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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Ruppelt, Air Defense & UFOs

From: David Rudiak <DRudiak@aol.com>
Date: Wed, 04 Feb 1998 19:27:24 -0800
Fwd Date: Thu, 05 Feb 1998 02:21:54 -0500
Subject: Re: Ruppelt, Air Defense & UFOs

> >From: jan@cyberzone.net (Jan Aldrich)
> >Date: Sun, 01 Feb 1998 12:34:32 -0800
> >Fwd Date: Tue, 03 Feb 1998 17:17:22 -0500
> >Subject: Re: PROJECT-1947: Ruppelt, Air Defense & UFOs

> >I would add to what was said about Alvarez. He was a supporter
> >of a strong offensive policy. He was an expert on radar and had
> >looked at a number of problems involving radar. He was a Nobel
> >laureate. He was a complete skeptic concerning UFOs.
> >Given all this, he would be "disinclined" to look closely at any
> >UFO evidence presented. He might look at some slightly
> >interesting reports and consider that they might for the moment
> >be puzzling, but he probably would not recommend a big study to
> >look into the possible "air defense implication."Why open a can
> >of worms? He was a support of Teller after all.

> >So I am not saying that Alvarez was dead set against UFOs because
> >he supported Teller, and there is some dark conspiracy here. It
> >is more like:

> > 1) UFOs are a complete waste.

> > 2) Yeah, there might be some momentarily puzzling things
> >here, but nothing to worry about.

> > 3) If we open this up to a larger study, it is a waste of
> >resources and who knows where it would lead or how the other
> >side might use it.

Now here's my two cents about Alvarez. I recently spoke to a technician who used to work at Lawrence Berkeley Lab when Alvarez was the director back in the 1970s. He told me a few things that might give some insight into the man's personality.

He said Alvarez was obviously very bright and enthusiastic, but not very imaginative. His work was mostly derivative. Despite his Nobel, he was a second tier physicist, not among the greats like an Einstein or Fermi or Dirac. What's more, deep down Alvarez knew it (according to my technician source). He could also be very petty. This came out in the way Alvarez apparently relished tearing down people who disagreed with him, especially when he thought they might upstage him.

I remember one such incident from the 1970s when I was a grad student at Berkeley. Berkeley physicist Buford Price thought that maybe he had discovered a magnetic monopole in a heavy cosmic ray track recorded on a glass photographic plate. The magnetic monopole is one of the Holy Grails of physics. If verified, Price had a lock on the Nobel Prize. Before Price had completed his investigation, however, word leaked out and what resulted was sort of the 1970s equivalent of cold fusion.

But getting back to Alvarez, there was no love lost between the two. Alvarez couldn't stand the idea of Price getting the Nobel (Alvarez had also been looking for monopoles), and was determined to discredit Price and his discovery. It wasn't just a scientific controversy; it got very personal as I recall. Eventually Alvarez came up with the alternate explanation of a uranium atom track, and that's where matters stand to this day, the issue unresolved. Price never did get his Nobel or credit for discovering a monopole. (While Alvarez and Price were fighting it out, I remember a graffiti in one of the physics men's rooms about in which of his orifice's Price wished he had a monopole.)

The technician had his own run-in with Alvarez's ego (but didn't seem bitter about it). Also back in the 70's the technician had gotten some national press for a promising invention of his, developed at LBL. He said Alvarez blew his cork, yanked him from the project he had developed, and replaced him with a "real physicist" (who didn't know a damn thing about it). Alvarez apparently couldn't stand the fact that a "mere technician" had upstaged his group of PhD scientists by getting written up in the press.

What this amounts to are the usual personality ingredients we have all seen in the petty, arrogant, and self-righteous "scientific" UFO debunker. Alvarez in this respect sounds very similar to other scientist debunkers like Menzel or Sagan.

I also asked the technician if he thought Alvarez could have been a "spOOk" scientist, perhaps working for the government on secret or black projects. (I was thinking about Alvarez's involvement with the Robertson Panel.) He said he didn't think so.

Take this hearsay for what it's worth.

David Rudiak

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