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Texans see UFO, fear apocalypse

The Associated Press

STEPHENVILLE, Texas - In this farming community where nightfall usually brings clear, starry skies, residents are abuzz over reported sightings of what many believe is a UFO.

Several dozen people — including a pilot, county constable and business owners — insist they have seen a large silent object with bright lights flying low and fast. Some reported seeing fighter jets chasing it.

"People wonder what in the world it is because this is the Bible Belt, and everyone is afraid it's the end of times," said Steve Allen, a freight company owner and pilot who said the object he saw last week was a mile long and half a mile wide. "It was positively, absolutely nothing from these parts."

While federal officials insist there's a logical explanation, locals swear that it was larger, quieter, faster and lower to the ground than an airplane. They also said the object's lights changed configuration, unlike those of a plane. People in several towns who reported seeing it over several weeks have offered similar descriptions of the object.

Machinist Ricky Sorrells said friends made fun of him when he told them he saw a flat, metallic object hovering about 300 feet over a pasture behind his Dublin home. But he decided to come forward after reading similar accounts in the Stephenville Empire-Tribune.

"You hear about big bass or big buck in the area, but this is a different deal," Sorrells said. "It feels good to hear that other people saw something, because that means I'm not crazy."

Sorrells said he has seen the object several times. He said he watched it through his rifle's telescopic lens and described it as very large and without seams, nuts or bolts.

Maj. Karl Lewis, a spokesman for the 301st Fighter Wing at the Joint Reserve Base Naval Air Station in Fort Worth, said no F-16s or other aircraft from his base were in the area the night of Jan. 8, when most people reported the sighting.

Lewis said the object may have been an illusion caused by two commercial airplanes. Lights from the aircraft would seem unusually bright and may appear orange from the setting sun.

"I'm 90 percent sure this was an airliner," Lewis said. "With the sun's angle, it can play tricks on you."

Officials at the region's two Air Force bases — Dyess in Abilene and Sheppard in Wichita Falls — also said none of their aircraft were in the area last week. The Air Force no longer investigates UFOs.

One man has offered a reward for a photograph or videotape of the mysterious object.

About 200 UFO sightings are reported each month, mostly in California, Colorado and Texas, according to the Mutual UFO Network, which plans to go to the 17,000-resident town of Stephenville to investigate.

Fourteen percent of Americans polled last year by The Associated Press and Ipsos say they have seen a UFO.

Erath County Constable Lee Roy Gaitan said that he first saw red glowing lights and then white flashing lights moving fast, but that even with binoculars could not see the object to which the lights were attached.

"I didn't see a flying saucer and I don't know what it was, but it wasn't an airplane, and I've never seen anything like it," Gaitan said. "I think it must be some kind of military craft — at least I hope it was."

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