

Scientists Dominating UFO Convention Dispel 'Kook' Image

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UFO conventioners are sometimes viewed as picture-book events where pulp writers, deluded amateur investigators and "kook" people their wares. There is usually a room full of flying saucer pamphlets and memorabilia, together with fuzzy photos of alleged "extraterrestrial spacecraft," sculptures of aliens from drive-in B movies, and "free energy" devices courtesy of the "space brothers." It may be fun to attend if you are into "spaced out" events, but it surely is not a scientific meeting.

Many probably believe that UFOs, in fact, are never discussed in a legitimate scientific conference. After all, flying saucer conventions are always like the one just described. Right? Wrong! The subject of UFOs has been discussed at symposiums sponsored by organizations like the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA). Over the years, there have also been annual symposiums sponsored by a few private UFO organizations that have had varying degrees of scientific credibility attached to them.

The 1986 Symposium of the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), held a few weeks ago at Michigan State University in East Lansing, was definitely on the upper side of the scientific scale. Except for one teacher, all the speakers were bona fide scientists. Six had doctorates in various fields of study and three are actively employed in our space program. Most of them are also MUFON officers or consultants. Walter Andrus, MUFON's Director, called the symposium "our very

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best to date." Various aspects of UFO-related research, such as photographic analysis, reported abductions, field investigations, and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), were presented from a scientific viewpoint. Yet several of these papers severely criticized the manner in which science and scientists have distorted and mislabeled the UFO phenomenon.

Science Details

One of the thorough presentations was given by Dr. Bruce Macabee, the Chairman of the Fund for UFO Research in Washington, D.C. and a U.S. Navy research physicist working on high energy lasers for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Dr. Macabee addressed at length the problem of "science at default" with regards to UFOs. He gave a number of examples: from the Kenneth Arnold sighting that started the modern era of flying saucers in 1947, to the severe difficulties of publishing "UFO data for rational, open analysis" in reputable scientific journals. In a separate lecture, Dr. Macabee gave a full account of the famous UFO sighting captured on 16mm color movie film by an Australian TV crew aboard an aircraft in New Zealand's Kaitiaki coast on the night of December 30, 1947. The UFO was seen by multiple witnesses and detected on radar both by the aircraft and a ground radar station in Wellington. Dr. Macabee has conducted an extensive investigation of this case and considers it to be one of the very best on record.

"I have been very interested, even fascinated, at the extent to which some scientists have gone to explain UFO sightings," said Macabee. "My study of these

illustrations has made me skeptical of the skeptics." He elaborated this point in detail, quoting extensively from old Air Force records and the books of the late Dr. Donald Menzel, a respected Harvard astrophysicist who was the first leader of the UFO "debunkers." Other speakers also tackled the reasons why scientists had been wrongly and unjustly involved in what Macabee called a "self-coverage" of the UFO evidence.

Marge Christensen, a teacher who heads MUFON's Public Information Public Education (PIPE) Committee, opened the symposium with her paper, "Scientists, UFOs, and Anti-Scientific Thinking." She quoted from the 1969 AAAS special symposium on UFOs, in which sociologist Dr. Robert Hall commented, "The point seems to be that scientists are human and behave according to the same principles of human behavior as nonscientists." The problem of science vis-a-vis UFOs was also addressed by Dr. Harley Rutledge, professor of physics at Southeast Missouri State University. His scientific field study of the UFO phenomenon was conducted over a 7-year period and published in 1981 in the book *Project Identification*.

Dr. Michael Swords, a professor at Western Michigan University with a Ph.D. in History of Science and Technology, touched upon this issue, too. His entertaining and informative slide presentation was mostly devoted to the subject of extraterrestrial intelligence in the universe. He showed how the evidence from planetary and cosmological, protobiology and evolutionary biology "point increasingly towards the conclusion that life and intelligence are inevitably in the galaxy on a broad scale." Swords also took a critical view of his peers' (continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3 - TRIBUNE,
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"prejudiced, fearful, and derivative overkill" reactions toward UFOs. This was an unnecessary attitude, he indicated, since "the major hypothesis of ufology (the E.T.) is in total congruence with the leading edge of all 'establishment' science observations and theories."

The problems of scientists with UFOs were also discussed in an interview with MUFON Director Walter Andrus. "Scientists sometimes wear blinders," he said. "They are so involved in their own particular field of study that they haven't studied things specially outside their own fields." While this situation was understandable, Andrus added that the problem lies in the fact that these same scientists will accept uncritically (due to their lack of knowledge) negative statements made by colleagues who don't have "any knowledge whatsoever of the subject." Andrus argued that it wasn't a case of making scientists believe in UFOs, but only of asking them to examine the available data. He said that MUFON was studying the possibility of printing short pamphlets catering to scientists in specific fields such as electrical or mechanical engineers, biologists or chemists.

The serious discussions of the UFO symposium were also joined by space scientists. Dr. Richard Haines, Allan Holt and John Schuessler work for either NASA or for aerospace contractors in the space station program. It was stressed repeatedly that their long-time interest in UFOs was strictly personal and had nothing to do with their employers.

Dr. Richard Haines, an expert in psychology, behavior, and human perception, gave an expert demonstration of what is a scientific investigation of "an alleged UFO photograph." The 35mm color photo showed a classic dome-shaped, metallic-looking circular craft, in other words, a flying saucer, taken at daytime on October 8, 1981 on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Dr. Haines spent over a year working this case. Among other things, he inspected the camera, lens, film and processing; he made a topographic survey of the site where the photo was taken; he interviewed the photographer at length to appraise his credibility; he studied the physics of frisbees to see if a model was used; and finally, he subjected the image to such technical analyses as "linear and angular image measurements, microdensitometry scan results, and computer based contrast enhancement results." His lecture was a lesson on how to investigate thoroughly a single frame of film. His final conclusion: "The image has not been identified to date."

Allan Holt's pioneer research on "Interstellar Spaceports and Transportation Systems" will be discussed more at length in a future article since its scope really goes beyond the UFO subject; it deals rather with the future of our own space program, 100 or 200 years from now, if the process of R&D for certain far-reaching propulsion concepts is implemented today. This, he said clearly, would allow us to travel to the stars. Regarding the importance of UFOs, Holt said that "UFO research in a very real sense offers us an opportunity to study and examine the technology of the future; the technology which we will use in 20, 50, 150, or 300 years from now."

Finally, John Schuessler, a senior aerospace engineer with the McDonnell Douglas Corp. in Houston, Texas, covered the legal angle of the Cash/Landrum case, which he has investigated exhaustively since it occurred on a road in East Texas on the night of December 29, 1980.

At previous MUFON symposiums, Schuessler discussed the medical and other investigative aspects of this tragic case. For instance, Betty Cash, one of the witnesses, has been hospitalized 25 times and has undergone two cancer operations since the night she and her friend Vicky Landrum, and Vicky's grandson Colby, saw a huge diamond-shaped UFO on the Texas road. The object emitted an unbearable amount of heat and was the apparent cause of a series of medical injuries they unexpectedly suffered following the encounter. The plot thickens because both they and other independent witnesses saw that night a large fleet of helicopters flying in the area. The life of the witnesses has been literally ruined as a result of the encounter, yet no military unit of the United States Government has accepted any responsibility for the helicopters or the sighting itself. The Government has so far delayed and denied every motion in court. The witnesses, summed up Schuessler, "cannot understand why they have been treated so coldly by the officials of the Government they love and respect. They are ready for their day in court."

UFO abductions, one of the most controversial and potentially significant aspects of ufology, was discussed by Dr. David Jacobs, a historian from Temple University. His book, *The UFO Controversy in America*, is the most scholarly and accurate history of Project Blue Book available. "More knowledge about the UFOs can be obtained from a few abduction reports than can be derived from scores of sighting reports," said Dr. Jacobs, adding that "in their totality, abductions have the potential for being the Big Breakthrough for which UFO researchers have been waiting so long." Jacobs showed how abductions differed from the classic "contactee" cases, which had a basis in science-fiction stories; he demonstrated also that abductions were not caused by "hysterical contagion." If these cases of alleged kidnaping and medical examination inside an alien spacecraft are not true, yet "the claimants are neither lying nor pathologically disturbed," concluded Jacobs, "the abductee stories are of critical importance" for "psychiatry, ps/ychology, and psychoanalysis" as well.

More than MUFON, the meeting was also supported and attended by members of the recently renamed J. Allan Hynek Center for UFO Studies, the still active CUFOS organization founded in 1973 by the late astronomer and ufologist, and the Fund for UFO Research. As explained by Walter Andrus, MUFON has "a very strong tie in their interlocking directorship and membership" with these two groups, so "we ought to deal as a group and work together." Mr. Andrus also outlined in an interview some projects, particularly with computers, in which MUFON is currently engaged. Noting that MUFON is "the world's largest membership UFO organization," Andrus thinks its "future looks very, very bright."

The symposium's final presentation, "Setting the UFO Agenda," was given by attorney Robert Blechman, who serves as MUFON's legal advisor and Connecticut State Director. As a lawyer, Blechman argued that there was sufficient evidence to prove that some UFOs are "somebody else's spaceships." Being this the case, he continued, it was up to the UFO community to "set the agenda" and take a new vigorous approach to pressure the Government release of UFO information through a professionally-orchestrated media publicity campaign.