

The *Cosmos 96* question is settled once and for all

Chief Scientist for Orbital Debris at the NASA Johnson Space Center, Nicholas L. Johnson, who is recognized internationally as an authority on orbital debris and foreign space systems, has determined that Cosmos 96, the Russian Venera probe that has been considered a possible explanation for the Kecksburg object for decades, did not land in Pennsylvania on the afternoon of December 9, 1965. Furthermore, he states that no other man-made object from any country came down that day.

Debris from Cosmos 96 has been a leading contender as an explanation for the Kecksburg object, due to the fact that it came down early that morning over Canada. Perhaps part ended up in Pennsylvania later, the theory went. The Air Force stated at the time that no space debris entered the atmosphere that day, and that all aircraft and missiles were accounted for.

Johnson examined the orbital data for Cosmos 96 and was able to calculate when it would have passed over Pennsylvania if it had been in orbit that day. The time, when it traveled from north to south, was at approximately 6:20 am. The Kecksburg object came down at 4:45 p.m. "I can tell you categorically, that there is no way that any debris from Cosmos 96 could have landed in Pennsylvania anywhere around 4:45 p.m.," said Johnson in an interview on October 10, 2003. "That's an absolute. Orbital mechanics is very strict."

The US Space Command reported in 1991 that Cosmos 96 crashed in Canada at 3:18 a.m. Johnson does not have information about the time of demise of Cosmos 96, but he did confirm that it was over Canada at this time.

One part of Cosmos 96 could not have stayed in orbit until 4:45 p.m. after the object came apart hours earlier, as some had speculated.

Even more intriguing, Johnson's data shows that no man-made object from any country entered our atmosphere and landed in Pennsylvania on the afternoon of December 9. Cosmos 96 was the only catalogued object that came down at all that day. He says that anything not catalogued would have been so small that it would not have survived reentry. "I cannot absolutely confirm that it was not some completely unreported event, but the chances of that are virtually nil," said Johnson. "You can't launch something without somebody seeing it. By 1965 the US and Soviets were both reporting their launches."

The possibility of a US reconnaissance satellite dropping a large film canister on that day has also been ruled out. These capsules were dropped following secret missions over the Soviet Union. Data on these flights was recently declassified. By checking launch and retrieval times, these capsules can also be eliminated as a possible explanation for what landed in Kecksburg.

In 1965, unlike today, the US government did not have the technical means of detecting natural bodies, such as a meteor, suddenly coming into the earth's atmosphere. The only record we would have of such an event would be witness reports.

Previously, both Johnson and another renowned expert, Phillip S. Clark of London's Molniya Space Consultancy who has studied the Soviet and Chinese space programs for more than 20 years, had just about eliminated Cosmos 96 as a possibility, assuming witness reports are accurate. The capsule was only 3 feet in diameter – much smaller than the object reported by Kecksburg witnesses. Clark also pointed out that the Cosmos capsule could not have made turns or descended slowly at an angle, as witnesses reported.

Now, the Cosmos 96 explanation is no longer a question, and we have fewer options left to explain this mystery. As Dr. Peter Sturrock, emeritus professor of applied physics at Stanford University, says in his book *The UFO Enigma*, "In principle, we can prove a hypothesis not only by finding strong evidence in its favor, but also by finding strong evidence against every other possibility."

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