

# The Minnesota UFO Conference

by Geoff Olson

It was a chilly night in Minnesota, the North Star state -- home to the sitcom Mary Tyler Moore and the rock star Prince (or the unpronounceable whatsis he calls himself now).

And there I was sitting in a hotel room in St. Paul with Glen Campbell, watching the X-Files.

Really.

This, however, was not the Glen Campbell who sings Rhinestone Cowboy for his supper. This was the anti-secrecy activist Glen Campbell, whose investigations touch peripherally on the topic of flying saucers.

The mainstream media offers us a smorgasbord of choices on the question of UFO reports. There's the pop culture interpretation: they're the stuff of supermarket tabloids, about as reliable as Elvis sightings. Or the anthropological view: they're millennial fantasies of otherworldly contact. And then there's the most intriguing interpretation of all: a small percentage of the reports involve real, technological craft not originating from earth.

A number of academics from across North America gathered recently to present papers on the evidence for UFOs. It was the Science Museum of Minnesota's second annual conference on The Science and Politics of UFO Research, held at the Radisson Hotel in St. Paul. Moderated by Seattle information science writer Terry Hansen, the event was a sober litany of anomalous radar reports, photographs, and video footage from around the world.

Is there a government cover-up? Those in attendance were in consensus that the American intelligence community knows far more than what they're willing to admit on the topic of UFOs. In particular, rumours of recovered alien technology in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 have convinced many "ufologists", that the smoking gun -- or guns -- is now warehoused somewhere in the United States. Glen Campbell, however, is more concerned with what UFO rumours "say about us" than they do with any purported craft and their pilots: his interest is more of the "human parade" that attends the acrimonious UFO controversy. Unlike the scientists in attendance, Campbell's in this mostly for the pop culture angle.

Campbell -- known on the Internet as Psychospys -- is a balding 36 yr. old former software developer who makes his home in Las Vegas, ninety miles due south of a top-secret military test facility out in the Nevada desert. Known to the locals as Dreamland, Area 51, and Groom Lake, the very existence of the test area is denied by the US government, even though it's the size of Connecticut.

In 1992 Campbell sold his shares in the Boston-based software firm he worked for, and headed out west to investigate the strange rumours buzzing around the mysterious area, where US stealth technology is tested. Campbell has been a civilian fly in the official ointment ever since, drawing public attention to the quasi- illegal land grabs by the Nevada military. The result has been that both he and Area 51 have received coverage in everything from tabloid TV to the New York Times.

(Those with access to the World Wide Web will find Campbell's adventures and misadventures with the base security forces in the electronic pages of his newsletter, The Groom Lake Desert Rat. Point your browser to The Area 51 Research Center.)

Stories from the Nevada desert are legion of craft performing impossible aeronautical maneuvers, and technology that's literally "out of this world". Campbell's heard it all, and is familiar with the more enthusiastic element that comes calling to the fringes of the not-so-secret base: those who see extraterrestrial landings in signal flares and landing jets.

Campbell - a sardonic observer of human folly, with a Pythonesque sense of humour - has long taken the UFO folklore that has accreted around Area 51 with a grain of salt. So I found it surprising to find Campbell entertaining "extreme

possibilities" when I met with him.

Sitting cross-legged on his hotel bed, with The X Files' Scully and Mulder debating in the background, Campbell soberly told me, and a few others, a tale that would test the credulity of any reporter.

Campbell has published the testimony of a man who he will only identify as "Jarod 2" -- an retired 70 year old mechanical engineer who claims to have worked at an unidentified facility from the 1950's into the 1980's. According to Campbell, his source claims to have spent at least a decade working on a top secret project involving flight simulators, which Jarod later learned were based on recovered alien technology. He came forth with his story, says Campbell, only after checking with his old supervisor, who gave Jarod the go ahead to relate some, but not all, aspects of his work.

Not only was alien technology recovered decades ago in New Mexico -- in 1953, according to this particular tale -- but alien bodies as well. Some of which, according to Jarod, were alive.

"Do you believe his story?" I asked Campbell.

"I don't know whether to believe it or not," he replied. "All I know is that its a story from an old guy I'd trust with my life." Campbell adds that he is satisfied by interviewing Jarod's family members that he is genuine.

Not a story that particularly satisfies all the protocols of who, what, when, where. Campbell won't identify Jarod as yet - - citing the unwanted attentions of the fringe element. Only one person has gone on record with a tale similar to Jarod's: the legendary Bob Lazar, who really began the whole Area 51 craze. Lazar has pretty much gone underground, apparently tired of the fickle opinions of the UFO subculture.

On the face of it, the Jarod story sounds ridiculous. Campbell would be the first to agree, and simply shrugs and says his role is simply that of a "collector of stories", a sort of postmodern folklorist. He remains resolutely agnostic about the tales of crashed saucers. "If this civilization is so advanced," he writes in *The Desert Rat*, "why can't they keep their craft in the air? It would be just our luck that the aliens visiting earth are the drunk drivers o f the universe, sent here to complete a 12-step program but taking the wheel again while still in denial."

Another collector of stories is George Knapp, a burly, bearded investigative journalist and Las Vegas television reporter. Knapp has said he has found greater fear in current and retired military personnel with UFO information than any Nevada residents with information on organized crime. I asked Knapp if anyone with a military background has told him anything similar to the Jarod tale. "About twelve people," said Knapp, adding that none of them are willing to go on record.

In his opening remarks to the conference, moderator Terry Hansen drew parallels between the reluctance of establishment science to deal with UFOs and similar diffidence throughout scientific history, giving examples such as meteorites (rocks can't fall from the sky) and continental drift (countries stay put, for good). Add to this a deliberate official program of UFO debunking engineered back in the fifties, Hansen stated, and you have the necessary conditions to create more than an academic chill. It's resulted in a scientific deep-freeze for the UFO topic, although there are recent signs of a thaw. Michael Swords, a professor from Western Michigan University, is chairman of the *Journal of UFO Studies*, the only refereed scientific journal in the field. UFO research is not an area that's especially good for career advancement, Swords said in his talk, and funds are hard, if not impossible, to come by. Richard Haines, a Ph.D. psychologist formerly with NASA, discussed the film evidence for UFOs, as did Bruce Maccabee, an optical physicist with the U.S. Navy.

The second part of the conference dealt with the claims of so-called alien abductions. Here there was less consensus.

David Jacobs is an associate professor of history at Temple University, who wrote his Ph.D. thesis in 1973 on the UFO controversy in America. In recent years he has taken to hypnotically regressing "abductees" to disinter traumatic memories of capture by the "greys", spindly beings with large black eyes. Jacobs is adamant that these are "real events taking place in real time to real people, really ", but others on the panel were more circumspect in their remarks. Don Donderi, an associate professor of psychology from McGill University, spoke of the problem differentiating between the signal and the noise in stories of this kind, but asserted that a portion of the reports aren't reducible to dreams or

fantasies. Richard Haines suggested that UFO entities may not be material beings in a typical sense. UFO researcher Ann Druffel expressed her opinion that the abducting entities are of a more "dimensional" than "extraterrestrial" in nature.

According to the evidence presented at the conference, UFOs -- as in anomalous structured objects -- have been caught on film, radar, and video. Have they also been caught in more overt sense, as well? UFO researchers, like Sysphius, are engaged in an uphill battle, pushing a growing weight of evidence toward some definitive answer.