

1-18-46
night
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Hicksville, N. Y.
Jan 4, 1949

Dr Lincoln LaPaz
Univ. New Mexico
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

Dear Sir,

During an Air Transport Command flight from Santa Maria, Azores, to Paris, in Jan., 1946, I witnessed the fall of a meteorite, an account of which I have often thought might be of interest to astronomers, and in particular, those of you more particularly concerned with the study of meteoritics. Until I read a recent issue of Science Illustrated I had not known to whom I might direct such a report.

Sitting in the cockpit of an airplane for hours at night a pilot sees many meteors fall; but on this night I saw one fall which I have not forgotten because of the unusual nature of the fall.

Our position was approximately midway between Brest and Paris; more exactly, I would estimate between 65 and 70 nautical miles due south of Cherbourg. As I recall now, the time was about 23:00 G. M. T. on Jan. 18, 1946. I was alone in the cockpit of a C-54 type plane at 7,000 ft. altitude, above broken clouds whose tops ranged between 4,000 and 5,000 ft. The sky was crystal clear. We were flying in the direction of Paris.

The meteor first appeared to me at an altitude of about 35° above the horizon. It fell (apparently) from the north at an angle of perhaps 20° or 25° from the vertical. It did not explode. Its intense brilliance persisted until it met the horizon at a point bearing 85° to 90° true from our position. This would put its point of contact with the earth somewhere on a line between Brest and Kiev (roughly). A split second after disappearing at the horizon, the meteorite reappeared above the horizon, describing a tiny hyperbola of perhaps 1° altitude and fell again from sight. The reappearance of the meteorite was like a ricochet or rebound. The elapsed time of the fall and reappearance was perhaps 2 or 3 seconds.

My log book also shows night flights over this route on Feb 12, 1946, March 22, 1946; and May 19, 1946; but I feel about 95% certain that the incident occurred on the night of January 18th., 1946. Otherwise the account is accurate to the best of my knowledge and memory. — date

I should be interested to hear if you have knowledge of a meteorite having fallen at the time and in a location which may fit the account I have given. Also, please let me know if I may be of further service to the Institute of Meteoritics.

Yours truly,

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(See attached comments by Dr Lincoln LaPaz, Director, Institute of Meteoritics, Univ. of N. M.

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EXTRACTS

FROM

Letter Directed to Dr H. E. Landsberg
from

Dr Lincoln LaPaz, Director
Institute of Meteoritics
University of New Mexico
January 12, 1949

In my opinion, [redacted] observation (which, as the first paragraph of his letter indicates, reached me only through his chance reading of my article in Science Illustrated) is of the utmost significance. What he observed was certainly not a "bouncing meteorite." A much more reasonable interpretation of his observation is that he saw a luminous object following a wave-like path (somewhat analogous to the real path of the Los Alamos fireball of 1948, December 20 8^h 54^m PM), the point from which [redacted] observed being situated very nearly in the plane of the trajectory of the luminous object and the direction of motion of this object being almost directly away from [redacted], so that the observed angular altitude of the first crest on the wave-like path was quite large (at least 13°) while the observed angular altitude for the second, more distant, crest was only about 1°.

In view of the fact that [redacted] important observation came to attention only by accident, it seems to me that immediate steps should be taken to interrogate all former and present ATC pilots (especially all pilots now flying in Germany or elsewhere in Europe) in order to determine whether additional observations similar to that made by [redacted] have been made. Would it not be possible to require all pilots and co-pilots to report in detail on any fire-balls they may observe which they have any reason to believe are definitely or possibly non-meteoritic?