

Further on the ‘Dead Cosmonauts’ Claims of the Judica-Cordiglia Brothers
James Oberg // August 1, 2008

1. As a follow-on to my March 1, 2007, ‘white paper’ on these stories (<http://www.jamesoberg.com/judica-cordiglia.pdf>) I make these supplemental criticisms of the July 2008 ‘Fortean Times’ article, “Lost in Space”, by Kris Hollington, on line at <http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/1302/lost-in-space.html>.
2. After exciting dramatizations of desperate radio calls from dying cosmonauts, the article states: “The ‘Lost Cosmonauts’ debate has been reawakened thanks to a new investigation into the efforts of two ingenious, radio-mad young Italian brothers who, starting in 1957, hacked into both Russia’s and NASA’s space programmes – so effectively that the Russians, it seems, may have wanted them dead.”
3. There has been NO ‘new investigation’. If anything, the new public claims have repudiated decades of REAL investigations by REAL historians, to pretend they never took place.
4. The author knows nothing about orbital paths, and actually knows ‘less than nothing’ – he never even realized he needed to talk to some real experts. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have written: “Turin was perfectly situated to track the Soviet satellites -- northern Italy was the only area in Western Europe on Russia’s orbital path.” Of course, it’s not.
5. The article does, at least, recognize my work on the subject. “James Oberg worked in NASA’s mission control for almost 20 years before becoming a space historian specialising in the Russian space programme,” it states incorrectly – I was a space historian well before I began work at Mission Control. I am quoting as admitting the signals “could be interpreted to mean a lost cosmonaut” – but not quoted as concluding that I and every other space historian on the planet did not credit that interpretation.
6. Other ‘expert testimony’ is even more bogus. “So, did any cosmonauts actually die in space? Russian journalist and 1965 cosmonaut candidate Yaroslav Golovanov claimed that on 10 November 1960, a cosmonaut called Byelokonyev died on board a spaceship in orbit.” Actually, Golovanov wrote to denounce these stories (and others) as false smears on the honor of the Soviet cosmonaut program. The Fortean Times article then does admit, “Sadly, there is no evidence to back these claims.”
7. The brothers told a dramatic story of listening in ‘live’ to Gagarin’s transmissions from orbit:

“We leapt out of bed,” said Achille, “dashed over to our receivers and began listening. Suddenly, in what was a magical moment, the hiss faded and this Russian voice emerged from very far away for a few seconds.” At that stage, no one in the West – not even the President of the United States – knew that the Russians had launched a rocket.

Russian translators were few and far between but the brothers had this covered – their younger sister was fluent in Russian. The first sentence they heard was: “The flight is proceeding normally. I feel well. The flight is normal. I am withstanding well the state of weightlessness.”

8. As mentioned in my previous statement, this is impossible to believe. The portions of the flight path of ‘Vostok’ when these comments were made lie far beyond the range of any tracking station in Western Europe. This physically-impossible account cannot, in my estimation, be merely enthusiastic, naive misinterpretation. “Those days were frenetic and exciting,” recalled one participant, “because when word got out that there was a space mission it was packed with girlfriends, friends, students; even professors started coming.”

9. The article also recounts in detail the brothers listening in to all of the conversations from John Glenn in orbit, from launch through landing. As already described, no radio station in Europe was in range to receive ANY of those signals. Absent a Nobel Prize discovery in the physics of radio propagation, these vivid tales cannot have been based on real events.

10. The author than adds his own dramatic tale – tracking down a KGB agent who had been spying on them, and who decades later became Russian ambassador to an East European country. The author claims to have personally met this Russian in Prague, and was told: “I heard the Gagarin recording, transcribed it and verified it was genuine. Our cosmonauts were warned to be careful what they said while in space after this and we had the brothers followed.”

11. First, do the math. Any KGB agent in Italy in the early 1960s is going to be in his 30’s, and in 2007 (when the author’s meeting allegedly occurred) he’d be in his late 70’s, if he were still alive at all. Possible, maybe, but my impression is it’s hardly likely he’d be gallivanting around “the art-deco basement bar of Prague’s extraordinarily ornate Municipal House”, as claimed.

12. Second, recall that the real-time ‘Gagarin recording’ was physically impossible to begin with (the brothers could easily have recorded snippets off news broadcasts in the days afterwards).

13. Lastly, ask yourself – if this meeting actually occurred, where is there any hand-written, photographic or documentary evidence? What was this person’s name? Why would that be impossible to produce in this post-Soviet era? Without such standards, I could only conclude this tale falls within the classic pattern of the entire Judica-Cordiglia legends, and is unworthy of belief. But in personal email communication, the author insists the meeting occurred and I have no evidence it did not.

14. The author also says he met an Italian (presumably a very OLD Italian) who says he was a government counter-intelligence officer assigned to protect the brothers from the Soviet spies. Even assuming some old Italian told this tale, does the author produce any

evidence the man was who he claimed, rather than just an old friend of the brothers, playing the game?

15. Consider the allegation that the Soviets had decided to kill the brothers to stop their work. Writes the author,

The retired KGB agent had told me: "They had to be dealt with – an accident perhaps – but then that TV programme happened and they were famous. That saved their lives. I was glad; they were good kids."

This, too, is unworthy of belief, since it is inconsistent with known Soviet assassination standards over the decades of the cold war – outright murder was reserved for defectors, with the probably exception of the insane Andropov order in 1983 to kill “the Polish Pope”.

16. The magazine does include one image allegedly of their visit to NASA headquarters in Washington DC in 1964, showing their encounter with “John Haussman”, from the ‘Tracking and Data Acquisition’ office (which actually wasn’t at headquarters, but in the suburban ‘Goddard Space Center’). This was not included in their book and last year I criticized them for not providing such proof they actually had met with NASA. See http://www.forteantimes.com/images/front_picture_library/UK/dir_5/fortean_times_266_1_5.jpg A friend of mine, a nearly-retired NASA veteran of that period, adds: “Apart from the howlers you spotted, I found a couple of minor ones. Jim Morrison was a good friend of mine, in International Programs; he was not a “technical director.” (He could have been, as a former F-100 pilot, but wasn’t.) Also, Harry Goett was not “NASA Director,” but director of GSFC.”

17. The article concedes that there are doubters about the brothers’ claims:

Many sceptics have argued that it was impossible for the brothers to have listened into so many Russian space missions. It may be, as some have claimed, that the brothers sometimes felt under pressure to produce results and were tempted to satisfy the insatiable popular demand for space stories by fabricating sensational new recordings. It’s unlikely, for example, that the soft beating sounds they once recorded were really a cosmonaut’s heartbeat as they claimed; heartbeats WERE broadcast from the capsules, but as electrical signals which sounded like static... Experts now accept that the brothers did record some Russian and American space missions, but that their interpretations weren’t always accurate.

18. Yet the brothers also claimed to have learned, from radio intercepts, about the problems encountered by cosmonaut Leonov on the world’s first space walk in 1965:

Despite threats from the KGB, the Judica-Cordiglia brothers continued. They captured ... the first-ever spacewalk, taken by Aleksei Leonov in March 1965. Afterwards, when Leonov tried to climb back into the

airlock, he found that his spacesuit had inflated so much that he didn't fit. He managed by opening a valve in his suit to let some pressure bleed off – a risky procedure. This information was withheld by the Russians, but the Judica-Cordiglias passed it on to NASA, believing it might save an astronaut's life.

There is no record or recollection I could find that anyone at NASA ever received any such message – there is no record from the brothers' side that they even sent it.

19. In describing how the brothers tracked satellites, the author provides an explanation that can only have come from them – and is wrong:

As for the timing, they created conversion tables. In 24 hours there are 14,440 minutes. So, for example, if they listened to a hypothetical satellite at 6.34am, that is 394 minutes after midnight, they would add the 394 to 90 minutes of satellite rotation to obtain 484 which is equivalent to 8.04am – they used these intervals to get some sleep, run errands, go to school or do their homework.

First, it's simple enough to compute that there are 1,440 minutes, NOT 14,440 minutes, in a day – presumably a typo that nobody on the magazine's staff had the technical competence to notice. But more important – a satellite that takes 90 minutes to circle the Earth will only repeat its path 90 minutes later if the Earth is not rotating. Otherwise, it takes about 96 minutes to come around again. Even in the most simple form of 'explanation', the article is a failure.

20. According to the magazine, author Kris Hollington is a London-based freelance investigative journalist and author. He has written for several national newspapers and is the author of 'Diamond Geezers', 'How to Kill', 'Crack House' and 'Line of Fire'. Photo: http://www.forteantimes.com/images/front_picture_library_UK/dir_5/fortean_times_269_4_12.jpg. A bio statement related to his work at www.assassinology.org is online at <http://www.assassinology.org/id17.html>. His literary agent provides more details at <http://www.andrewlownie.co.uk/books/hollington.kris/index.shtml>. He describes his life here: http://www.chrishigh.com/interviews/kris_hollington_interview.htm.

The 'Fortean Times' article is intelligently discussed here:
<http://www.stumbleupon.com/url/www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/1302/lost-in-space.html> and <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-chat/2048540/posts>

21. Nothing said or written about the implausibility of their claims seems to have made any difference to the men. The article concludes:

The Judica-Cordiglia brothers remain adamant that they recorded lost cosmonauts. Standing in front of their unique library of recordings, Gian told me: "Fifty years ago, it wasn't possible to build a simple computer

that weighed less than a ton, yet we were firing men and women into outer space who were prepared to die the loneliest of deaths. They were true heroes. And, thanks to radio, we know about their sacrifices." He patted a shelf full of recordings. "We must never forget them."

This is an ironic comment by a man who hopes the world has forgotten almost everyone else's evaluations of their claims.

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Addendum from Sven Grahn (emailed Sunday, August 03, 2008 10:12 AM)

I have now looked at the documentary about the Judica-Cordiglia brothers available on YouTube (http://www.southgatearc.org/news/july2008/space_hackers.htm). It is of course, the same old story, but very well told by the filmmakers. However, there is nothing that convinces me. The heartbeats and strange radio calls we have heard before - nothing new at all. However, a few more details are given about the recording of Gagarin's and Glenn's voices.

Tracking Gagarin -- Now they say they were tipped off about an imminent manned launch on 12 April 1961. They could have listened on 20.005 MHz which was used by the Sputniks. The AM voice from Vostok 1 was transmitted on 20.006 MHz and 9.019 MHz according to the TASS news release. So, in principle, they could have picked up Gagarin. What makes me a bit suspicious is the recording played in the documentary. It sounds awfully like the voice recording released by the Soviet Union at that time - and available on a EP record. See:

<http://www.svengrahn.pp.se/histind/Vostok1/Vostok1X.htm>
<http://www.svengrahn.pp.se/histind/Vostok1/VostRec.htm>

How good was the original recording made by the brothers? Was it really Gagarin? There was plenty of ground-based Russian AM voice in the 19.995-20.005 MHz band in those days.

Tracking Glenn -- Now they say they measured the HF whip antenna used during recovery operations to figure out the frequency used by Glenn. This is interesting. The HF telescoping whip antenna deployed during recovery served both the HF AM voice on 15.016 MHz and the recovery beacon on 8.364 MHz (Check <http://www.ibiblio.org/mscorbit/document.html>, the [Mercury Familiarization Manuals](#)). This makes it dubious whether it is possible to determine the frequency by measuring the length of the whip. There could have been all sorts of devices to adapt the antenna to both frequencies. Also, the recording played in the documentary is extremely brief and it is barely possible to hear the word "Mercury".

Tracking Explorer-1 -- There were no other recordings (except Sputnik 1) played in the documentary that other people have heard. **I would have liked to hear signals from spacecraft that sounds like the signals that other trackers have heard.** The signals from Explorer-1 were not convincing either. It was just a plain carrier, while other trackers heard commutated subcarriers (See <http://www.svengrahn.pp.se/sounds/spectrgr/spectra.htm>).

All this is as confusing as it always has been. The brothers say in the documentary that they loved to do "mischief" as young men. Indeed! That is what I think they keep doing.

Sven