

Why Did 'Gordo' Tell UFO Stories?

Jim Oberg // June 6, 2008

A plausible hypothesis might be that he enjoyed visiting UFO conventions and talk shows, and liked the reception his stories got. He didn't have many other people who wanted to see him, by then -- he'd burned all his bridges to NASA and to the space community after naively campaigning on behalf of a number of aviation industry scams that cost people more than two million dollars. He lost his own money, too -- he wasn't one of the fakers, just their tool -- and victim, too.

His earlier comments, in the 1970s, were much more cautious and well-worded. That was when, for example, he'd only 'heard' about the Edwards AFB case but "saw nothing first hand" (taped interview with OMNI, 1978). Later, of course, in his narratives he had become the 'boss' of the camera team and had personally viewed their films, and later still, internet versions appeared claiming he had actually been on the scene himself. But that was fairly standard narrative embellishment.

The 1980s was when he was still denouncing a lot of the faked 'transcripts' about his 'secret comments' about space UFOs -- he even sued one vendor for using his name to falsely endorse some CE3K merchandise. But he soon stopped protesting.

People wanted those kinds of stories, and what harm did it do, he might have wondered. As you see from posts on the Internet, people STILL want those stories to be true -- and the 'harm' is in the level of viciousness they now display towards anybody trying to see what really might have originally happened.

That's the saddest part. Cooper had good reasons to be furious with NASA. He had been assigned as backup commander of Apollo-10, with Donn Eisele and Edgar Mitchell, and he expected to rotate into command of Apollo-13 (there was a standard 3-mission pattern -- the Apollo-9 backup crew was assigned to Apollo-12).

But Deke Slayton (fellow Mercury astronaut, in charge of crew assignments) was faced with a crisis, in that the other astronauts in training reported that Cooper was just coasting. He was the cool guy in the white scarf with his smooth hand on the stick. He had one assistant to be expert in the Command Module, and one the Lunar Module, so he acted as if he didn't need to bother his pretty head over the engineering classes and malfunction drills. The moon landing mission was his by "Right Stuff"

right -- that was the impression others got of his attitude. In terms of the technical material he was supposed to know, he just didn't work on mastering it -- why should HE have to? Ed Mitchell, who witnessed this process first-hand, has declined out of loyalty to Cooper to provide any insights from his own experience during this period.

Then a miracle happened. Original Mercury-7 veteran Al Shepard, medically grounded in 1965, got his off-the-books operation on his ear, and his Miniere's Syndrome balance problem cleared up -- the NASA docs certified him as flight qualified again. Slayton slipped Shepard into Cooper's commander slot on the crew (and swapped the Apollo-10 and -11 backup crews for Apollo-13 and 14, to give Shepard more time to catch up on his Apollo lessons -- which he DID).

Cooper was stunned. He felt betrayed by his buddies, and soon quit NASA in disgust. One report says he was offered command of the 1973 Skylab space station, which he rejected ("I don't want to be a 'half-astronaut'," he was quoted as saying). Cooper himself later described to radio listeners how he was told to repeat his duty as a backup Apollo commander, for Apollo-13, with a shot at commanding Apollo-16 or Apollo-17). When Shepard actually walked on the moon on Apollo-14, Cooper actually left the country, he was so outraged at the 'unfairness' of the denial of his rights.

It didn't have to happen that way -- his buddies had given him several chances to change gears and get with the new program (he had been assigned backup commander of Gemini-12 exactly as such a disciplinary move). But he never outgrew his white scarf days, and he underestimated how seriously the astronaut office was in enforcing academic standards. His grievance with NASA lasted for decades.

NASA, meanwhile, kept up the astronauts-as-gods propaganda for its own political purposes, and had no interest in discrediting Cooper. He had flown good, tough missions when his skills were the ones needed -- he had earned respect and gratitude for that. When he was no longer useful (when, in fact, his attitudes had become a flight risk), he was moved aside, but nothing personal, it was strictly business. However, Cooper took it very, very personally -- but that's another story.

NASA Gordon Cooper- UFO are visiting earth
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yBFga-wto>