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UFO-Explained, Alleged UFO Sighting Probed

NEW YORK (AP) - A Japan Air Lines pilot who claimed to have seen an unidentified flying object alongside his airplane last November was actually seeing an unusually bright image of the planet Jupiter and possibly Mars, an investigator said Tuesday.

Philip J. Klass said astronomical calculations show that on Nov. 17, when the pilot claimed to have seen the UFO, Jupiter was extremely bright and was visible precisely where the pilot reported that he saw the UFO.

Mars was just below and to the right of Jupiter, and may explain the pilot's initial report that he saw two lights, Klass said.

Klass, an editor with the magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology and a long-time investigator of claimed UFO sightings, said the pilot's claims that the object followed him as he made a 360-degree turn are contradicted by what he told flight controllers at the time.

John Leyden, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration in Washington, quoted from a summary of conversations between the pilot and ground controllers in which the pilot reported losing sight of the object after completing his turn.

The object reappeared a few moments later, according to the FAA summary quoted by Leyden.

The pilot, Capt. Kenjyu Terauchi, was over Alaska enroute from Europe, via Iceland, to Tokyo when he claims to have sighted the object.

Paul Steucke, a spokesman for the FAA in Anchorage, said that Terauchi told FAA officials in an interview that the object stayed with him as he turned.

Steucke said the FAA would be releasing the results of its own investigation in mid-February.

According to Klass, who reviewed a complete copy of the transcript, the pilot never reported seeing Jupiter or Mars, even though they were clearly visible.

Klass's report was issued by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal in Buffalo, N.Y., an organization of scientists who investigate claims of UFO sightings, ESP occurrences and other so-called paranormal phenomena.

Klass, who heads the organization's UFO subcommittee, is the author of "UFOs: The Public Deceived." He has been investigating UFO sightings for more than 20 years.

Morris Simoncelli, a spokesman for Japan Air Lines in New York, said, "We have no position on this as the airline. The captain said he saw something; he reported it. He followed procedures."

"Jupiter was only 10 degrees above the horizon, making it appear to the pilot to be roughly at his own 35,000-foot altitude," said Klass in his report. Mars was visible closer to the horizon and to the right of Jupiter, but was not as bright, the report said.

"This is not the first time that an experienced pilot has mistaken a bright celestial body for a UFO, nor will it be the last," Klass said.

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