

Mystery fireball over Rockies was NOT fiery death of Russian spysat
September 22, 2014 advisory from James Oberg

1 The mystery fireball over the Rockies on September 2 local time was not the fiery death of a Russian spy satellite, as widely reported in recent days, but instead was caused by the burn-up of a relatively small piece of that spy satellite that had been routinely jettisoned before the actual satellite safely landed twelve hours earlier.

2. Here are some media examples:

London Daily Mail (Sep- 17): Mystery fireball spotted from New Mexico to Montana was Russian spy satellite : <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2758925/Experts-Mystery-fireball-Russian-satellite.html>

US News and World Report (Sep 12): Russia: Satellite Did Not Explode Over U.S. [Incident confirmed by U.S. Strategic Command represents growing threat of aging satellites dropping down from space.] by Paul Shinkman
<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/09/12/russia-refutes-satellite-exploded-over-us-despite-us-military-confirmation>

NBC Nightly News -- A Russian spy satellite was mistaken for a meteor sighting over Colorado. Published September 18th 2014, 6:01 pm
<http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/3rd-block/its-bird-its-plane-no-its-russian-spy-satellite-n206776>

3. Had the fireball been the actual spy satellite, an aggressive ground search would have been launched over Canada to retrieve the possibly crippled and off-course object, whose heat-shielded main body would likely have survived reentry to crash to Earth, containing top secret Russian recon cameras and exposed film of its recent ground targets in the United States.

4. Instead, say private but highly experienced amateur satellite trackers in Canada and Europe, the Kosmos 2495 satellite landed routinely near Orenburg in Russia on September 2, exactly as Moscow officials later declared when they tried to debunk press stories of the satellite “exploding” over the United States [eg, <http://en.itar-tass.com/russia/748761>]. The original "explosion" story was based on the realization that the meteor's flight path DID very closely parallel the expected path of the Kosmos 2495, but then went too far in speculating it MUST have been the satellite itself.

5. As is typical of spy satellites of this “Kobalt” class, several pieces of on-orbit equipment [probably solar panels and radio dish antennas] were

jettisoned shortly before the planned landing, and themselves burned up randomly hours later. One of those pieces created the fireball seen over several Rocky Mountain states.

6. Reliable determination of the identity of the fireball was confused by a tabulation error at the North American Aerospace Defense Command in Colorado Springs, which listed the “decay” of the satellite as September 3 [GMT] and not the previous day, which was more accurate. This led some media sources to believe this NORAD announcement confirmed that the fireball on September 3 [Sep 2 local] WAS the actual satellite and not a jettisoned component from it.

7. An Associated Press story on September 17 correctly quoted an American expert on Russian spaceflight, Charles Vick, as identifying it as a fragment of the satellite, not the actual satellite. But the story was headlined as asserting the fireball was the actual satellite.

Experts: Mystery fireball was Russian satellite

By [MEAD GRUVER](#), Sep. 17, 2014 2:10 AM EDT

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/experts-mystery-fireball-was-russian-satellite>

8. Confusion also lingered because confirmation of the safe landing of the spy satellite in Russia took a week to filter out of that country, in the form of youtube videos of the fireball of the main satellite’s descent to Earth. A Russian colleague then provided links to numerous Youtube videos of Kazakhstan and Orenburg sightings: <http://satobs.org/seesat/Sep-2014/0085.html> Those videos had been misidentified by most witnesses as a Chinese satellite burning up, but the flight path was in the precise time and direction of the Russian satellite’s descent trajectory.

9. Marco Langbroek [<http://sattrackcam.blogspot.com>] summarized in detail the case for identifying the fireball as a piece of debris, at his blog:

<http://sattrackcam.blogspot.com/2014/09/you-only-die-twice-confusing-end-of.html>

This is an outstanding and significant piece of detective work. It’s beautiful to see the logical development of the investigative trail.

10. Additional technical assessments of how the Rockies fireball fits the pattern of this type of satellites NORMAL return to Earth, involving the routine jettison and quick decay of some components, was posted by respected Canadian satellite tracker Ted Molczan here:

<http://satobs.org/seesat/Sep-2014/0110.html>

== Jim Oberg