

WHO'S UFO COVERUP WAS THIS, ANYWAY?

A Review by Robert R. Young

"Reality programming" - in which the television audience gets to participate - has become a specialty of the Fox Television Network (Sheaffer, 1988). On October 14, 1988 the genre soared into the stratosphere with "UFO Coverup - Live!" from Washington, D.C. How something like this got on the air over a reported 134 television stations in the U.S., Canada and New Zealand will probably remain the greatest unsolved UFO mystery of 1988.

Some of America's most far out UFOlogists were among those showcased for two full hours against a handful of skeptics. There were live satellite "bridges" to a Moscow flying saucer buff and to UFO sighters assembled in Florida. Bizarre revelations were alleged by self-described U.S. Government "intelligence agents" about "saucer crashes", "guest aliens" and UFO bases in the Southwestern U.S. The audience could participate via telephone with their own UFO sightings and vote for or against a Congressional investigation. Surprise: an investigation was demanded by a margin of almost eight to one!

At times, the show was a real rip! Actor/host Mike Farrel was sometimes seen struggling to keep a straight face, and the sprinkling of clips from many old 1950s sci-fi thrillers was an absolute delight. I sometimes had the feeling that the program's producers, Seligman Productions, might have thought the show would pass for a spoof and that a tongue-in-cheek presentation of these old films was added to give "balance", rather than some no-nonsense explanations. My sense of humor deserted me later when a teacher friend told me in frustration about wasting valuable classroom time for two weeks afterward answering students' credulous questions about the program.

The UFO reports: In two full hours, minus commercial breaks, the total time allotted to the viewpoints of skeptics was 400 seconds. Many old classics solved for decades were among the 48 UFO incidents included on the show. Only 11 incidents, all photographic hoaxes, were described by the program as having been solved. This ignores the fact that most UFOs are misperceptions and panders to the view that unless it's a hoax, it must be real (Condon, p 521-522; Hendry, p 22). Three more were exposed by the skeptics interviewed.

The remaining 34 sightings were presented as unsolved mysteries by the program, including 12 which have been solved - some as long ago as 1947; 15 were uninteresting reports of lights in the sky, etc., with possible explanations, and three were "abductions" probably generated by UFO investigators employing hypnosis to fill in details of "missing time" (Baker; Klass, 1981; Hilgard; Rosenberg, et. al.). Two more were Soviet

"entity" sightings which, if they are like the thousands of such reports worldwide over the past 40 years, exist only in the minds of the witnesses. The remaining two episodes were bizarre "entity" stories by disguised figures claiming to be "intelligence agents". Some coverup!

The litmus test: Former President Jimmy Carter was quoted at the beginning of the show as saying he doesn't doubt UFO stories because he has seen one. The program never explained that Carter's UFO was identified 12 years ago as the planet Venus by investigator Robert Shaeffer (1977; 1981). Six other witnesses saw nothing unusual and Carter was later nine months in error as to the date of the incident, delaying its solution. Some researchers even consider mention of the Carter UFO as a "litmus test." Any writer or investigator who mentions it as an unexplained mystery has done practically nothing to check his or her facts.

The Misrepresentations: My interest was piqued when three "classics" solved more than 35 years ago were presented with what seemed to be film footage of distant moving lights in the sky. I call these the "blue pictures" because of the obvious daylight or twilight sky background. "With all the UFO sightings over the years in America," the narrator declared, "the logical question is: If they really exist, why don't they visit the White House? And then, there they were - all of a sudden, on July 26, 1952." (The Washington sightings had actually begun one week earlier, on the night of July 19/20, 1952.) At this time, a "blue" film sequence showed a group of small white objects with a big arrow pointing toward them as the narration continued, "The Air Force tried, and failed, to intercept up to a dozen UFOs in the sky over the White House."

Since this famous case involved nighttime radar and visual sightings (Condon, p 158), where did these pictures come from? It seems that during this segment of the program and another on the tragic 1948 accident which killed Air Force pilot Thomas Mantell as he chased a high altitude research balloon (Ruppelt, p 56), two completely unrelated 1950s films of "saucers" were used. One, the 1952 Tremonton, Utah, movie, was shown to have probably been birds more than 20 years ago (Condon, p 425; plate 31), and the other, the 1950 Great Falls, Montana, film, was identified later as two planes which landed nearby minutes later (Condon, p 415; plate 27).

When I realized what had been done, I thought of my science teacher friend. How many teachers, deluged with questions from their students, could be expected to know that the footage used by this program when describing the Mantell episode was actually filmed more than two years before and 1,700 miles away from the incident it was purported to show? Is Thomas Mantell's tragic death - even 41 years later - really "fair game" for a spoof?

If one is charitable and assumes that the use of one of these films might have been an honest mistake by the program's researchers or editors, what should we conclude when both film clips - probably the two most widely shown and talked about "saucer" films of all time - were coincidentally used in exactly the same way?

Ignoring the obvious: After reviewing the bizarre Cash-Landrum incident which has been used in an attempt by Betty Cash to get the U.S. Government to pay for her cancer treatment, two hypotheses were presented as all that is left: a secret U.S. Government craft or an Alien craft. The possibility of a hoax, as has been pointed out by skeptic Philip J. Klass (1982), was never considered a third alternative.

You've got to be kidding department: In the segment with Intruders author Bud Hopkins and his abductees (Klass, 1987), often recruited with notices in his UFO books, hypnotist Dr. Rima E. Laibow actually states that abductees, "Don't want fame, money or publicity." Right. That's why they're on TV.

When life follows art: A major feature of the program was the Gulf Breeze, Florida UFO incidents (Sheaffer, 1989). The program stated that they had, "Assembled a whole town full of people," who had seen a UFO, but it turned out that only 153 of the town's 6,000 residents made the claim. All of this started with anonymous UFO pictures taken by someone named "Ed" and published in the local weekly newspaper. Why is it that even though, "Most of Gulf Breeze really believes Ed's story and his photographs," according to the newspaper editor who first published the pictures, "Ed" remains in the background?

A Jet Propulsion Laboratory photo interpreter, Dr. Robert Nathan, then showed how some pictures seem to have been faked. If the first pictures which appeared in the paper were hoaxes, what does that tell us about later reports by folks who said their UFOs were, "Just like the pictures in the paper"? Does life follow art? When it comes to getting in on UFO excitement, it often does. It also seems that art follows life. "Ed" is reportedly working on a book about his pictures and experiences. I wonder whether he will reveal his identity at that time so that we may judge his credibility?

The Moscow connection: A segment had Soviet newsman and UFO fan Sergei Bulontsov reciting his favorite Russian UFO stories. Later, NASA engineer James E. Oberg, author of several books on the Soviet space program, identified one as a secret Soviet military space shot. He has suggested that the government controlled press, there, may deliberately foster UFO stories to hide the facts (Oberg). Bulontsov also mentioned the 1908 explosion at Tunguska as if it were a mystery. Most western and Soviet scientists now think it was a comet or large meteor (Sky & Telescope). Abnormal Radiation found in trees by one early study is now thought to have been caused by unannounced Soviet nuclear

weapons tests (Oberg). During a brief "rebuttal" by two skeptics and a NASA representative at the end of the program, Oberg pointed to the irony this segment created for the program. Whose "UFO coverup" was this supposed to be, anyway?

The "crashed saucer" fiasco: It is not surprising that this tired old story of a 1947 Roswell, New Mexico, "saucer crash" was included. Program participants William L. Moore and Stanton Friedman have been trying to prove the wild assertions made in Moore's book (written with Charles Berlitz), The Roswell Incident (Grosset and Dunlop, 1980). The outrageous claims made in this book have been thoroughly exposed in the pages of this journal (Sheaffer, 1981; Klass, 1986). The original incident involved a weather calibration balloon from nearby White Sands atomic bomb site (Schumack). The book seems to be a regurgitation of a 1950 tale by Hollywood columnist Frank Scully in one of the first American UFO books, Behind the Flying Saucers (Henry Holt, 1950). The story was shown in 1952 to be a hoax and later the reliability of the two sources of much of Scully's information was demonstrated when they were convicted in an unrelated confidence scheme (Sheaffer, 1981; Cahn; Klass, 1986; Gelatt).

The "MJ-12 documents" Described by the program as proof of the Moore-Friedman claims, the so-called "MJ-12" documents were found to have "problems", according to a 1987 study by the National Archives - a detail not mentioned by the show. Critics from the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal have called them "clumsy counterfeits" and "One of the most deliberate acts of deception ever perpetrated" (Klass, 1987-1988). One survey failed to find a single UFOlogist, other than Moore and Friedman, who thinks the documents are authentic (Klass, 1988).

The anonymous informants: The words "TOP SECRET" appeared prominently across the screen when two disguised figures unimaginatively code named "Condor" and "Falcon" told their tales. Some of this "top secret" information, about the supposed inner workings of the Air Force Project Blue Book investigation, was available 30 years ago to any kid who read pulp flying saucer books (Ruppelt). This was probably the most bizarre segment of the program, reaching a climax of juvenile excitement when "Falcon" announced in an electronically disguised voice that the aliens' favorite snack is strawberry ice cream!

This has apparently set off an entire new sub-field of UFO research. According to an announcement in the May, 1989 MUFON Journal, the official publication of America's largest surviving flying saucer club, investigators are urged to send in abductees' details of any recipes they have exchanged with their captors. We are assured that this "prosaic" field of research can give us information about the digestive systems of the extraterrestrials. The lack of knowledge of biology and medicine - let alone common sense - displayed in the assumptions

Hopkins and Laibow. But, if the history of the past 40 years of UFOlogy is any indication, they will not produce one scintilla of evidence for the existence of a single flying saucer or alien visitor, only more television programs like this one.

Two more UFO programs are reportedly in the works for the fall 1989 television season including one by Curtis M. Brubaker who is listed as "supervising producer" for this silly show.

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underlying these "research" efforts only tell us how far down the pseudoscience path UFOlogy has traveled.

If each and every step of this 42 year old hoax has been exposed, is this unsupported testimony really proof of a "UFO coverup"? Or is it just more evidence that these leading members of the pro-UFO movement, more and more desperate as time goes on, are engaged - some of them perhaps unwittingly - in a coverup of their own?

Flying saucer evangelism: Red Lion, Pennsylvania, based flying saucer evangelist Robert D. Barry, who believes angels pilot some UFOs, made a cameo appearance on the special. He showed an uninteresting series of film clips totalling three seconds of a nocturnal light made in 1975 at Carman, Manitoba, in an obvious bid to have it accepted as one of the certified miracles of the UFO believers. Barry made the claim that the final frames show the UFO accelerating in 1/16 second to more than 30,000 miles per hour and disappearing in a flash which lit up the horizon.

Canadian amateur astronomer Chris Rutkowski tipped me off that a copy of the film in his possession shows both UFO images, before and after the "jump", to be on the same key frame. I then examined each frame of the pictures closely and discovered unmistakable evidence that: 1) the film had been copied at one-half its claimed speed; 2) a splice on a 1/2 speed copy at the key frame could wholly account for the object's appearance; 3) the "flash" did not light up the horizon, was simultaneously in a different part of the picture than the "UFO" image and could have been caused by a light leak (an explanation offered long ago by Canadian UFOlogist Ed Barker), and 4) incredibly, the "disappearance" of the UFO quite obviously was caused by the end of the film!

Later, in a "special report" on his weekly "ET MONITOR" show on WGCB-TV in Red Lion, Pennsylvania, where Barry mixes NASA films and space slides with UFOria and bible quotes, he described the atmosphere of the October 14 telecast in the "heavily guarded" studio. According to Mr. Barry, who seems to believe just about everything anyone has ever told him about flying saucers, guards were needed because of the "sensitive" nature of the proceedings. He described how some participants gathered the next day to celebrate the birthday of the show's producer. And well they should have celebrated, because the program was a dream come true for the outer fringes of the UFO movement, propelling Barry, Friedman, and Moore into the stratosphere of UFOdom.

According to Mr. Barry, phone operators during the October show took more than 67,000 calls from people who claimed to have seen UFOs, including more than 4,000 folks who uncovered their own darkest UFO secret - that they, too, have been abducted by aliens from flying saucers! Leads like that will provide years of "hard data" for UFO investigators like Barry, Friedman, Moore,

2nd clip
(1/2 reduction)

Figure 2

← 23, 24 →
← 22 →
doubles in size
2nd object

"flash"

23, 24

Figure 3

1st clip:

(actual size on screen)

"Trailer"
dim, white(?)



23, 24

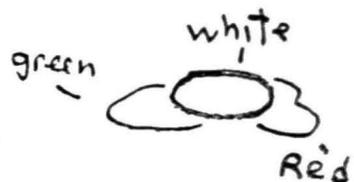
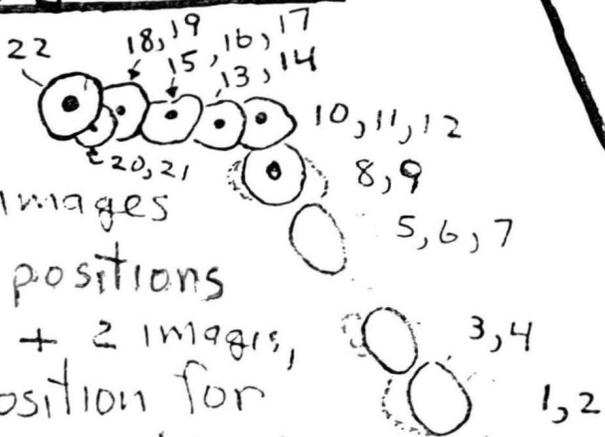


Figure 1



22 images

10 positions

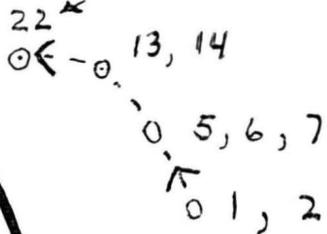
+ 2 images,

1 position for
upper object

and "flash"

24 total "images" and
11 positions

"flares"



1st object

motion of object

#1 image # 22 only appears once

10) "...That's why this film is good. You can at least get an idea that the reports are real reports - it's a real UFO..." That people near Carman, Manitoba, saw many lights in the sky in 1975 seems not to be in question. If in fact this film even represents what was observed by the eyewitnesses, which is in doubt as indicated above, it ~~doesn't seem to offer any proof for~~ ~~whatsoever~~ of the existence of a "real UFO" (Hartmann, 1969).

cannot

UFO lecturer Robert D. Barry has recently claimed that a "clamp" has been put on the continued availability of this film, that, "They told them not to release the film...I guess it was classified." Mr. Barry followed this by stating, somewhat ominously, that, "The National Security Agency and NASA each has a copy of this film." Mr. Barry never told his college audience what he told me in a November 1989 letter: those two agencies had copies of the film because the station had sent them copies.

If the film was classified, why wouldn't the U.S. or Canadian governments make an effort to prevent its display or get control of all copies? Mr. Barry never explains or says who "they" were. There are a lot of reasons for this film not to be available any longer, including possible embarrassment over the superficial inquiry originally given to the film, as outlined above.

This film can not be used as credible evidence for the existence of a "real UFO".

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April 4, 1989

Mr. John Haines
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CANADA

Dear Mr. Haines:

This may seem like a strange subject, but please bear with me for a moment in the interest of rational thought over myth.

On October 14, 1988 there was a two-hour television program carried on the Fox Network over 134 stations in Canada, the U.S. and New Zealand, "UFO COVERUP - LIVE!" The program included a short clip of a light in the sky taken by a cameraman for CK1-TV near Carman, Manitoba on May 13, 1975. The clip was narrated on the Fox program by Robert D. Barry.

Recently the film was shown here at a public lecture by Mr. Barry at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania. Being a graduate of the college, I attended with some members of our society. Seeing that we were in attendance, Mr. Barry allowed no questions afterwards - normally a major part of his presentations. (He has what is probably the world's only weekly TV program devoted to UFOs on a nearby religious television station, WCB-TV, Red Lion, Pennsylvania.) We had, after the October 14 telecast, asked to examine the film (See the enclosed letter). After providing him with dates and lining up a professional photographer and darkroom technician, Barry never responded to our letter - even though he had offered to cooperate.

At the recent lecture Mr. Barry stated that the "Winnipeg Astronomical Society was impressed with the film", or words to that effect. I am writing to you folks, and the Manitoba Astronomical Society, as well as CK1-TV and the planetarium for more information about this incident.

Can you help? Does anyone in your group remember the Carman incidents and this film, in particular? Is Mr. Barry's characterization of your group's response (if he means your group) accurate?

THE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF HARRISBURG, PA, INC.
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Member of: The Astronomical League ★ AAVSO ★ ALPO ★ IOTA

Mr. Haines page two

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P. 123, 124
)

What is your assessment of the Carman UFO incidents 1 1/2 years later?

Any assistance you could provide would be very helpful. Particularly valuable would be any newspaper clippings about a recollection of these incidents or the film. However, by no means take any valuable observing time on this one!

Thank you for any assistance or thoughts you can provide. Also included is a review of the Oct. 14 telecast for your enjoyment!

Clear skies,

Bob Young

Robert R. Young
A.S.H. Education Chairman

(717) 234-4616

Encl. Barry letter
Review of "UFO COVERUP - LIVE" broadcast

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