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Radar review fails to confirm UFO

BY JEFF BERLINER

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (UPI) - Federal investigators said a review of radar tapes failed to show a UFO shadowing a Japan Air Lines cargo jet, contradicting reports made by the crew and the air traffic controller who handled the plane.

The Federal Aviation Administration's examination of radar tapes shows what appears to be a second object near Japan Air Lines flight 1628 on Nov. 17, but investigators now believe it to be a double image from the JAL Boeing 747, FAA spokesman Paul Steucke said Wednesday.

The FAA released details of the UFO sighting Dec. 29, revealing the flight controller handling the jet saw an object on radar 5 miles from the plane. The Anchorage Air Route Traffic Control Center directed the crew to take evasive maneuvers, including a 4,000-foot drop and a 360-degree turn.

Co-pilot Takanori Tamefuji, 39, said Wednesday in an interview with United Press International that he did not know why the FAA first confirmed a nearby object and now dismisses it as an image of the 747.

"At first I thought it was head-on traffic. I was a little scared," said Tamefuji, who has 10 years of cockpit experience. "Actually, I saw something flying to our left.... I thought there were two (objects), but I couldn't identify them. It is very unusual."

Although the FAA is satisfied with the double image explanation, the inquiry is continuing with interviews of the crew and a review of data, Steucke said.

In his second interview with the FAA Tuesday, Tamefuji reiterated that he saw lights, and Steucke said, "The co-pilot's testimony supported the pilot's."

The FAA reopened its inquiry of the incident with a second interview of the pilot, Capt. Kenju Terauchi, who again said he saw lights. Steucke said the FAA also plans a second interview with flight engineer Yoshio Tsukuda.

Steucke said all three have told the same story: Blinking yellow, amber and green lights appeared too close to their plane for comfort.

Steucke said the FAA believes the controller apparently misinterpreted what he saw on his screen. But Steucke defended the controller's response, saying, "He had a pilot tell him he was seeing something right there. This is not something where he can take a risk even if it is a double image."

The radar image seen in the JAL cockpit and by the controller also appeared intermittently on Air Force radar. Air Force spokesmen dismissed it as "random clutter."

Terauchi, 47, who has 29 years experience, said he saw two small objects and a third enormous object as his plane was flying from Reykjavik, Iceland, to Anchorage as part of a chartered cargo flight from Paris to Tokyo.

Steucke said the FAA will complete its inquiry and send a report to its Washington headquarters, but he said he doubted whether the mystery of the lights over the arctic that November night will be solved.

"The bottom line," Steucke said, "is that this tells us that we don't have any radar confirmation of the object that the pilot said he saw."

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