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## UNIDENTIFIED FRAUDULENT OBJECTS

<http://www.skepticfiles.org/ufo2/ufraudoo.htm>

"UFOs are real, all right, - It's some of IFOs that are phony"

By James E. Oberg

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The first contact between human beings and alien civilizations is a major topic in science fiction. It has been a fruitful theme for stories and novels about Martians, Moties and manifold other creatures. Many observers today believe that such contact has already taken place on earth, or in space near the earth. The "extraterrestrial hypothesis" of UFOs claims that they are space craft from other worlds.

Hardly a UFO book or movie fails to point out that "astronauts have seen them too." If the tens of thousands of earthbound witnesses and photographs may be questionable, at least (so these advocate maintain) the space reports are reliable. The "astronaut sighting" provide a challenging controlled case study in UFO methodology. A researcher should be able to determine all the variables, obtain extensive transcripts and verified photographs, and observe the behavior of previous researchers.

I have been interested in space mysteries for a long time. This phenomenon was intriguing, but I refrained from serious work because I felt certain that the field has already been adequately covered by "UFO believers" and the University of Colorado (Condon Committee) investigators. My unique background in computer science, Air Force operations, astronautics, and historical research did not seem to promise any additional insights. But after an initial investigation this year, I changed my mind. After three further months of intensive effort, I came to some startling and eye-opening conclusions, conclusions never seen in print. Compelling evidence has accumulated to convince me of the truth of the following:

1. There are no "astronaut UFO sightings." All reported cases have been readily identified as entirely prosaic events.
2. Previous research efforts have been conducted with individuals clearly lacking the proper credentials, experience and insight to penetrate the "mystery."
3. A number of specific individuals in this country and overseas have been the main source of the persistent published reports of "astronaut UFO sightings", in absolute variance with the facts known to themselves but withheld from the general public. Evidence has been altered, omitted, or fabricated to support myth.

My research furthermore revealed carelessness, gullibility, and distortion on the part of respected UFO research groups such as MUFON, APRO, NICAP, and CUFOS. One may certainly hope that these groups, and the hundreds of hardworking, dedicated, and honest members of their investigation teams, have been more careful when it comes to investigating terrestrial sightings.

What is the evidence? Always realizing that it is impossible to "prove a negative", what can I prove about the "best cases" of the "astronaut UFO sightings" genre? Is there a slightest suggestion that anything mysterious and unexplainable is involved?

The best cases of Gemini program (1965-1966) were described by Dr. Franklin Roach of the Condon Committee as a "challenge to the analyst". Despite the man's impressive experience with the space program, one can easily see the gaps which challenged his own powers of analysis. It is also clear that the UFO groups eagerly accepted the "endorsement" of the skeptical Condon Report which otherwise was seen by many to have been a whitewash of the government's UFO activities.

Roach, now living in Hawaii, listed the sightings on Gemini-4 and Gemini-7 as practically unsolvable. Other researchers have compiled even longer lists, going back to Mercury-7 (a "domed saucer" in a photograph), Mercury-9 ("radar sightings of a visual target"), Gemini-1 ("four objects tracked by radar for one orbit"), early X-15 flights in 1962, and later Gemini flights including Gemini-10, Gemini-11, and Gemini-12 ("four objects, not stars"). During Apollo, reports were published about Apollo-11 and Apollo-12 being chased on the way to the moon, while "APRO Bulletin" had to caution its readers that there was no reason to suspect that UFOs had shot down Apollo-13. Skylab photographed more UFOs, including a paddle-shaped object of immense size, a strange reddish framework, and a cigar shaped object which has just buzzed an Army helicopter in Ohio. These, at least, published reports.

(As with terrestrial reports, an observer may be inclined to agree that "most may be explainable", but that a hard core of cases (perhaps 20%, perhaps 5%, perhaps 1%) are authentic. UFO evidence, unlike the proverbial chain which is as strong as its weakest link, is oddly enough as weak as its strongest link. What this means is that disproving a single case, or almost all cases, proves nothing; there is always one more case which might be a true UFO. To demolish that possibility, a skeptic must take what the believers consider to be the best case, and show just how good they really are. Up until my research, not a single investigator had done that. After my research (to be published in excruciating detail), the "astronaut UFO cases" will never be the same.

The Gemini-4 of Major James McDivitt is by large the "best" case of the class during fifteen years of Soviet and American manned space flights. A photograph, allegedly taken by the astronaut, has been picked by NICAP as one of the four best photographs ever taken anywhere. The retired astronaut has appeared on numerous TV talk shows, was invited to participate in a 1976 Playboy magazine UFO panel, and recently taken part in a long playing UFO record album.

Early on the two-man four day mission in June 1965, McDivitt reported seeing and photographing a cylindrical object with an arm sticking out. It was apparently on collision course with the capsule. Ed White, the co-pilot, was asleep at the time. Back on earth, NASA asked the Air Force to check with the North American Defense Command (NORAD) space radars in Colorado to see what other satellites were near enough to Gemini-4 to account for the sighting. A computer run came up with a list of dozen objects, mostly debris. One large satellite, called Pegasus-3, was about a thousand miles away at the time of sighting, but might have accounted for the report. But it was too far away for the space pilot to have seen the details which he described.

Upon returning to earth, McDivitt searched through all the films taken on flight. He could not find the ones he took of the object, a fact which some observers found suspicious. Shortly thereafter, a photograph appeared in print (I was never able to find out who was first with this

accomplishment) which purported to be "McDivitt's UFO". It showed an oval blob of light with a smear over it. NASA said it was a glare of a window bolt and smudges on the glass window.

My own search leads me to the inescapable conclusion that McDivitt had caught a glimpse of his own Titan-2 second stage booster which was in a nearby orbit.

This hypothesis sounds trivial and laughable at first (at least those were my own impressions), with the major objection being the question of why it took so long to prove such an obvious answer. However, many facts have never been added up, and there have been few people willing to either dig up the facts or to do the adding up. NASA was not concerned McDivitt was a UFO celebrity, and the UFO groups already had an "official endorsement" of the case and were not interested in further investigation of what they rightly considered one their most persuasive cases.

Here are the relevant facts, never published together:

1. McDivitt had been maneuvering around the booster early in the flight in the world's first attempt at a space rendezvous. He broke off the attempt after an unknown amount of successes when the capsule fuel ran low.
2. McDivitt continued to see the booster on subsequent revolutions when the orbits of the two satellites (which were nearly parallel) crossed.
3. McDivitt saw his UFO at the same point in the Gemini orbit where he had last seen the booster several hours before.
4. Mc Divitt had earlier seen the booster at least once but failed to recognize it due to sun glare. He reported an "unknown object" to Mission Control, only to correct himself moments later when he recognized the characteristic beer-can shape of the booster, metal straps and insulation hanging off it.
5. At the news conference a few days after the flight, McDivitt clearly stated that the UFO looked just like a rocket booster.
6. McDivitt saw the UFO through small Gemini window (about the angular size of this magazine at arms length - 25cm) badly smeared by Ed White's attempt to clean them during his walk in space the previous day.
7. The object drifted across the field of view while the capsule was in slow tumble, and then was lost in the glare of the SUN.
8. McDivitt's observation that the object seemed at first to have been on collision course can only mean one thing to a pilot: it held a constant "angle off", or relative angle of the line of sight. This clearly implies an object in parallel orbit.
9. McDivitt later complained to flight surgeons that his eyes were very red and teary at this part of flight. "I didn't think I was going to be able to hack it", McDivitt reported to earth the following day. A large accidental urine spill a few hours before the sighting had not helped his eyesight.
10. The booster did remain in orbit somewhere for at least another day before burning up in the atmosphere, according to NORAD figures.

11. NORAD had been asked to plot an intersection of the Gemini orbit and "other satellites", which was taken to mean "other previously-launched satellites". The booster, which was in a nearby orbit, was NOT on the list of objects supplied to NASA.

12. McDivitt was the first astronaut to attempt to make visual range estimates while in flight. Many of his readings were off by a factor of ten; his experience helped later crewmen be more accurate.

13. Gemini-4 was the first long American space mission, and the first on which photography was attempted on large scale. Exposure settings in space were uncertain, and a very large percentage of Gemini-4 photographs were badly exposed. Many photographs were apparently taken with the lens cap still in place.

14. McDivitt completely disassociated himself from the "McDivitt UFO" photograph, and reiterates his contention that he never saw anything on film which looked like his UFO. Since he had copies of the film manifests and log, he was able to determine that he had been shown all film exposed on the flight.

15. McDivitt was never particularly impressed by the UFO, while taking advantage of the opportunities his testimony afforded. He still maintains that it was probably some man-made object.

Where do these facts leave us when we consider them all? What do they add up to? Where do they leave "McDivitt UFO"? UFO researchers and writers have been repeating this story for more than a decade without many of these fifteen facts. Where does that leave your trust in them? Clearly the main mystery is why and how this case ever achieved the notoriety and fame which it did. The mystery is how a major "anti-UFO" study can leave it unsolved, and how a UFO group can pick an overexposed, smudged photograph as one of the four "best UFO photographs ever taken."

(Actually, I agree: the photograph is a lousy shot and proves nothing, but it still does qualify as one of the best ever compared with its competition.) I naturally expected that McDivitt himself would be curious to see this new development in a puzzle which has been bothering him for a decade, so I sent him an advance copy of the manuscript. In public, he has recently said, "I was never able to find out what it was, and nobody else ever did either." The air of mystery was enhanced by McDivitt's often quoted opinion that nobody will ever solve this UFO sighting.

After eight weeks, McDivitt returned my manuscript with a brief disappointing note. With the time spent on talk shows and records, he did not have time to study the report or offer any comments or criticism whatsoever. He did "glance through it," wished me luck as a writer, and subtly informed me that he was not interested in any solution to a puzzle which continues to bring him publicity and attention.

Another famous case, recently revived, concerns the Gemini-11 photographs of what NASA identified as the Soviet Union Proton-3 satellite. NORAD prediction (the computer was projecting forward some sighting made a day earlier) put the Soviet satellite a few hundred miles behind the Gemini over the Indian Ocean on Sept 12, 1966. The crew, however, reported an object quite close in. Their photographs show resolvable detail and large angular size. Therefore, say UFO investigators, the object was "too big to have been at the range of Proton-3, or much closer than Proton-3." This whole line of reasoning collapses when the actual range is computed.

Since the Proton was in the final stages of orbital decay (it burned up 36 hours later), it was running far ahead of its predicted schedule. Once I had obtained several consecutive orbital predictions over the final few days, I was able to determine just how far off the initial NORAD estimates had been: several hundred miles per day. The contradiction between range and size vanished.

Overlooked by the same researchers (either they never saw it and were superficial in their study, or did see it and chose to ignore it) is a visual description of the object given by astronaut Charles "Pete" Conrad. He describes an object which looks like Proton-3, just as Soviet space program analysts in Washington D.C. maintain that the NASA photographs show an object which looks like the Proton satellite. The shape of the Soviet object is known because models are on exhibit in a museum in Moscow, but UFO researchers continue to use an arbitrary and wholly erroneous geometry to "prove" that the photographs cannot be identified with Proton-3.

If these serious "astronaut UFO reports" are so easily solved (easy only in the sense of obvious solutions once all the relevant facts have been determined, a process which took more insight and effort than anyone had ever before applied to the problem), what purpose can be served by spending time with the lesser cases? My detailed report treats every one of them in exhaustive precision, but a summary will demonstrate all that can be learned from them.

On Mercury-7, astronaut Carpenter was photographing a poorly inflated balloon subsatellite ejected from the capsule in an unsuccessful attempt to get visual tracking data. X-15 pilots, like Mercury and Vostok spaceman, were plagued by "fireflies," flaking paint and frozen droplets of fuel and water floating near their spacecraft. The Gemini-12 astronauts were the victims, not of a UFO visit, at the news conference they described how they threw overboard four bags of equipment and saw them a few orbits later. Gordon Cooper saw what he thought was a UFO while he was a fighter pilot in Germany, but in his latest public appearance on the UFO record with McDivitt, he never mentioned his space flight. The Skylab photos were space debris and a strangely shaped structure on the surface of the Earth.

It is immediately obvious that the reports of this caliber would not long hold the attention of the news media. There must be some driving force behind it all, some agency which continuously brings "astronaut UFOs" back in the limelight again and again. The evidence may be counterfeit as well as contrived, but it serves to keep the subject in the public mind and to lend credence to the whole UFO phenomenon.

One of the most widely printed astronaut UFO photographs is from the Gemini-7 missions. It shows two octagonal objects with strange luminous force fields glowing beneath them as they fly in formation over the clouded Earth hundreds of miles below. It has been widely reprinted in UFO magazines. It has been widely publicized in traveling slide shows given by serious UFO lecturers. The photo is a forgery. An authentic Gemini-7 space photograph which shows the nose of the spacecraft and sunlight glinting off two roll rockets thrusters was retouched to make the black spacecraft body fade into the blackness of the dark Earth background. The two lights were left mysteriously hanging in space. The fake was so transparent that a simple inquiry at the NASA photo archives in Houston would have uncovered the fraud. I was the first - and only - person to ask. I talked with photo analyst Dick Underwood in building No.8 at the Johnson Space Center (formerly the Manned Spacecraft Center). He had viewed every photograph ever brought back from space by astronauts. I asked him point-blank if he had ever found anything strange. "There are a lot of things to photograph in space," Underwood pointed out. "We have photos of insulation fragments, gloves floating out of open hatches, fuel and urine droplets,

boosters and rendezvous targets, flaws in the negative, dust in the cabin between the lens and the window, and so on. Nothing has really stumped me for long."

"So there were no UFOs," I pressed. "Unfortunately not," chuckled Underwood. "I'm kind of disappointed not to find something really interesting."

Other visitors to Underwood's office have apparently been far more skeptical than I. While researching a film (UFOs Past, Present and Future) billed as a "documentary," investigator Alan Sandler came to the same office (it is open to any member of the press, who may order copies of any photograph ever made by astronauts in space). He was looking for UFO evidence, or was looking for evidence that NASA was hiding evidence. One series of photographs turned out to be very useful. They were used in the movie and were reprinted in the book of the same name, authored by Richard Emenegger. They showed three lights in a row against a dark background; Sandler added that NASA "said" they were Agena tracking lights, with the clear implication that it was an obvious coverup of a true space mystery. Tracking lights, indeed, was the obvious implicit sneer.

"But that's exactly what they were," Underwood told me plaintively. We stood together over a lit viewing board in his laboratory, looking at the entire sequence from which Sandler had selected just two shots. The Agena was brilliantly lit by the sun, then the Earth darkened beneath it, and finally it too faded into darkness. All that was finally visible was a row of tracking lights. "I brought this whole sequence to Hollywood to Sandler, but he wasn't interested in using all of it," Underwood explained. "Unfortunately, he just used what he had taken."

Every few years a new report comes out of Berkeley, California, that Apollo-12 astronauts were followed on the way to and from the moon. The source is Dr. James Harder, research director of APRO. He seems to have found the secret information in an article in Saga magazine. The quotations are indeed accurate. Astronauts Conrad, Gordon and Bean were joking about flashing lights visible in space, lights which quite obviously came from tumbling fragments of their own booster rocket which was in a nearby trajectory. Conrad's own words on the matter (he has verified the quotation directly to me) are direct and to the point:

"They've been after me for years because we were followed by a UFO on the way to the moon. That, of course, was untrue. The guy who came up with it was going by our transcript where he saw debris from our own rocket and were joking with the ground crew about it. He took this out of context. I called the ground and said: 'Hey, gang, we are being followed, there is some flashing object out there.' Some scandal sheet took that and made a helluva story out of it."

Harder's version is that Conrad, and his crewmen, are being forced to lie to the American people by some secret government agency that can control ex-astronauts but cannot intimidate college professors. There is a simpler explanation, and it is that Conrad is telling the truth. What that implies about Dr. Harder and APRO is something else.

Two of the most respected UFO researchers in the country are Dr. J. Allen Hynek and Dr. Jacques Vallee, leading officials of the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Illinois. In their latest book, *The Edge of Reality* (Regnery, Chicago, 1975), they reveal the quality of their scientific research by publishing a "Table of UFO Sightings by Astronauts." Aside from misspelling, wrong dates, and completely discredited reports, they demonstrate that they did not even read their own book carefully: Mercury-9 is launched a year before Mercury-8, Voskhod-2 is launched a year before Voskhod 1, Gemini-4 is launched a year before Gemini-3. The quality

of their accuracy leaves much to be desired (Hynek disavows any responsibility for this section of the book.)

While UFO devotees claim that astronauts are ordered never to discuss UFO sightings, they proudly display quotations from astronauts indicating the possibility that UFOs may be real (astronauts have no special inside information, and are just as well-informed, or as badly misinformed, as the average citizen). Even the quotes can be questionable.

On November 27, 1973, chief astronaut John Young was asked about life in the universe and he was quoted to the effect that "there are so many stars that it's mathematically improbable that there aren't other life sources in the universe." The AP wire story from Seattle started off with the sentence, "Astronaut John W. Young says that odds are that unidentified flying objects do exist." Before you could say "UFO flap," the punctuation in the sentence had been rearranged. Vallee gives the quote as follows: "Odds are that UFOs exist" - Astronaut John Young.

The pattern of "astronaut UFO sightings" in the news now becomes clear. The object seems to be to create enough smoke so that people will suspect that there is fire somewhere. Probably the two most original and persistent rumor-mongers of this type are George Fawcett and Gary Henderson, whose stories are eagerly reprinted and embellished by writers like Hayden Hewes (of the "International UFO Bureau"), Major Donald Keyhoe, and Bob Abborino (of the National Tattler, "the most respected name in people-to-people journalism").

A revealing look into the mentality of such writers was afforded to me by an exchange of letters with columnist Gregory Kanon of Halifax. His weekly newspaper feature "The Unknown," mentioned the Gemini-11 case and closed dramatically with the words, "Not surprisingly, NASA no longer accepts the satellite explanation. The file on the case is now marked with one large, unmistakable word - UNIDENTIFIED.'

When I objected to Kanon's interpretation and presented my own analysis, he evaded responsibility for the story, claiming that he was just reporting somebody else's conclusion. He clearly was also taking no responsibility for the truth or falsehood of the opinion, preferring instead to pass on another juicy rumor, suitably dramatized and embellished from his own imagination.

In one local newspaper, my letter to the editor was carried, explaining what really happened on Gemini-11 and what journalists like Kanon had made of it.

But there were dozens of other papers with hundreds of thousands of readers for whom Kanon's opinion is the ultimate authority and last word. It should be clear by now that the "astronaut UFO" phenomenon is a MANUFACTURED PHEONOMENON - loosely based on actual events, but essentially created in the imaginations and fantasies of UFO writers and "researchers." Not a single case has the slightest merit. There is not a shred of evidence - either photographic, anecdotal, material or otherwise - to demonstrate that any astronauts has ever seen an object which might suggests that the Earth is being visited by other spacecraft.

What the evidence overwhelmingly does demonstrate is the lengths to which even the most respected UFO groups can and will go to prove their point of view. If there is good evidence elsewhere, why the concentration on misquoting astronauts, forging photographs, and insinuating coverups?

Why the need to convince the public that UFOs must exist because "even our astronauts have seen them?"

Such proof of existence of UFOS must be sought and found elsewhere, if it exists at all. The payoff for positive proof will be so high that the effort is worthwhile and real scientific research into the "UFO phenomenon" by physicist, sociologists, psychologists and other scientists is long overdue. The proof we do have on hand is related to the quality of UFO research already carried out. It is embarrassingly low, and must be a severe disappointment to any of us who expect to find true evidence of alien contact - contact which sooner or later will occur.