

VA - Oct. 16, 1987

Reports of UFOs mounting

BECKY PURSER

Staff Writer

The supervisor for the waste water treatment plant in Abingdon doesn't know exactly what he saw in the sky Wednesday night, but he's beginning to wonder if it was UFOs.

"I'm not one to believe in flying saucers, but when the military doesn't claim it, you can't help but wonder," said Mike Maiden of Saltville.

Maiden was emerging from his car to greet his 8-year-old son, Adam, after an out-of-town trip when two objects "lit up like a Christmas tree" loomed overhead.

"My kid started hollering and I couldn't figure out what was wrong," Maiden said.

When he looked up, Maiden said he saw two objects resembling aircraft. He then looked at his watch. It was 9:27 p.m.

"It was incredible," Maiden said. "They were traveling east to west in sporadic but simultaneous maneuvers, which isn't something most planes do."

Maiden, who has a brother in the Air Force and who has learned a great deal about aircraft as a result, said he'd never seen anything like it before.

What Maiden did see was one large object in the shape of an arrow he said was larger than a U.S. Air Force B-52 bomber. A smaller craft flew about 1/4-mile ahead.

The larger UFO had a wide rear complete with one flashing red light, one steady red light and two green lights. Four large red lights were strung across the mid-section while the front displayed four bright lights in a row.

The UFOs flew about two miles from Maiden's home, which is about 30 miles northeast of Abingdon. The aerial display lasted about five minutes.

Another Saltville resident, James "Jim" Bordwine, also saw something fitting Maiden's description Wednesday night.

Maiden said perhaps the UFOs might be sophisticated American or Russian military aircraft, but calls to Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, N.C., and to the Tri-City Regional Airport didn't confirm this.

Maiden said no aircraft were recorded in the area at 9:27 p.m. Wednesday by either airfield.

Milton Cole, air supervisor at the airport, said air traffic controllers did not read anything on radar over Saltville. Officials from the Air Force and the Saltville police department could not be reached immediately for comment.

While Maiden is at loss to explain what he saw, residents in nearby Wythe County are convinced they've been seeing UFOs for the past few weeks.

Danny Gordon, news director for radio station WYVE in Rural Retreat, said Friday his station has been flooded with calls since Oct. 2.

"We've been overwhelmed with calls from all sorts of people from law enforcement authorities to homemakers to city officials to fishermen," Gordon said. "We're not sure what's going on, but the people seem to think they're definitely UFOs."

At least 50 sightings of silent UFOs have been reported to authorities or called in to the radio station.

Brooks Coleman, a communications operator for the state police, told the radio station he'd seen a UFO, while a family from out-of-town reported a strange-shaped object flew a few feet over their car before zooming off.

Gordon said he has contacted public relations officers for the Navy at Oceana, the Marine Corps at Cherry Point, N.C. and Langley Air Force Base, all of whom said no military craft like those described in the sightings have flown over Wythe County.

The descriptions have included sightings of one to three UFOs. Some sightings have been similar to the one described by Maiden, while others have seen saucers with blinking lights.

"I'm almost afraid to look up at the sky because I want to cover what's going on," Gordon said. "I might look up there and see something and become a true believer."

But Gordon said in light of all of the calls he's gotten, he and some television crews are planning to stake out the skies in hopes they'll catch something on film.