larger than 8 feet across. He said the third light was on an aircraft, a huge darkened globe with a diameter of perhaps two aircraft carriers placed end-to-end, Steucke said.

Terauchi said the large UFO showed

up 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 analyzed as a coincidental "split image" of the aircraft, Steucke said.

Radar tapes, transcribed interviews and radio messages are to be sent to Washington, D.C., later this week for review, he said.

A JAL spokeswoman said yesterday that Terauchi was on a flight to Europe and was unavailable.

Flight 1628, with a three-man crew, left Iceland Nov. 17 with a load of wine bound for Tokyo from Paris. Terauchi and his crew boarded the Boeing 747 in Iceland for the leg of the trip to Anchorage.

The evening sky was clear as the jet, cruising at 525 knots, crossed into Alaska from Canada, just northeast of Fort Yukon. As the plane flew at 35,000 feet, Terauchi said he saw three lights 8 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.

"The two smaller ones moved a little bit, changed their angle. The smaller ones did not show up on the weather radar on board," Steucke said. "The larger one did.

"It appeared to him it might be possible that the lights might be exhaust pipes; they kind of wavered but did not blink. His main concern was trying to determine whether he was overtaking another aircraft."

Steucke said the pilot reported that he dimmed cockpit lights to ensure he was not seeing a reflection.

"He flew for about six minutes before he decided to report anything," Steucke said. "I can't say I blame him for that."

Terauchi radioed Anchorage FAA

air controllers, who direct all aircraft traffic in the state, except for planes near airports, Steucke said. Fairbanks controllers checked their screens but saw only Flight 1628, Steucke said.

Terauchi reported the object was staying with him and controllers told him to take any evasive action needed. The pilot decreased altitude to 31,000 feet, but 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. "That was pretty clever," Steucke said. "It allowed him to eliminate any natural phenomenon which would have stayed stationary."

The lights stayed with the cargo jet, and moved to its left side, the pilot told the FAA.

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

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