

# NASA worker tracks UFO reports by pilots

By HAL BERTON

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The mysterious flashing lights sighted by the crew of a Japan Air Lines cargo jet last November aren't the only strange things pilots have seen through their cockpit windows.

In the past 20 years, more than 2,000 sightings of UFOs have been reported by pilots, according to Richard Haines, a NASA scientist who tracks UFO sightings by pilots in his spare time.

Some of them are very spectacular and very difficult from the standpoint of getting a better idea on how to characterize the phenomenon," said Haines.

He said the sightings are reported by military, civilian and commercial pilots who fly both national and international routes. UFO reports from Alaska pilots are relatively rare.

The sightings tend to occur in cycles that peak about every five years, Haines said. For the past two years, sightings have been in a trough. Haines said many of the reports fall into two main categories.

One category involves UFOs that suddenly appear within view of the cockpit and then disappear very rapidly. "The airplane is flying along essentially minding its own business. Then something comes up and does horizontal rolls around the airplane."

Many other reports, including the Nov. 17 sighting by the JAL crew, involve UFOs that fall straight for periods ranging from two minutes to more than two hours.

Haines' interest in UFOs two decades apart working in NASA's man-in-space program. In the early 1960s, as he began studying visual sightings in space, he encountered many reports from pilots who claimed to have seen UFOs.

"I thought I could explain all these strange phenomena as nothing more than strange lighting," said Haines, who now studies "human factors in space" at NASA's Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif.

"But I had to look at the data as an open-minded investigator and pretty soon realized that we are seeing something totally different."

NASA currently doesn't investigate any UFO sightings. But Haines, working out of his Los Altos, Calif., home on his own time, has clipped newspapers, interviewed pilots and talked with controllers to amass reports of more than 3,000 sightings.

Haines said he hopes to fly to Anchorage next to investigate the Nov. 17 sighting by Capt. Kelly Terrence, pilot of a JAL cargo plane en route from Iceland to an Alaskan refueling stop. The report was made public in late December.

Terrence, a 47-year-old pilot with 23 years of experience, told United Press Small states that United Press Small brought it about "the usual manner of object—the usual two aircraft carriers that followed the jumbo jet for 400 miles."

Terrence first spotted the lights shortly after the plane entered Alaska airspace. At first, the lights were directly

in front of the plane, and Terrence feared a military collision, said Paul Steneck, Alaska spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration. Terrence then obtained permission from an air traffic controller to try and evade the UFOs with several turns and drops in altitude. He finally lost the UFOs about 80 miles northwest of Anchorage, according to Steneck.

The FAA controller who monitored the JAL plane, Flight 102, reported tracking the UFOs several times on radar, as well as five miles from the aircraft. "The tracker (UFO) stayed with jitters and he turns and descends," said the controller in a statement released by the FAA. The identity of the controller, however, has not been revealed.

The Military Regional Operations Control Center reported picking up the UFO on radar about eight miles from the plane. The military center then lost track of the UFO for 11 minutes, then picked up "a light of two," according to a flight chronology released by the FAA. It picked up the UFOs as they dropped back and to the right of the plane, then lost radar contact.

More recently, Steneck has said that neither the military nor the FAA puts any fault in the early radar sightings. Steneck said that the FAA controller mistakenly interpreted a split-image of the cargo plane as a UFO and that the military now reports its radar images were simply "clutter."