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Soviets explain bogus UFO sightings

Toledo Blade

In an effort to quell growing public fascination with UFOs, the Soviet Union has published an explanation of the Petrozavodsk phenomenon — perhaps the most famous Soviet UFO incident.

The group of UFO experts who conducted the analysis concluded that Petrozavodsk, like “most” other UFO sightings, actually resulted from public misinterpretation of a rocket launch.

The 1977 incident involved a huge bright star that approached Petrozavodsk, an industrial city about 150 miles northeast of Leningrad.

After reaching the city, it expanded into a glowing object that witnesses said resembled a jelly fish. The object then emitted fine, ray-like beams of light that poured onto the city like rain. The object later assumed a circular shape and moved off in the early morning darkness toward nearby Lake Onega.

The analysis was published in *Science in the USSR*, the official journal of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The Academy is Russia's most prestigious scientific organization, the rough counterpart of America's National Academy of Sciences. It sets the

course of Soviet science and finances research.

In a commentary, the Academy criticizes scientists for contributing to the public's belief in UFOs and other paranormal phenomenon.

“The concept of *glasnost* in science can hardly be interpreted as ‘anything goes,’” it observes. The commentary says that UFO research has been of poor quality, unsuited for publication in legitimate scientific journals.

The most recent episode occurred in September, when Soviet news media reported a flying saucer in Voronezh, a city about 300 miles southeast of Moscow. Knobby-headed extraterrestrial creatures supposedly emerged from a hatch and, accompanied by a robot, strolled through the city park.

The analysis of the Petrozavodsk incident includes a lengthy discussion of the dramatic visual effects that can result from rocket launches. It concludes that visual effects from the launch of the Cosmos 955 satellite on Sept. 20, 1977, produced the Petrozavodsk phenomenon.

American space authorities had suspected a link between the object and Cosmos 955.

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