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## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### In Search of Gordon Cooper's UFOs 3/3

From: "Jerry Cohen" <rjcohen@li.net>  
Date: Tue, 4 Feb 1997 06:36:27 -0500  
Fwd Date: Tue, 04 Feb 1997 09:41:13 -0500  
Subject: In Search of Gordon Cooper's UFOs 3/3

Part three of Mr. Oberg's original essay, which appeared in May 1996, is reprinted from "Errol Bruce-Knapp: UFO UpDates - Toronto". Originally posted on UFO Updates by Dean Kanipe, Area 51 Research Center. (Formatted BBS compatible)

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Date: Sat, 11 May 1996 00:47:24 -0400  
To: ebk@nobelmed.com  
From: Errol Bruce-Knapp <ebk@nobelmed.com>  
Subject: UFO UpDate: In Search of Gordon Cooper's UFOs

incident, and probably permanently.

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A careful reading of his previous testimony indicates that he had ascribed no ominous motives to what he honestly thought had been a "disappearance" of the film. Instead, he had testified, the UFO-related material had probably been gathered together in a storage room and just forgotten. As for deliberate cover-ups, he has always disputed such a notion. "If any UFO information is being suppressed," he told OMNI, "it's certainly not by the U.S.. Air Force, because I was at a high enough level to know about it." That's just the opposite of how many "UFO promoters" portray his feelings..

As to the accuracy of the rest of Cooper's recollection of the "Edwards UFO", eyewitness Gettys had this to say in 1982: "I am amazed that Gordon Cooper said the object landed -- as far as I know, he never even saw it.... His story sounds kind of funny to me." And Gettys -- who still does not believe the "weather balloon" explanation -- was there; Cooper, contrary to legend, played no role at all..

Whatever the true identity of the 1957 Edwards AFB "balloon/UFO", it is clear that the "Cooper UFO legend" is quite inaccurate here. No coverup or information loss was involved. The "UFO" never landed. Cooper had nothing to do with the incident (he was not connected with the film crew in any official capacity, and they had never heard of him) but was only an accidental bystander. But as a certified hero, his persona has been exploited by others who spread the legend for excitement, for ego, or for profit. That's a theme that far predates the space age!

#### THE THIRD HUNT

The most sensational UFO encounter of his life happened to Cooper while he was a fighter pilot in

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Germany in the early 1950s. "Hundreds of UFOs" flew over his airbase near Munich over a two-day period..

In the 1976 production of the long-playing record of UFO-related testimony, Cooper gave the following description of the incident: "A weatherman spotted some strange objects flying apparently fairly high altitude with some large binoculars while tracking a weather balloon, and reported, and before long the entire fighter group was out peering through binoculars at these groups of objects coming over, all heading generally from easterly to westerly direction, and all in very strange patterns resembling fighter formations. But unlike fighters they would stop, almost stop in forward velocity and change ninety degrees sometimes in their flight path. And within the next two or three days we had practically all the fighters we could muster on the base up flying as high as they would climb with guys with binoculars still trying to spot these strange devices flying overhead. We never could get close enough really to pin them down but they were round in shape and very metallic looking."

A year later, during an interview with Spiegel for OMNI, Cooper elaborated: "They were large groups of metallic saucer-shaped vehicles at great altitudes coming over in flier [sic?] formation in various sized numbers and for the greater part of two days these kept coming by. They were in fingertip formation, flights would cross under, back and forth, just the same kind of formations we used in fighter groups. They had the capability of changing directions a little faster than a typical fighter would, stopping, rapid starting, changing directions....".

Another interview in the "National Enquirer" (March 28,1978) gave additional details: "I spent two days trying to get to them. We got as high an altitude as we could, and they were still well above us. Probably twenty or thirty planes, at least, went up after them. F-84 and

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F-86 jets, fairly high-speed jets. The UFOs came over in groups of four, twelve, sixteen, twenty. They came over regularly, at intervals, all day long for two days. They came right over the air base. We could only get to about 45,000 feet, but we did get close enough to see what they looked like. They were actually shaped like saucers. we had no idea whether they were looking at us, or what they were doing. And after two days they simply disappeared."

A search for primary sources was bound to be difficult. The incident was in 1951 (according to Cooper's UN letter in 1978), probably in the summertime. The location was Neubiberg Air Force Base, in a suburb of Munich. The unit was the 525th Fighter Squadron of the 86th Fighter Wing, which was assigned to Europe between 1947 and 1952. Since there were about twenty five aircraft per squadron and the 525th shared the base with the 526th and the 527th, there might have been upwards of a hundred additional witnesses involved, not to mention the inhabitants of the large city nearby..

In 1979 I wrote to contacts in Munich and received a negative reply: "Neither the Munich newspapers nor the police records of that period give any mention of the case", wrote Wolfgang Kuchler of "P.M." magazine. An inquiry to the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, obtained the declassified unit history records for the 86th for the period in question -- and there was no mention of anything remotely similar to Cooper's description..

As a last stab in the dark, I wrote to several Air Force related publications with a request for general information (such publications have special columns for people doing historical research, seeking contact with missing former buddies, or organizing unit reunions). Months passed with no further results.

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A year went by. Then the break came: a letter from John Bonner in Los Angeles, who had flown with Cooper. He had been looking through an old pile of "Air Force" magazines and spotted my letter in the February 1980 issue. On March 10, 1981, he wrote: "Once, while in a large group formation, I spotted a large number of

objects very high above us. I do not think anyone had a chance to climb up to investigate that time. Another time on a Sunday morning two of us were scrambled to intercept a large number of objects coming in from the east. We did not intercept these as they turned back before we got there." In a second letter two months later, in discussing the first sighting, he added, "I felt they were not balloons, stars or debris. I was suspicious of the Soviets. I guess I could not rationalize to myself what I saw." Bonner's descriptions did not tally with Cooper's at all, but he did provide another lead: a unit reunion for the 86th was planned for that very summer in San Antonio..

I immediately contacted the organizers and discussed my research. None of the people could recall the incident but they promised to ask around. On June 5-7, 1981, more than a hundred pilots gathered for the party (many of them had left Neubiberg before, or had arrived after, the date of Cooper's incident). On August 3 I called Colonel "Swede" Larson, the reunion chairman, and asked about my favorite topic. His reply was negative: ~I talked to a few people who might have known, and they couldn't recall the incident. I was there then, and I was a flight commander, but I don't remember anything either."

As a last effort, I wrote letters to two dozen people whose names were listed in a special directory published by the reunion committee and who had been contemporaries of Cooper in the 525th. The directory also contained a reprint of the December 1950 base phone book; recalling Cooper's comment that it had been a weatherman

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who first spotted the objects, I wrote off to every member of the base meteorological staff whose names were listed in that phone book, too. My letters went out across the country and beyond to Guam, Israel, Paraguay, and wherever the veterans of the 86th had dispersed..

The answers trickled in over the passing weeks. Nobody knew what "Coop", as they called their former flying buddy, was talking about (along with frequent testimonials to his honesty and integrity, which have never been in doubt). "I never experienced such sightings," wrote one. "If I had it would be indelibly inscribed in my memory, and I'd be happy to share any such recollections with you." Another former Air Force pilot who later entered the priesthood and became a state bishop wrote, "I recall nothing about any UFOs.... As to what Gordon Cooper saw, I have not the slightest idea." Another: "Absolutely no recall of any such incident."

One wrote: "I was at Neubiberg Air Base from July 1950 to July 1953 as Weather Officer and Detachment Commander. During this time I did not make any unusual sightings that could not be explained as light reflecting from a high-flying weather balloon, or as a lenticular cloud group over the mountains". Another pilot wrote: "I do NOT recall any comments that Gordon Cooper made concerning UFOs -- I was his squadron commander sometime in '51, then got the 86th Fighter Group later, and I never recall even hearing anything along that line.... I'm sure if these UFOs had become a serious subject during my almost 5 years at Neubiberg, I would have remembered something -- and I flew most every day during all those years."

Other veterans of Cooper's unit concurred. "I was a pilot and weather officer at Neubiberg 1948 thru 1951, but I can't recall any reports of these sightings," wrote one. Another pilot, a retired brigadier general, wrote: "No, I am not aware of any UFO sightings. I'm fairly

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certain that I would have heard about it." Another: "I was at that time 'A' flight commander and was therefore 'in the know' of most of the flying activities in that area. I flew at least 25 hours each month. The flying saucer report made reference to by Cooper is unknown to me." Another: "I never heard mention of it before. At that time I was Wing Communications Officer ... If true it was one of the best kept secrets!" The base weather officer at the time wrote: "I draw a complete blank: can remember no facts, no discussions -- in fact, not even a rumor." And another Neubiberg veteran flier had absolutely no recall of any such incident."

In all, a total of more than a dozen men had responded to my letter (including commanding officers and weather officers) : their opinions were unanimous that no such event had occurred at Neubiberg..

Cooper, in his first interview with Spiegel for the "Credibility Factor" record, had made a possibly relevant comment. When asked if it hadn't been exciting to return from the UFO chases and compare notes with his fellow pilots, Cooper had replied cautiously, "Yeah, it was [but] I'm not sure we really ever realized the impact of it, at that point in time, really." What Cooper seemed to be saying was that the incident itself seemed hardly memorable when it happened, which would explain why no other witness could remember it thirty years later. But if so, one is forced to ask how accurate can Cooper's own memory be under the same circumstances?.

One more comparison is possible, thanks to yet another freak stroke of luck. During an idle luncheon conversation late in 1982 (four years after I had become interested in researching the case), the talk turned to the topic of UFOs. One retired NASA engineer began to regale his table with an account of UFOs seen by his friend Gordon Cooper (I was at the table, and hadn't even initiated that topic -- what an extraordinary

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coincidence!). All the familiar elements came out, including the "fleets" over several days, the inability of the jets to reach them, and the bafflement and frustration of all the pilots. But two new factors appeared: first, the event was supposed to have happened in the "American Middle West" [later clarified to mean the Rocky Mountains or New Mexico, but NOT California or the "Midwest"], and second, there had been an official explanation provided for the UFOs, an explanation which the pilots had rejected: seed pods. My story teller recounted Cooper's reaction to this explanation: "Seed pods at 50,000 feet!", he described Cooper snorting with derision.

This account was based on a conversation which took place at the NASA installation on Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, in late 1963, more than a decade before Cooper publicly referred to his UFO experiences.

But is THIS version of the account accurate? That question remains open, but at least it shows that Cooper was telling some sort of UFO story privately for years. The account also suggests that Cooper's story has undergone considerable evolution over the years, as well.

So the "fleets of UFOs" story must remain "unsolved", in large part because the story's reliability must be judged highly questionable. The popular version of the legend, placing the action in Germany in 1951, simply cannot have occurred as Cooper has described it -- if the vast majority of the witnesses are to be believed.

#### HINDSIGHTS & INSIGHTS

What can be learned about the UFO world from Cooper's association with and exploitation by it? Several interesting and uncomplimentary conclusions can be reached.

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Through it all, Cooper's behavior has been exemplary. He has been candid in his feelings and curious about UFOs and other topics generally considered "far out", but he has every right to such interests.

This candor and cooperation has been met with exploitation and misrepresentation from UFO promoters and publicists. From Beckley's "Hangar 18" fantasies to the Columbia Pictures Industries false advertisements to Dr. Hynek's explicit endorsements, Cooper has found himself on the receiving end of frauds and fabrications attached to his name. His usefulness to UFO proponents is based on his honest advocacy of serious UFO research (a desire shared by many serious researchers in the field, including myself) and on the UFO stories associated, not always accurately as we have seen, with his name. The image appeared good -- all the more reason for UFO promoters to carefully avoid checking up on the UFO incidents even though (if they paused to think about it) their past experiences

