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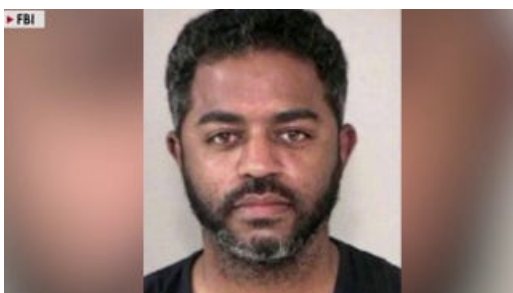
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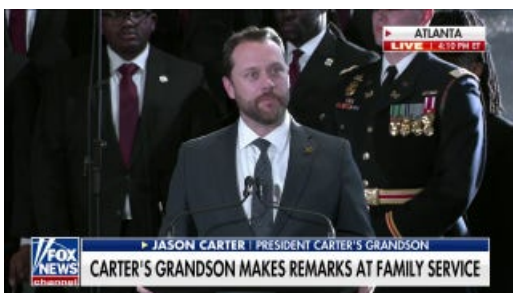
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FORT WORTH, Texas – Fighter jets were training nearby the night dozens of Stephenville-area residents reported seeing a UFO this month, Air Force Reserve officials said Wednesday, backtracking on earlier statements.

The announcement did little to satisfy residents of Texas dairy country who swear that what they saw in the sky Jan. 8 was no airplane.

Some said it even bolstered their claims, because several people reported seeing at least two fighter jets chasing an object.

"This supports our story that there was UFO activity in that area," said Kenneth Cherry, the Texas director of the Mutual UFO Network, which took more than 50 reports from locals at a meeting last weekend. "I find it curious that it took them two weeks to 'fess up. I think they're feeling the heat from the publicity."

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Officials at the Joint Reserve Base Naval Air Station in Fort Worth initially said none of their planes had been in the area, but on Wednesday they said 10 F-16s were there that day.

The officials said they were mistaken and wanted to set the record straight "in the interest of public awareness."

Maj. Karl Lewis, a spokesman for the 301st Fighter Wing at the base, declined to comment on the nature of the military training or say whether it took place on other days.

Lewis had said earlier this month that residents might have seen an illusion caused by two commercial airplanes and reflections from the setting sun. On Wednesday, he said he should not have speculated about the reported sightings.

From well-respected business owners to a county constable, several dozen people say they saw a flying object that was larger, quieter, faster and lower to the ground than an airplane. They also said its lights changed configuration, unlike those of a plane.

"I guarantee that what we saw was not a civilian aircraft," Steve Allen, a pilot and freight company owner, said Wednesday.

The planes' training area in the Brownwood Military Operating Area includes Stephenville's Erath County, but Allen said it does not include the airspace where he saw the object. Also, Jan. 8 was not the only day sightings were reported.

Anne Frazor, who owns a fabric store in Stephenville, about 70 miles southwest of Fort Worth, said many in town have seen military aircraft zoom overhead from time to time as part of training operations. But she said that wasn't what she saw Jan. 8.

"I couldn't begin to say what it was, but to me it wasn't planes," Frazor said.

Since the reported sightings two weeks ago, the 17,000-resident city is having fun with the international publicity.

Some high-schoolers made T-shirts depicting a flying saucer beaming up a cow with the messages: "Stephenville: the new Roswell" and "They're here for the milk!"

Several stores put new messages on their marquees, including "Aliens welcome."

This week Tarleton State University is even hosting a lecture by a UFO researcher on the U.S. government's secret response to UFOs, based on previously classified documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

The U.S. Air Force says it has not investigated UFO sightings since 1969 when it ended Project Blue Book, which examined more than 12,600 reported UFO sightings — including 700 that were never explained.

That program started a few months after the 1947 crash near Roswell, N.M., of an aircraft the government said was a top-secret weather balloon but others have claimed was an alien spacecraft.

"What we want is the government to admit there are UFOs and what they know about them," Cherry said.

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