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Downed-plane search

Meteor theory on flash of light

By James W. Siehl
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If not the flash of a downed aircraft, what was it that scared a group of campers in the mountains near Seward around 10 p.m. Sunday, touching off an extensive, but fruitless, search?

Stan Gordon of Greensburg, director of the Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained, said Tuesday he was assuming it might have been a meteor.

Adding support to the meteor theory are reports that no flight plans had been filed with the regional radar center in Cleveland nor with the Flight Service Station in Altoona that would have placed an airplane in the area in the time period. In addition, no overdue crafts or missing planes have been reported.

Uncertain about loud noise

Attempting to account for the loud noise heard by the campers, Mr. Gordon said he did not know whether it was motor noise or a type of wind velocity they were describing.

Mr. Gordon said that a sound similar to a sonic boom sometimes accompanies a bright meteor. He said it also will give the impression of an aircraft on fire or a plane going down

in a crash.

"What bothers me, it is the only report," he said. "Normally, a bright meteor is seen over a large area. Normally, after really brilliant meteors, there are quite a few calls from other sources. At this point, we have not heard from anyone else who saw it."

Alan Jenkins of 195 Barron Ave., one of the campers, said he had been in the company of three others sitting around a fire in the Big Springs vicinity when a plane appeared to pass low right over their heads.

"I couldn't see anything right then," he recalled, "but I didn't make a 360-degree look around. I did glance from right to left the way I was sitting."

"After that, there was like a two-or three-second silence — and then a real loud explosion and a flash of light."

Mr. Jenkins described the flash as "a real bright, brilliant white light." And, he said, "It wasn't that far away."

Closeness was frightening

The location is what made the experience so frightening.

"When I first heard the explosion, I actually thought they dropped a bomb — is what I thought," Mr. Jenkins said. "We just packed up there and got out of there. We were packed up within five minutes. Dumped all of the ice out of the freezer chest right

on the fire. Threw everything in the truck and got out of there."

Mr. Jenkins said it took the group 45 minutes to an hour to clear the woods and report the incident to the authorities.

He said his recollection of the sound overhead seemed like a turbo jet engine — more engine roar than wind. He and his friends also considered that the loud noise and flash that followed may have been made by an aircraft breaking the sound barrier.

"We kicked that idea around, but I don't think so," Mr. Jenkins said, "because we would have heard the plane after that."

May 1 incident

According to Mr. Gordon, an unexplained incident took place at 12:15 a.m. May 1 between New Florence and Bolivar.

He said a very brilliant shaft of luminescent white light had been seen over the woods, extending to the tree-tops. The beam was described as approximately five feet wide and was raised and lowered six different times over a five-minute period, Mr. Gordon said. Strangely, the light did not penetrate the floor of the woods. It just lit up the tops of trees, Mr. Gordon said.

A high percentage of UFO-sighting reports have logical explanations, Mr. Gordon said. Some of them turn out to be misidentifications — lights on aircraft, meteors, bright stars and planets.