

# Bright Flash Seen

Santa Clara County, December 16, 1972

On December 16, 1972 at about 2330 hrs. I was standing in the middle of a prune orchard in south Santa Clara County (Silicon Valley) California. I was facing north when an extremely bright flash of blue-white light lit up the countryside. In the instant of that flashbulb-like illumination I could clearly see the Ponderosa pines on the top of Pine Ridge nine miles to the east. The floor of the valley and the hills to the west were also brightly lit.

It was a cold (low 40's), clear night and there was no wind. I heard no sound associated with the flash, and there was no sensation of heat. I did not see the source of the light, but my friend, Leon, did. He was seated in the driver's seat of his car (a 1971 Datsun 240Z) facing south 10 feet from me. He immediately reacted to the event by yelling, <sup>3</sup>There it is again!<sup>2</sup>

Ten minutes earlier he had seen the same flash, in the same part of the sky, while driving southbound. Both times he witnessed the light source. Leon stopped at my house because he knew I was an amateur astronomer and aviation buff. We had parked in the orchard near my house to be away from the house lights. We immediately began to record our observation and attempt to determine what the source might be.

Leon described the light source as a horizontal, perfectly straight bolt of intense blue-white light extending between two discrete points about 30 degrees above the southern horizon. Moments after the event Leon marked the apparent length of the bolt on the windshield of the car. The retinal after-image was still apparent. Leon was looking almost directly at the bolt when it flashed. He demonstrated how it extended about 20 inches across the windshield and stated it appeared to be oriented east/west (perpendicular to his line of sight). Leon guesstimated the source was miles distant and since the tops of the ridges were illuminated, the source must have been over 3500<sup>1</sup> high. There was no precursor event to the flash, there were no aircraft near the source, and when I turned around immediately after the flash, no indication of the source was visible.

Lightning you say? Leon insists it was not lightning and I agree that it was not like any lightning I have ever seen before or since. I have lived in central Texas for years and have never seen anything like this. The weather conditions were not conducive to lightning. The light-bolt was perfectly straight and with a thin diameter like lightning. It had a distinct beginning and end point. It was not a laser since a laser would not radiate light in all directions. It was not a flare. It was not related to any power lines in the area and it did not flicker. It was not the powerful search light from a Lockheed P2V ASW plane.

After about an hour we drove south about two miles to the small town of San Martin. There was no sign of any activity in or around San Martin. At that time this was a rural farming community. However, in San Jose (30 miles north) there were many high-tech and defense companies. Lockheed Missiles and Space, an IBM research facility, United Technologies and many other such companies were there. Lawrence Livermore Lab was in operation well north of us. To the south, Fort Ord, home to the 7th Infantry Division (I think), was in full operation due to the war.

I have seen many strange things in my years as a backyard astronomer including Soviet booster rockets spewing unused fuel, Minuteman missile launches, and weird fluorescing clouds of boron (?) shot into sub-orbit. I've seen countless meteors, including some spectacular ones. I've even been nearby for the U.S. Army's <sup>3</sup>High Intensity Light<sup>2</sup> (laser) experiments at Fort Hunter Liggett c. 1977- 78. Yet I have no explanation for what we saw in December, 1972.

If I had to guess, I would say that what we saw was some sort of recon photo flash. How such a flash might be accomplished is a mystery to me. A huge area was lit up brightly enough for a fast film to work. Based on Leon's observations, if the flash was a mile away it would have been about 3500<sup>1</sup> high and more than 2,000<sup>1</sup> long. If it was ten miles distant it would have been about 35,000<sup>1</sup> high and visible over a huge area. Fort Hunter Liggett is about 120 crowd-miles south of our location. If the flash occurred directly overhead there it would have been 80 miles high with an incredible intrinsic brightness.

We tuned to KGO (San Francisco) talk radio immediately after the flash to see if anyone would call in a report. No joy.

We tuned in KCBS news radio (San Francisco) and heard no mention on the news broadcasts. For weeks after the event we asked around town to see if anyone had seen the flashes, or had some explanation. Not one person we contacted had seen or heard of the event. We saw no newspaper reports of the flashes. No one had any theory for what we saw. In the decades that have passed I have related our observation to dozens of people from all walks of life and, other than lightning, no one has offered an illuminating explanation.

---

(c) 1995 by Michael A. Perry (Astoran@aol.com). All rights reserved.

Posted 9/2/95