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In Search of Gordon Cooper's UFOs 1/3

From: "Jerry Cohen" <rjcohen@li.net>
Date: Tue, 4 Feb 1997 06:36:05 -0500
Fwd Date: Tue, 04 Feb 1997 09:38:10 -0500
Subject: In Search of Gordon Cooper's UFOs 1/3

Part one of Mr. Oberg's original essay, which appeared in May 1996, is reprinted from 'Errol Bruce-Knapp: UFO UpDates - Toronto'. It contained the following header from Dean Kanipe.
(Formatted BBS compatible)

From: Area51www@aol.com
Date: Fri, 10 May 1996 23:55:57 -0400
To: ebk@nobelmed.com
Subject: IN SEARCH OF GORDON COOPER'S UFOs

IN SEARCH OF GORDON COOPER'S UFOs
c James Oberg

The attached file is an article written by James Oberg concerning Gordon Cooper's UFO reports. It consists of original research by James and addresses several important points seemingly ignored elsewhere. I submit the file solely for the purpose of providing information to the current discussion on Mr. Cooper. There may be some typos from the scanning, and I request that those be overlooked. I am not responsible for the content of the article, so please do not send comments to me. Those should be directed to the author.

Sincerely,

Dean Kanipe
Webmaster
Area 51 Research Center
Area51www@aol.com
<http://www.ufomind.com>

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IN SEARCH OF GORDON COOPER'S UFOs

=A9 James Oberg

The commercialization of astronauts has certainly been extensive, but one bizarre attempt reached astronomical heights. During the publicity blitz for Columbia Pictures' "Close Encounters of the Third Kind", toy UFO aliens appeared in stores around the world. A plastic model called "Authentic Bendable Extra Terrestrial Figure" even today sits on my desk, his (its?) right hand altered with glue to present the middle finger defiantly in my direction. On the back of the cardboard wrapper originally containing the "authentic" (whatever that meant!) alien was a sensational quotation from two-time space veteran Gordon Cooper.

The passage read: "Intelligent beings from other planets regularly visit our world in an effort to enter into contact with us. NASA and the American government know this and possess a great deal of evidence. Nevertheless, they remain silent in order not to alarm people. I am dedicated to forcing the authorities to end their silence."

Now, astronauts (or cosmonauts, for that matter) are not known to be frequent visitors at the United Nations. When they do come, it is usually to discuss their own space vehicles. But in March 1978, the same Gordon Cooper addressed a UN committee on somebody else's space vehicles: aliens from space were flying to Earth on exploration voyages of their own. The ex-astronaut declared that since it was a planet-wide problem it demanded international attention.

The United Nations maintained a stoic, even embarrassed silence, nonetheless. Part of Cooper's problem might have been that he was visiting under the auspices of the then dictator of Grenada, the madcap "Sir" Eric Gairy. Gairy's excesses and crackpottery, added to his alleged corruption and brutality at home,

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later led to the New Jewel coup-d'etat led by Maurice Bishop, and indirectly to the US intervention five years later.

Since his retirement from the space program two decades ago, Cooper (now in his 60's and an engineering consultant in Los Angeles) has become an outspoken advocate of the reality of UFOs. Personal experiences with UFOs contribute to Cooper's authority as a commentator on the controversial topic. His experiences have literally become legend....

Persistent accounts in some leading UFO books describe a UFO encounter with Cooper's Mercury-9 space capsule in May 1963. In addition, Cooper himself has talked about the disappearance of photographic evidence for a UFO landing at an Air Force Base in California where he had served prior to being picked for spaceflight. And most spectacular of all is his account of "fleets of UFOs" soaring over his Air Force base in Germany, where he began his pilot career in the early 1950s. Clearly, Cooper is a very experienced UFO witness, and a very persuasive one.

Cooper has been quite outspoken about his evaluation of the UFO phenomenon. As early as 1974 (three years after he left NASA) he was being quoted as saying, "People have seen flying saucers at close hand. And in many cases they have been verified on radar. It is ridiculous for anyone to say that they're all completely unreal."

In a letter to the United Nations on occasion of the November 27, 1978 discussion of UFOs, Cooper wrote believe that these extraterrestrial vehicles and their crews are visiting this planet from other planets, which obviously are a little more technically advanced than we are here on earth."

Earlier that same year, Cooper had been on latenight TV's Merv Griffin Show (April 10,1978) when the question

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of UFOs came up. Griffin asked Cooper if he thought any extraterrestrial visitors had "ever been here", and Cooper was explicit in his answer: "Yes, I think they have and are here regularly."

Griffin pushed into an even more sensational area: "There is a story going around, Gordon, that a spaceship did land in middle America, and that there were occupants and that members of our government were able to keep one alive for a period of time.... Is that a credible story?" Again, Cooper didn't waffle. "I think it's fairly credible," he replied candidly, "Apparently from everyone who has been abducted or who's had contact with UFOs, they seem to agree that the occupants are really not that different from what we are."

"I would like to see the time when all qualified people not trying to make a dollar selling some weird and way-out stories could really work together," Cooper told Griffin, "to really properly investigate these types of stories and either refute them or prove them.... I'm rather interested in maybe eventually in the near future putting together a few people of science and engineering, and so on,

to properly investigate this type of thing." Later, in an interview in OMNI magazine (March 1980), he described his preferred research strategy: "I=D5m not really of the school that feels you should go back historically and correlate all the sightings. I think we'll probably find out more by looking harder now and in the future." Elaborating, he also declared, "Very likely we'll find out about them sooner or later, but probably not just by analyzing past sightings."

"I've always been honest about my views on this subject," he added. "Because the astronauts have been so badly misquoted by irresponsible journalists, it's up to each of us to say what he believes in."

Perhaps related to Cooper's complaint about irresponsible journalists, a particularly amazing claim

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was described by paranormal publicist Timothy Beckley in 1980. Citing an interview in the "National Enquirer", Beckley claims that Cooper has revealed that, "There are those connected with our space agency -- NASA -- who (allegedly quoting Cooper) 'have had contact with the creatures on board UFOs', apparently right here on Earth." Beckley publishes several newspapers and magazines, and regularly advertises in the weekly grocery store tabloids.

Cooper's quotation about NASA's "UFO secrets", printed on the back of Columbia Pictures Productions' "alien figure", received widespread circulation. The quotation was subsequently reprinted widely, including in Margaret Sachs' "UFO Encyclopedia" (Perigee Books, G. P. Putnam, 1980), and in an article in the September 30, 1980 issue of the tabloid newspaper "The Star", published under the by-line of America's most respected ufologist, astronomy professor Dr. J. Allen Hynek.

Hynek later admitted he had made a mistake in allowing the newspaper to compile the article from his previous publications while paying him a fee for the use of his name as author -- since he hadn't reviewed the written material prior to publication. Such are the perils of UFO journalism. Cooper, too, was being victimized.

That statement attributed to him was finally too much for ex-astronaut Cooper. In August 1978 he filed suit against Columbia Pictures Industries for false use of his name. The suit sought two million dollars in damages and a "fair percentage of the profits, totaling not less than \$750,000, for the use of his name and reputation. Part of the problem was that the quotation, according to Cooper, was entirely counterfeit: "The quotation attributed to me by Columbia Pictures is entirely a fabrication", he wrote in 1978, calling it fakery".

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Yet in 1980 when a new version of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" was released, Columbia Pictures used the same counterfeit quotation again in its promotional literature! And the lawsuit disappeared into the bowels of L.A. law courts, its resolution never disclosed by either party.

Despite his often involuntary association with such activities, the quality of Cooper's testimony has been universally recognized. His integrity, intelligence, and technical competence have never been questioned. If a man like Gordon Cooper, a veteran of travel through outer space, can believe in UFOs and can publicly testify to that effect, ordinary citizens are bound to conclude that there must really be something to the subject after all.

Indeed, anyone who ventures to raise questions about the validity of Cooper's UFO experiences runs the risk of appearing to want to smear a genuine American hero with the cinema-certified "Right Stuff" or UFO proponents, Cooper's accounts were too useful to risk solution; for UFO skeptics, Cooper's personal prestige called into doubt the practical value of such research (who wants to look like an unpatriotic iconoclast?). Besides, the stories deal with events several decades in the past, and experience has repeatedly taught the frustrations of attempting to track down clues and leads across such a span of memory-benumbing and records-losing decades.

But the Cooper incidents kept being flaunted in pro- UFO tracts, while the failure of skeptics to "explain" such authoritative and impressive testimony was portrayed as almost an admission of

intellectual incapacity. I kept running into the same questions at lectures and seminars. The "UFO Bulletin" of APRO, a leading American flying saucer group, repeated the challenge in 1981, and editor Gordon Creighton of Britain's "Flying Saucer Review" made the same challenge over a radio debate in 1982. A recent

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major UFO book by Timothy Good ("Above TOP SECRET") endorsed the cases again.

The challenge has appeared in OMNI magazine and in tiny UFO newsletters, in letters and private conversations: "If you skeptics are so smart, how come you can't explain Gordon Cooper's UFOs?" In late 1982, Dr. J. Allen Hynek blasted the British Broadcasting Corporation for its production of "The Case of the UFOs" (aired in the US on NOVA in October 1982) for avoiding any mention of Gordon Cooper's UFO experiences, which Hynek clearly portrayed as genuine and unsolvable. As recently as January 1, 1990, the "Current Affair" tele-tabloid show referred to Cooper's accounts of chasing UFOs in his jet.

I, too, had been interested in researching these stories. Could the Cooper UFOs be accounted for in terms of prosaic phenomena? Were Cooper's published recollections of the incidents, often after decades of hindsight, reasonably accurate? Were there any lessons about contemporary UFO research standards which an analysis of the Cooper cases could define? Those were questions well worth asking. Those were answers well worth seeking.

THE FIRST HUNT

The most famous UFO associated with Cooper's name reportedly occurred on the Mercury-9 space flight in 1963.

By 1967, Frank Edwards gave these details of the event (in *Flying Saucers -- Here and Now!*, Lyle Stuart, New York). To the question, "Who was the first astronaut to see a UFO in orbit?", Edwards responded: "On the record it was Major Gordon Cooper, over Mucnea Tracking Station near Perth Australia, on his final orbit of Earth

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on a night in May of 1963. The object which approached him was also seen by the two hundred persons at the tracking station. It was reported twice on the NBC radio network before Cooper had been picked up by the rescue craft. He was not permitted to comment on it."

Other details appeared in *Is Something Up There* (Dale White, Scholastic Book Services, Doubleday, 1968): "The astronaut radioed the tracking station that he had sighted a greenish object moving east to west. This is contrary to the orbits taken by man-made satellites. Nearly one hundred persons, some of them technicians, saw the UFO appear on the Australian radar."

The story spread as years passed. In 1973, ufologist George D. Fawcett was writing: "The UFO... was seen, recorded and tracked by the Mucnea, Australia, tracking station, where hundreds of technicians and newsmen saw and heard the reports. This was good enough for the experts Dr. J. Allen Hynek and Dr. Jacques Vallee, who (as mentioned earlier) used Fawcett's data (unverified) in their book *Edge of Reality* as follows: "Gordon Cooper reported a greenish UFO with a red tail during his fifteenth orbit. He also reported other mysterious sightings over South America and Australia. The object he sighted over Perth, Australia, was caught on screens by ground tracking stations."

In 1977, Leonard Stringfield's book *"Situation Red - - The UFO Siege!"* (Fawcett Crest) reported further details: "According to a reliable and well-informed Australian businessman who visited my home in October 1975, a luminous green UFO with a red tail, witnessed by hundreds of Australians, flew in the opposite direction to Cooper's spacecraft. During the UFO's overflight, he learned from a military source that it caused an electrical outage at the Dry Creek Tracking Station and at the rocket range in Woomera, including a blotting out of radar. The low-level, football-shaped UFO was also

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witnessed by Australian scientists, and cameramen took sixteen

thousand feet of color movie film of the object. My informant told me that he learned from a military source that the film was sent to Washington, D.C., for evaluation. No jet interceptors were scrambled, because the military feared they might be affected by the powerful force field created by the UFO". Stringfield added that Cooper denied reports "he had seen the UFO during his overflight of Australia".

What purported to be an actual transcript of the astronaut's description of his UFO encounter was published by UFO author Dan Wilson about the same time, in his book *Our Mysterious Spaceship Moon* (Dell, 1976, -- his editor, James Frenkel, assured me that "all the references are checked, within reason", and that Dell lawyers had reviewed the manuscript and determined there was nothing libelous in it). Wilson wrote, "Cooper described the object as being of 'good size', and claimed, 'It was higher than I was. It wasn't even in the vicinity of the horizon...' This is indicated that the bogey (NASA's slang term for UFOs) was not a star or other object, either natural or manmade".

"The important thing to remember," continued Wilson, "is that the incident was seen by all those present at the Mucnea Tracking Station. And this included civilian observers as well as newsmen. In fact the entire incident was reported to the world at the time by NBC News. So something was seen out there -- not fabricated by a UFO writer."

This story must be unraveled in reverse order to the way it developed. Wilson's alleged quotation can be checked first, because he

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