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Strange Lights Dance in Sky, Police Report

By FRAN BROCK

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One set of lights shone and shimmered more brightly than the stars in Saturday night's cloudless sky, mystifying stargazers and prompting reports of a UFO.

Among those who said they saw the lights were Burlington air traffic controllers and area policemen.

"The lights I saw were not like anything I had ever seen before," said Donald Kernan, a traffic controller at Burlington International Airport. He said he saw "a bright light that really played; it did a kind of dance."

Other controllers also said they saw the lights, and Richard Morris said they showed up on the airport radar screen.

"What I did see I really don't know," Morris said. "It was a radar target that was not identified."

The lights were seen between 10 and 11 p.m. hovering over Malletts Bay and then moving west and north toward New York.

On the radar, the target moved about four miles in two sweeps of the radar scanner, Morris said. That would translate into a velocity of about 1,500 miles per hour if it were an airplane, he said, two to three times faster than the signal of a Boeing 747.

"It moved west, just north of Juniper Island," he said. The radar screen showed small or faint objects, similar to three small aircrafts, joining a larger, brighter object and then breaking into four objects, Morris said.

Within minutes, the three small blips separated and moved east about one mile before disappearing, Morris said.

Morris and Kernan said aircraft were not scheduled to be in the area and the radar tracings moved too fast to be birds.

Morris said the radar signal left a faint shadow, similar to trails left by airplanes, Morris said.

Colchester and Burlington police and an amateur astronomer in Essex Junction reported watching the lights.

Colchester Patrolman Robert Stebbins said he saw a "strange series of flashing lights," purple and turquoise in color, through a pair of binoculars.

"I was surprised. I never saw anything like it before," said Stebbins, who said he first saw the lights from Church Road. He said he then moved to Turf Road when the lights moved toward Burlington.

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Stebbins said he had another officer look at the lights "to see if I was just seeing things."

A Burlington officer viewed the lights from the P&C Supermarket parking lot on North Avenue, Stebbins said. A report was not included in the Burlington Police Department log.

Richard and Loraine Billups said they took turns tracking the lights through a telescope from their Jackson Heights home in Essex Junction.

Billups, an amateur astronomer since age 9, said the object was triangular in shape and flashed a sequence of colors, "green to blue to red with a bright yellow core."

At first, the object hovered over Malletts Bay, Billups said.

"It was not a star. It was not a planet," said Billups. When it started moving north, it took on the shape of a cigar, Billups said. "The colors changed faster as it moved faster."

Billups said his wife first spotted the lights. "It was 10 p.m. I remember, because TV last night was really

boring and my wife decided to go to bed. "We watched until about 11 p.m. when it was blocked by the tree line," Billups said.

Plattsburgh Air Force Base officials said they had no reports of of the lights.

The national UFO Reporting Center in Seattle, Wash., received some reports and will investigate, a spokesman said.

Morris and Kernan said their sightings at the airport, made after the Colchester Police Department filed a report, were recorded in the daily log, but no action was taken to determine the object's identity.

The lights seemed to be floating between 2,500 and 4,000 feet above the ground, but they might have been as far away as 60 miles, Kernan said.

Kernan said the clear, crisp March night sky can cause bright stars to play tricks on a person's eyes. But after checking his vision on the stationary airport runway lights, Kernan said he knew the jumping lights were not due to an unsteady hand.

"It was something abnormal. It was an unusual sighting," said Kernan, admitting he might get a ribbing from some people who refuse to believe in UFOs.

"It was fun because it was strange," Morris said, doubting an explanation will ever be offered.

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UFO Experts Investigate Reports Of Sparkling Lights Above Lake

The cluster of sparkling lights seen Saturday night traveling northwest over Lake Champlain toward New York remained unidentified Monday, but UFO researchers are investigating.

Area police and traffic controllers at Burlington International Airport spotted the bright, colorful object between 10 and 11 p.m. hovering above Malletts Bay and then moving across the lake.

The object was picked up on the airport radar screen and observers using binoculars and telescopes said it was a triangular-shaped object that flashed different colors.

Jay Allen Hynek, a noted astronomer and director of the Center for UFO Studies outside Chicago, said his organization will review the reports. If the visual reports correspond with the radar findings, the discovery could be especially significant, Hynek said.

An airport control tower spokesman said the government no longer investigates UFO reports, leaving the work to private institutions. A report of the occurrence that was filed by traffic controllers was sent to the Center for Atmospheric Research in Palestine, Texas, the spokesman said.

The UFO Reporting Center in Seattle also was notified.

The lights were seen by police in Colchester and Burlington and an amateur astronomer in Essex Junction. A Shelburne woman who saw a colorful object from her window said she thought it was a star flickering behind moving branches until the object started to move and then disappeared.

Edward Foley, head of the observatory at St. Michael's College in Colchester, said the object was not viewed from the observatory.



Howard Stearns

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World Needs Abnormal Visitation

Burlington appears to have had an "abnormal" visitation last week. I am sure there will be preachers who quickly see the analogy between this strange phenomenon in the night sky over Malletts Bay and the equally "abnormal" visitation to Jerusalem by Jesus on Palm Sunday.

The abnormality of Jesus' visitation was not as physically apparent as whatever was sighted over Burlington. Here was a middle-aged man riding on an ass, cheered by people and hailed, "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord." Just another itinerant Galilean preacher, he was the latest of many messiahs who populated the land of Palestine.

The abnormality was deeper than the physical appearance. Jesus in fact did not acclaim himself a messiah. He repeatedly cautioned those touched by God's power in him not to spread the word about what was happening. By not seeking the prerogatives and attributes of power, Jesus was extremely abnormal.

Jesus' abnormality came from the amazing charisma, the inner strength, the unconquerable love. It came from his assurance of another world peopled not by strange flying objects but by normal humans bound together in faith.

The reaction to Jesus' abnormality was a perfectly normal reaction in a world where power and the prerequisites of power are so much the way of things. The crowd's adulation waned swiftly. By week's end they screamed for his crucifixion. Aside from UFOers, last week's events will fade, too.

But there will be others today, not unlike the power structure of religion and politics in Jesus' day, who will seek to manage the events. Unaware that Jesus was a full testimony to God, the very people entrusted with the proclamation of the ways of God finding their systems challenged by this strange and abnormal man, plotted to do away with him. By week's end their conniving with the Roman politicians had sealed his fate. He was to die.

Whether there is such management of events surrounding relatively verifiable sightings of UFOs today, there has been the claim of such management. The management of events and the news surrounding those events whether they be matters of economic, political or military importance is something about which one constantly needs to be vigilant. Jesus' week of passion testifies to his having given himself up to the ultimately impotent powers of this world which managed his final days and the reports surrounding them.

But, on the other hand, hasty acceptance of every evangelist proclaiming some new messiah is just as bad.

How I wish, as well, that the Word of the love of God in Jesus could spread as swiftly as the work of the celestial lights. Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem was really so much more startling. The world needs again his abnormal visitation.

•The Rev. Howard Stearns is executive minister of the Vermont Ecumenical Council.