

PROBABLY METEOR

# Flaming Object Zips Across Sky

A bright flaming object that streaked across the sky and lighted a wide area "like noon" was viewed at 10:15 p.m. by residents in Dallas and by thousands of other observers from Houston to Shreveport, La., and Topeka, Kan.

Federal aviation authorities and airport control tower officials generally agreed on the cause—a meteor exploded in the atmosphere.

Earlier reports had left thousands of residents stunned. Some

reported fears of an atomic blast. Some reported they had "seen an airplane explode."

Widest circulated report was that high-flying jets making night-time pictures of Hurricane Carla had dropped powerful flares to light the sky. A report that Connally Air Force Base at Waco had supplied the planes was officially denied.

At 12:15 a.m. Sunday — two hours after the light was seen "for a full nine seconds" in Dallas—conflicting reports still were circulating. But the meteor theory was, by far, the one circulated most in official circles.

John B. Allen, head of the Dallas moonwatch team, said he was "doing some work on a telescope" at the time of the great flare. "As near as I can guess, it was a large meteor which was relatively close. I would guess it was about 300 miles up."

Allen said he got this figure by listening to the roar "that occurred when the meteor began to burn up in the atmosphere." He called it the "brightest I have ever seen since I have been observing."

Phone calls from worried observers of the strange light tied up Dallas News switchboards for almost an hour.

Electrical engineer Earl Cozby, 2205 N. Farola, said the initial white-like flash was followed four minutes later by the boom. From the difference, he said, he estimated the explosion was about 70 miles northeast of Casa View.

Early "explanations" that received wide circulation was that the Air Force had been making night-time photographs with magnesium flares for light. Connally Air Force Base near Waco, reported origination point of the photographic flights, officially disclaimed any role.

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LARGEST COMBINED  
DAILY CIRCULATION  
IN TEXAS

# FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

FORT WORTH, TEXAS—WHERE THE WEST BEGINS A FORT WORTH-OWNED NEWSPAPER SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1961—81ST YEAR

## FIREBALL LIGHTS WIDE AREA

An enormous green ball of fire visible from central Kansas to South Texas lighted up the sky over Fort Worth with an eerie glow shortly after 10 p. m. Saturday.

Oscar Monnig of 29 Chelsea Dr., astronomer and leading meteorite expert of the area, said the thing was without doubt "a giant meteor, an enormous fireball."

After quick telephone checks with fellow associates in Tyler and elsewhere, he plotted the landing area of the meteorite as south or southeast of Sherman.

Among the thousands of persons who saw the heavenly display were several pilots in North Central Texas.

"They all said it was a meteorite," the Federal Aviation Agency's Air Route Control Center in Fort Worth reported.

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THE BALL seemed to disinte-

grate in the sky over Fort Worth, and there was an unconfirmed report that a burning fragment fell near 28th and Beach and caused a fire.

A house burned near there, but the meteorite theory was discounted.

Weather Bureau Meteorologist Ted Lange told the Star-Telegram the fireball streaked across the heavens on a course almost due south to north—190 degrees to 10 degrees.

"It made a sound like a sonic boom," he said.

He fixed the time at 10:08 p. m.

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THE FIRST report to the Star-Telegram came from Harley Pershing, assistant city editor of the evening paper. He was sitting in the back yard of his home on the far South Side.

"It lit up the whole sky as bright as day," he said. "It was a terrifying sight."

The Air Route Traffic Control Center reported shortly afterward that the object was sighted by control tower personnel in Tyler, 130 miles east of Fort Worth, and by a pilot over Guthrie, 190 miles west of the city.

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STAR-TELEGRAM Photographer Al Panzera, who lives at 1212 Oak Knoll, near where the fragment reportedly slammed to earth, said he heard an explosion "like the sound barrier breaking."

Panzera said his family saw the meteorite apparently "pass 50 feet over our house."

At Meacham Field, Tower Operator J. R. Collier said the ball of fire "lit everything up as bright as the sun" for five or six seconds.

He said he could see buildings miles away "just like in daytime."

He said the meteorite ap-

peared to travel southwest to northeast.

"It was real weird looking," he exclaimed. "I've never seen anything like it."

He said the whole sky was lit up bluish green and faded to a white to orange color.

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ED RITCHEY, who operates a flying service at Meacham Field, said he was watching the Miss America competition on television when "the whole room lit up."

Ritchey said he looked out the window of his home three miles east of Meacham Field.

"It was the most eerie thing you ever saw," he said.

"I could see the fence and barn just like in daylight."

Monnig said he plans to go to the Sherman area to look for fragments Sunday.

He said chunks of the meteorite  
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# MORE ABOUT FIREBALL

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ite, which probably exploded before falling to earth, would be black crusted and heavy for their size, "much heavier than rocks."

He added that the pieces frequently don't go into the ground, but can be found lying on the surface and often at first glance can be mistaken for rocks.

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**MONNIG HELPED** unearth a meteor fragment near Marshall in May. The fragment was turned over to the Smithsonian Institution.

That fragment was broken up and passed out among the nation's top scientists who are running a series of tests which may yield new knowledge of space.

The fireball passed over Fort Worth from southwest to northeast. Monnig said one usually "bursts into view 40 or 50 miles high.

"It goes out, or becomes invisible, when it reaches a height of about 10 miles," he said. He estimated it probably was traveling at 20 to 30 miles a second.

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**MONNIG SAID** it is normal to hear the sonic boom of a meteor three to five minutes after its passing, and that it is not uncommon to hear the boom seven minutes later.

A house occupied by Mrs. Argentine Fields, 55, and her daughter and four sons burst into flames about the time the meteor passed over the city,

leading to the belief that the meteorite fell on the house. The Negro family lives at 3029 Eleanor in Riverside.

They were not at home, but a neighbor, Mrs. B. T. McIntosh, said she saw the house suddenly burst into flames.

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**FIREMEN COULD** find no evidence of a meteor fragment, and Chief R. C. Harvey said he had no idea what could have caused the blaze.

Monnig said it was highly unlikely, "in fact not possible," that the house fire resulted from a meteor fragment dropping into the building.

"There is no known case where a meteor or fragment was too hot to handle when it fell to earth," Monnig said. They may be slightly warm on the outside, but not warm enough to start a fire.

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**THE DALLAS** sheriff's department and a Dallas television station at first reported that the light was a giant flare.

Their reports said jet planes from Connally Air Force Base in Waco dropped the flare to take pictures of hurricane Carla. The air base punctured that report by saying it had no planes in the air.

Boone Blakeley was standing outside the Star-Telegram Building and thought at first it was a huge flash of lightning.

He said it appeared to be only 200 feet high and said he thought it was going to hit the Continental Bank Building.

He said the ball of fire was blue at the front, became yellow in the center and had a tail. He said it lightened up the clouds as in daylight.

# Meteor Crater Still Is Sought

The meteor that flashed the sky Saturday night probably is in some field or pasture between Sherman and Bonham, Oscar Monnig, local astronomer, said today.

A day of field investigation yesterday placed the site of its fall as near Bells, with White-wright and Bonham close seconds. Mr. Monnig will return to that area later this week to check further.

The meteor, which probably fell in one-to-five and even 10-pound chunks, traveled at 15 to 20-miles a second, he estimated. That is two to three times as fast as a satellite is shot. It certainly broke up because some fox hunters out near Melissa heard a series of pops after the big boom.

Rule of the thumb way to tell where it fell is the length of time between the flash of light and the sonic boom. The

less time, the closer the place of fall.

Mr. Monnig still needs observations from people in the area between Bonham and Sherman to help locate the place the meteor fell.

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## Ex-Senator Sick

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**TOM BEAN, BELLS**

# Astronomer Finds Area Of Fireball

The fireball which splashed Texas and Oklahoma skies with a green glow Saturday night probably fell to earth near Tom Bean or Bells in Grayson County, a Fort Worth astronomer said Sunday.

Oscar Monnig of 29 Chelsea Dr., who spent the day interviewing persons from Fort Worth to Denison who had seen the phenomenon, theorized that pieces of the meteorite struck east or southeast of Sherman.

"It definitely was south of Denison—one man there saw it to the south," Monnig said.

He plans to return to the area later this week to continue his search. Chunks of the meteorite may weigh as much as 10 pounds, he said.

Monnig requested that anyone who got a good view of the fireball from the Sherman-Denison area to contact him.

## Wild Goose Chase

# Miss America, Meteor Leave Writer Panting

BY ELSTON BROOKS

A funny thing happened to us on the way to an inside straight Saturday night.

That was the night you and 90,000,000 others were watching the Miss America pageant on TV. But out in our neighborhood the wives were playing bridge while the men were playing poker.



ELSTON  
BROOKS

The phone rang at 7:30 p. m., scant seconds after it was decided that the joker was wild on aces, straights and flushes, no check and raise and the blues are worth a quarter.

Linda Loftis was now in the top 10, the office said, and while 10-to-1 odds aren't the best, perhaps we should see when we could get the first plane out to Atlantic City in case Linda won. The new Miss America would have a press conference at 10 a. m. Sunday and then we could accompany her on a gala three days in New York before the triumphal return home.

They dealt around us while a Miss Lord at American Airlines told us the sad news. All Sunday morning flights booked solid. The only thing going out Saturday night left Love Field at 11:15 p. m. for Philadelphia, just a few minutes after the Miss America choice would be known. Yes, we could hurry to Love Field and carry our baggage on board. Maybe the plane could hold a minute if Bert Parks started stretching it out.

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### NO CONNECTING FLIGHT TO ATLANTIC CITY

But there was no connecting flight to Atlantic City. We'd land in Philadelphia at 8 a. m. Sunday, have to get to New Jersey the best way we could—unshaved and without entry credentials—in time for the 10 a. m. conference. Yes, we could charter a limousine, but it cost \$25.

The suits we wanted were in the cleaners, of course, and we had only \$20 poker money and no portable typewriter. We called the cab as we packed. There were just 20 minutes before the limo departed from Love Field when we got to the office to pick up more cash and leave phoned instructions for Linda's manager to make reservations for us on her flight out to New York.

You could almost hear the "chase music" in the background shortly after 10 p. m. when the limo had to detour by way of Carter Field to pick up Dallas-bound passengers there. As we started up the ramp, the entire sky lighted up like noon for six seconds as Saturday's celebrated and supposed meteor belched an unbelievable brilliance over the countryside.

A young Army colonel got in the limo and asked us how we were doing.

"Just waiting for the shock wave after the light," we said, meaning every word of it.

"Sure looked like the Russians," he comforted us. "I'm in missiles, down at the Redstone Arsenal."

All we could think of was that Life magazine article about how our military people volunteer missile information. We wouldn't have said another word except it soon developed this was one of the officers we had met last year at Redstone while on the world premiere of "I Aim at the Stars." A weird coincidence on an evening that was getting weirder by the minute.

We made the mad dash to the ticket counter and got permission to carry our bag on board at the last minute. We panted to the insurance counter as the clock ticked nearer takeoff time. No, they weren't sure they could refund our insurance if we didn't take the flight. A conference. The clock ticked on. All right, it could be done. In duplicate, of course.

We had never run a mile with a full suitcase until that minute. As we got to Gate 4, the waiting Electra on the runway coughed its engines to life. We dropped the bag and raced for a pay phone.

Now we paid the penalty of traveling on the night of the meteor. The Star-Telegram's lines were jammed with callers wanting to know what had happened. Minutes went by. We sweated, and the airline attendant was signaling frantically to us outside the booth.

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### ANSWER, AT LAST, PROVES TO BE LETDOWN

We hung up. Called again. Finally, an answer.

"Quick," we panted. "Give me the desk."

"No hurry," said the operator, recognizing our voice. "She was third runner-up."

The Electra taxied away as we lugged the bag back the long mile to the insurance counter (refund), and the ticket counter (refund), and the man with the poodle on a leash who heard us talking to the ticket attendant and was moved to tell us, "Oh, you poor thing. You'd have loved being with her in New York. I'm so distraught for you."

We sank back exhausted in the Fort Worth-bound limo, talking to the driver about the Miss America we weren't going to see. That was when three potential Miss Americas, three very tired students at the American Airlines Stewardess College who were returning from a trip to Juarez, got in the limo.

"Did Miss New York win?" asked Arlene Bourne.

"How about Miss Nebraska?" put in Linda Yost.

"Did Miss Oklahoma win?" inquired Valerie Sterling.

"Ask us," we said tiredly, "who was third runnerup, and I'm a fountain of knowledge. It just occurred to me, I don't know who won."

Linda Loftis and we had something in common. The game still was going on when we got back at 12:30 a. m. No one had missed us around the table, so we sat down and lost the \$20.

BELLS, Texas