

To: MUFON UFO Journal (Dennis Stacy)

August 17, 1992

The May 1992 UFO Journal carried a translation of Jean Sider's report on the November 5, 1990 UFO wave in France. Sider said the wave could be "the greatest UFO flap in France since the Autumn of 1954", as well as "one of the largest possible UFO flaps in French history."

The French space agency CNES, through its UFO study group SEPRA, explained the sightings as being caused by the atmospheric entry of a Soviet rocket (a Proton third stage). Despite Sider's argumentation against this solution, my own further research has confirmed it.

The Soviet satellite Gorizont-23 was launched by a Proton booster on November 3, 1990 (not as per Sider on October 21), into a temporary low parking orbit. The payload was injected toward geosynchronous orbit half an hour later, while the spent third stage fell from orbit within 48 hours (See for a comparable case the similar Proton [Zond] entry over Tennessee in 1968 described by Klass in UFOs-Explained).

Attached is a ground track map of the booster in the hour before it decayed and burned up. This is based on orbital elements released by the US Space Command. The trajectory took the rocket body right across the northern horizon of France. The exact point of entry could not be tracked by US Space Command sensors (outside of its radar coverage) and only an approximate point on the orbital path can be computed in advance. The west-to-east motion of the fireball in the northern skies of France is completely consistent with eyewitness accounts, connected with the predicted entry.

Sider's rebuttals to the Proton entry explanation are easily refuted:

1) An astrophysicist at the Lyons Observatory "ruled out" the entry hypothesis. Well, on what grounds, and what does this person know about entries? The citation is a French TV report, not a follow-up interview that a competent investigator should have done.

2) An astronomer near Grenoble was on duty at the time and should have seen an entry. Astronomers don't usually stand on platforms scanning the skies with their eyes, they operate complex equipment from control rooms. Besides, the scattered clouds could easily have blocked view of the fireball low on the northern horizon. The absence of the astronomer's report is no evidence for the absence of a bright entry fireball. The much later sighting appears to be independent.

3) US Space Command said the impact was expected over the North Atlantic at 2:35 PM. I have been unable to confirm this published report (new officials in the press office are uncooperative), but entries can occur within 1 or 2 orbits of the expected time, and the US Space Command times are usually given as Mountain Standard (GMT -7). The authenticity and relevance of this datum is obscure.

4) The object was seen below the clouds. If this means that the object passed along the northern horizon below higher clouds, above it in elevation angle from the ground, this is consistent with the entry. If it means that the sky was totally overcast and the object was seen with clouds as background, that's something else. The former interpretation is consistent with the Proton entry fireball.

5) A structured object was perceived by witnesses. This is a classic fireball phenomenon, where bright lights (individual fragments) are mentally integrated by witnesses into illuminated sections

of a single craft. The estimates of "enormous size" are worthless since only angular size is directly perceivable. This is basic eyewitness interview technique and standards.

6) The object's motion was irregular. Some witnesses did report "alternating slow and rapid speeds" or a "vertical ascent", but these perceptual errors are known to occur with undisputed fireballs and are a characteristic of sudden celestial perceptions.

7) Many witnesses were "qualified observers". This is a discredited argumentation gimmick which falsely implies that pilots or engineers or students are more likely to recognize natural celestial apparitions. Experience has shown the opposite: they are more easily cued into unconsciously adding in interpretations from their specialties.

8) Further investigation of this was done in the US. My notorious reputation as a "space/rocket UFO debunker" (and genuine expert) seems to have disqualified me from being approached, but other real experts would have told Sider the same thing: the evidence was overwhelming that the sightings were caused by a space entry.

It is distressing that by now, half a century into the "modern UFO phenomenon", leading UFO groups such as Sider's and MUFON cannot recognize such overt UFO's as rocket entries. This French case is one example. Another pitiful throwback was shown in a recent Gribble column on the 1967 "crescent UFO wave" over southern Russia, a wave which my research (published in the MUFON Journal in 1982!) showed conclusively to have been caused by Soviet orbital weapons entry tests. Nobody has argued with that solid conclusion: MUFON's editorial position appears instead to just pretend it was never published. This is not a responsible, scientific approach to the issue.