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3-UFO (SCHEDULED FEATURE)

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Harvard's UFO expert probed over alien abduction theory

By Gene Emery

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts (Reuter) - Even by the sometimes eccentric standards of his colleagues on the teaching staff at Harvard, Dr John Mack, is an oddity.

Mack, a psychiatrist attached to Harvard's prestigious medical school, believes millions of humans may have been abducted by space aliens. His work is being investigated by a panel appointed by the dean of the medical school -- a rare and uncomfortable position for a tenured professor.

This week Mack, breaking a long silence, agreed to take questions from reporters on a conference call. He seemed to be a man wrestling with two parallel universes.

While admirers have compared his voyage into the realm of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) with that of Columbus, critics are raising serious questions about his methods for treating people who believe they have been kidnapped and subjected to experiments by sometimes-hostile aliens.

Asked if he has paid a price for exploring a topic many people regard as just plain kooky, Mack responded: "absolutely." The cost, he said, has come in "energy, time, money, attack and criticism. On the other hand, it's been worth it because I think it's contributed to opening people's minds to some shift in consciousness."

In many ways, these are the best and the worst of times for the talented Harvard professor, who won a 1977 Pulitzer Prize for his biography of T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia).

His hardcover bestseller "Abductions: Human Encounters with Aliens" recently released in paperback has already put him on virtually every major U.S. talk show. And he is the man of the moment among UFO enthusiasts because his Pulitzer prize and Harvard credentials have lent an air of credibility to beliefs and theories long shunned by academia and the serious scientific community.

But Mack is also frequently the butt of jokes and derision -- none of which has done Harvard's image any good. For example, a lengthy article on Mack in the Boston Globe last year bore the headline "E.T. phone Harvard."

And one alleged abductee counseled by Mack turned out to be a writer working undercover, who told Time magazine she had fooled Mack into believing that, while aboard a UFO in 1962, she had met President John Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during the Cuban missile crisis.

After the deception was revealed, Mack responded by suggesting that the woman may have been abducted by aliens after all and later tried to suppress the experience.

Harvard's secret probe of Mack's activities surfaced last month after one of his former lawyers distributed a letter to UFO supporters warning that the university was trying to "silence" Mack. The university has refused all comment on the investigation, but it is reportedly concerned that Mack encourages his patients to believe they have been abducted by extraterrestrials when there may well be perfectly valid psychological diagnoses of their problems.

Mack disagrees. "The psychological approaches to this have

been proven pretty solidly bankrupt for about 25 years," he said.

Asked in an interview to cite a single, compelling case that might convince doubters, Mack declined, saying skeptics can always poke holes in a legitimate case.

He cited the example of UFO photographs taken in Gulf Breeze, Florida. Skeptics branded the pictures a hoax after a UFO model was found hidden in the photographer's attic and a young neighbor told how he helped the photographer make the pictures. Mack contends that the model was "planted" and the youth "was put up to it by his father to do this as a scam."

Mack believes the alien abductors are from another dimension. That would explain how the extraterrestrials can defy known physical laws, like passing through walls. "A phenomenon like this that apparently originates in another dimension -- a parallel universe, whatever you want to call it -- and shows up in our physical world and has physical effects doesn't yield to the demand" for tangible evidence, he said.

He also thinks the aliens are trying to send us a message.

"The fact of the matter is that we have 15 to 20 years before the psychological, moral, physical, and environmental collapse of the Earth as a living entity becomes altogether a reality. This is scientific, predictable fact if you just move the clock ahead from what's going on now," he said.

Undeterred by Harvard's growing unease with his work and reputation, Mack is determined to keep pushing his message, if only because he is convinced his work helps abductees.

"There are hundreds of thousands, if not millions of these individuals in this country alone," he said. "So from the point of helping the people, I think it's been worthwhile."

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