

Jerry Cohen's "Rebuttal" of My Investigations of the Cooper UFO Stories  
June 26, 2003

For several years, the website of Jerry Cohen (cohenufo@o...) has included a long rambling self-styled rebuttal of my own research results on the Gordon Cooper UFO stories (see <http://www.zip.com.au/~psmith/cooper.html>), a report completed in 1983-1984 as a book chapter for a project that was later set aside. I couldn't take Cohen's piece all that seriously since only about 10% of the almost 30,000 word report actually addressed my study, and even then ignored or misrepresented 90% of the evidence I had presented. In Cohen's words, "Mr. Oberg made statements demeaning the reputations of not only ex-astronaut Gordon Cooper, but additionally those of Drs. J. Allen Hynek and James McDonald. My rebuttal(s) give lie to this." – but my assertions were about credibility of stories, and soundness of judgment, not character flaws and issues with intelligence and integrity.

Cohen also complained that I never responded in detail to him (see <http://www.cohenufo.org/Oberg/obrgacknhist.htm>), but then added, "I recently found Mr. Oberg's personal web site and observed that the above essay in question didn't appear therein. It is my hope that he gave some thought to some of the things he wrote and decided not to include them with his other analyses." This is surprising because there is indeed such a link.

The time has finally come to address why I think the Cohen essay is irrelevant to the credibility of my conclusions in my own investigation (the only investigation EVER conducted by ANYONE to corroborate the UFO stories associated with Cooper, as far as I can tell), since several correspondents of mine have asked for my responses, and I value the quality of our exchanges enough to make the effort to prepare the following essay. This does not mean I'm interested in debating Mr. Cohen, since I see no evidence in his own 'rebuttal', or elsewhere on his site, that there is any prospect of productive clarification and modification of views.

Comments on Select cases and moments from UFO History (The "real" x-files) formerly titled The Oberg/Cooper Rebuttal(s) and The Research of Jerry Cohen

[Note added in 2008: the current link to this essay is <http://www.cohenufo.org/index.html#obrgindexpg> and Cohen also provides a link to this rebuttal essay [http://www.cohenufo.org/oberg\\_rebut\\_to\\_cohenufo.htm](http://www.cohenufo.org/oberg_rebut_to_cohenufo.htm) and acknowledges several major points I made therein]

Cohen: ""my research concerning several 1957 cases lends strong support to what Cooper has stated regarding the alleged landing at Edwards AFB."" I will present three well documented cases from 1957. I selected these cases because Mr. Oberg specifically discussed a claim that Gordon Cooper made concerning an alleged landing at Edwards Air Force base in 1957. I believe these cases, when examined in relationship to each other, demonstrate a strong probability that the case against Cooper is not as "cut and dried" as Mr. Oberg has indicated.... The three cases I have mentioned contain factual, concrete evidence that proves beyond a shadow of doubt that some UFOs can definitely be referred to as "craft", as they contain crucial evidence identifying some UFOs as craft of an unknown type."

JEO: Cohen's approach to attack my research is to not attack my research, but to present other cases that have NOT been researched, and use them to argue that Cooper's stories are similar to them, and hence are mutually corroborated. This is a snake swallowing its own tail, a closed-loop `proof` that goes round and round but neither starts nor finishes anywhere reliable.

Cohen: "Many of the things Mr. Oberg said in his essay appeared to be accurate however, I found it filled with unsupported innuendo. I disagree with several of the conclusions reached and I'm not so certain of the veracity of others as some are anecdotal in nature with not enough supporting documentation to confirm some of the things he says."

JEO: Mr. Cohen has never asked me to share my interview notes or the letters I received from the witnesses I quote. Others have asked me, and I have complied. In any case, this complaint of his appears fairly insipid, and easy enough to satisfy, if he'd only have asked.

Cohen quotes JEO re UN visit: "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, later led to the New Jewel coup d'etat led by Maurice Bishop, and indirectly to the US intervention five years later."

J.C. "Although much of what was said in the preceding paragraph may well have been true (and which parts we cannot be sure, as specific documentation was not offered to support same), it has not been adequately demonstrated that Cooper had a "problem" at the time. Also, I am not certain why this material was included in the preceding dialogue except perhaps to impugn Cooper's character by

implying that he was somehow in "cahoots" with a "crackpot," corrupt dictator; or that people reporting UFOs must, by association, be crackpots too. The fact of the matter is that the United Nations had previously agreed to have a conference concerning the subject of UFOs. They certainly weren't forced to have this discussion. It is a rather large body of nations. If the topic was totally absurd, they wouldn't have agreed to wasting their time on it in the first place. It most likely was petitioned and had support." .. "In reality, the main reason the UN did not follow-up further on the proceedings had mostly to do with economics and ongoing world politics. "

JEO comments: Cooper's visit to the UN is often presented as part of a UN-sponsored study of UFOs. My comment was intended to clarify that Cooper went to meet Waldheim as part of the delegation of Grenada, and Waldheim was obligated to receive Grenada's head-of-state and his entourage, purely as a diplomatic courtesy. As to the motives of the later UN study, note how Cohen – who complains in the same paragraph about my 'lack of documentation' – simply presumes the rationale and motives of the UN with no pretense of any actual supportive evidence even existing.

Cohen: "1b- GORDON COOPER, SECOND HAND ACCOUNTS, SLANDEROUS STATEMENTS, JAMES McDONALD AND CLOSED MINDED SKEPTICS -- Without getting lost in discussing the pages of proof submitted regarding the supposed enhancements to Coopers statements which Mr. Oberg attempted to demonstrate were created by other individuals, I will concede that it is human nature for people to build upon stories, misquote information, fabricate, etc., especially if there is money to be made from same or possibly, careers to be made in newspaper journalism. UFO researchers are well aware of this. However, contrary to what Mr. Oberg would have us believe, some professional UFO researchers actually do follow a general rule that one must "take with a grain of salt" second-hand accounts, sources, etc. relating to UFO claimed incidents and, instead concentrate on examining initial reports and how they correlate with other reports from the same general time period..... One mistake should not invalidate that person's entire work otherwise Mr. Oberg's own lifetime body of criticism regarding UFOs might also thereby be dismissed in total because he spent inordinate time discussing these second-hand versions (a "no-no" in itself!) without providing adequate solid proof to substantiate the entirety of his accusations, some of which verged on slander."

JEO: I attempted to provide checkable citations of all passages I quoted and would have been willing to provide more details as

requested. These were not "supposed" enhancements, but documented descriptions that were at variance with Cooper's own accounts. As to "what Mr. Oberg would have us believe" (Cohen seems to think I claimed that professional UFO researchers are never skeptical of second-hand accounts – he made this up out of imagination), it should not be hard to believe the following:

Many respected UFO writers passed on the story of a UFO encounter on Cooper's Mercury-9 orbital flight in 1963. Hynek's book *Edge of Reality* (coauthored with Jacques Vallee) carried a long list of astronaut sighting reports, including this one: "May 16, 1963 -- Mercury 9: 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."

My 1983 paper made the following contrary claim, based on Cooper's personal communication to me. In a 1978 letter, Cooper stressed "the non-occurrence of a sighting on Mercury 9. I have the original on-board tapes in my possession which also refute this." I had written, "In an OMNI interview published in March 1980, Cooper was asked about the reports of astronauts seeing UFOs in space. He replied, "It got so bad that there were deliberately falsified tapes of communications with the astronauts, where UFO material was simply edited in."

Years later, Cooper continued to criticize those who had exploited that myth. As reported on [www.space.com](http://www.space.com) on 10 September 1999, by staffer Robert Scott Martin, (<http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/phenomena/cooper.html>), "Cooper flatly denied the long-standing claim, repeated over the years by various authors including UFOlogical saints Allen Hynek and Jacques Valle, that he saw a greenish object with a red tail move past his Mercury 9 spacecraft in 1963. "No, somebody made a lot of money selling ... lies on that one," Cooper, the sixth American in space, told Art Bell on the syndicated "Coast to Coast" talk radio show Thursday night. "It was totally untrue, sorry to say."

In the many tens of thousands of words that Cohen presented to refute my study (less than 10% of the text actually referred to my study itself), Cohen found no space, as far as I can tell, to ever mention the Mercury-9 myth and how his favorite UFO investigators fell for it, and caused people who trusted them to fall for it too.

In discussing my research on the 1951 Cooper reported sighting in

Germany, Cohen wrote, "He has used supposed "witness" accounts from a dozen or so people who responded to him saying they never had the experience which Cooper claims to have had, to prove to us that Cooper was mistaken in what he says he saw and that [JEO's words quoted by Cohen] "The popular version of the legend, placing the action in Germany in 1951, simply cannot have occurred as Cooper has described it -- if the vast majority of the witnesses are to be believed." However, what rightly should have been said was "...if the vast majority of people who RESPONDED are to be believed." Readers must, in all fairness, realize that since they didn't "see it," those individuals cannot be properly referred to as "witnesses." .... it is certainly not "written in stone" that the people who actually witnessed what Cooper says he did would readily come forth to talk about it. In reality, one must totally understand the Air Force's position on UFOs, the penalties it imposes on those that break the silence."

First, Cohen omits a full description of my research, which was more than merely sending letters and awaiting responses. At two reunions of the veteran pilots, a former wing commander deliberately sought out men who had been in positions of command and knowledge on the base, and they reported no knowledge of such an incident. Also, I wrote, "In 1979 I wrote to contacts in Munich and received a negative reply: "Neither the Munich newspapers nor the police records of that period give any mention of the case", wrote Wolfgang Kuchler of "P.M." magazine," and I later expanded this inquiry to German UFO clubs that had records in that region dating back to that period – again, no independent corroboration. Lastly, I reported an account of a man who knew Cooper circa 1960 and he recalled Cooper's story of the 'fleets of UFOs' as occurring not in Germany but in the American middle west.

Second, what are the implications of Cohen's statement that the reports that came in from men who had been flying with Cooper at the time but did not recall anything should be ignored because the men saw nothing and hence were NOT witnesses? Imagine a situation where a dozen people sit in a room, and one person jumps up and reports a gorilla shuffling across the room. All the other men see nothing. Is their testimony valueless in assessing the credibility of the gorilla sighting? Of course not.

Lastly, Cohen invokes the trump card reserved for inconvenient testimony, that such people are lying on account of threats of punishment (punishment for which there never seems to be any documented cases of it ever happening, as OMNI magazine found out a

decade ago when it spent months trying to find ANYBODY who had suffered retribution for talking about UFO secrets in public). It's another self-fulfilling circular pseudo-proof: "The other guys say nothing happened there? That's further proof that there's a massive coverup forcing everybody else to falsify their statements."

Cohen complains: "Another bone of contention occurs when Hynek is slandered at the essays end with the following statement: [Cohen quotes Oberg] "But solving the cases was the last thing the UFO promoters were interested in. ...." -- "People who have used Cooper's stories to 'prove' the reality of UFOs (respected ufologists such as Frank Edwards, Leonard Stringfield, J. Allen Hynek, and less respected ones such as Timothy Beckley) seem to have neither known nor really cared about the real truth behind the stories....."

Cohen: "This, too, is a blanket statement concerning all the individuals mentioned and has certainly not been adequately proven concerning any one of them. Also, it has not been proven that Cooper was not telling the truth."

JEO: Cohen could back this assertion up with a single example of ANY of these people conducting their own investigation of any of Cooper's story, but Cohen can't do this, because such investigations never happened. Even Hynek's own published definition of a "UFO Report" was of an apparition "that does not specify any known physical event, object, or process or any psychological event or process", with the critical requirement that it be "even after examination by qualified persons." Hynek and his associated never performed such 'examinations' in Cooper's cases.

[Cohen quotes Oberg] "Their goal evidently was to piggyback on Cooper's reputation to further their own ufological careers, not to take the opportunity to see what Cooper's actual experiences could teach them about the real UFO phenomenon. The truth behind Cooper's stories was the last thing that seemed to interest them." Cohen writes, "Again, an assumption on the author's part. Unless one was there with Gordon Cooper, no one can know what his actual experiences were. I can speak with confidence from my own research that Dr. Hynek's work was sincere."

JEO: Cohen equates sincerity with veracity here – I refer again to the Mercury-9 Cooper UFO myth which Hynek, in fact, DID promote, and which Cooper himself (the only expert Cohen says he'll believe) testifies was a fake story. Cohen does not like this opinion, but the documented facts appear supportive.

Yet he returns to this theme several chapters later: "3a. Mr. Oberg has stated that Dr. Hynek wasn't careful in the data he selected to be used in several of his books. To the best of my awareness and research, no one that worked with Hynek on an ongoing basis ever accused him of anything of this sort." First, the second sentence is not actually a refutation of the first. Secondly, the example of the Mercury-9 Cooper UFO Myth provides exactly the sort of documentation to demonstrate that my assertion is justified. Cohen perhaps realizes this – I wonder if that's the reason, in his tens of thousands of words, that he never (as far as I can tell) mentions the Mercury-9 Cooper UFO non-case explicitly.

Cohen appears not to have understood irony, or perhaps my words were obscure enough to give rise to an honest misunderstanding. Concerning the cameraman who took the photographs in May 1957 at Edwards AFB, I wrote: "When I told Gettys in 1982 that McDonald had used his case in congressional testimony, the UFO witness was pleased but surprised. McDonald had never gotten back to him about the use he'd put his testimony to. So the pro-UFO people kept some secrets, too!." My intent was comic relief in a narrative in which accusations of withholding information had been widely thrown at government and military personnel. Meanwhile, I quoted the McDonald passage as an example of an accurate reportage.

But Cohen saw the comment as an attack on McDonald: "Dr. McDonald brings a recorded, documented case to a congressional committee," he writes, "and, Mr. Oberg, because of Air Force statements claiming the preceding was a "weather balloon...", assumes that Dr. McDonald's case is invalid and goes even further, intimating that McDonald did something devious in bringing the case to the committee. Additionally, Oberg clearly states that the witness was pleased that McDonald had done so. Is it possible that McDonald knew he would be pleased? No, Mr. Oberg feels that darned McDonald is just trying to be sneaky."

Cohen is totally off the deep end in these ravings. He completely misunderstands and misrepresents my argument. I intended no implication of devious behavior by McDonald, just a mild taunt that he had neglected to provide feedback to Gettys after all of the cameraman's cooperation. Cohen writes, "Mr. Oberg feels that darned McDonald is just trying to be sneaky," but he is in fantasyland on this bizarre and baseless misrepresentation.

Later, Cohen returns to this theme: "Oberg/Cooper.7ab&c will

reasonably demonstrate that Mr. Oberg unjustly accused McDonald of generally not researching his cases and caring about the facts. I believe you will also find there certainly was nothing that anyone might remotely call "secretive" in regards to his analysis of the Kirtland AFB case or his address to the American Association For The Advancement Of Science (AAAS) UFO Symposium, Boston, Dec. 27, 1969."

I am totally baffled by this allegation that I made any such accusation, and I'd appreciate help from anyone in trying to explain to me how Cohen could have so grievously misunderstood what I had thought was a relatively clear argument. In fact, I trust Dr. McDonald's account of the eyewitness description of this encounter, and merely point out two glaring stunners: McDonald makes it clear that the primary witnesses did NOT report the object landed (as Cooper now claims), and that "Gordon Cooper" was not the name of anyone involved in witnessing the incident (he claims he was in charge of the team). So if Cohen TRUSTS McDonald's account, how can he ALSO trust Cooper's version which fundamentally contradicts it?

A thought about the origin of the 'triangle landing gear' detail from Cooper's narrative later in the 1990's. There is one passage in McDonald's description that, if read quickly or only partially remembered (and Cooper did read it, as part of my own draft report I sent him in 1984), as follows: "They immediately got into communication with the range director and asked if anyone else was manning an Askania that could be used to get TRIANGULATION SHOTS." Perhaps in some later dramatization of the story for an appreciative audience, this phrase metamorphed into a triangular landing gear.

Regarding that Edwards case, in chapter 5b, Cohen writes: "A weather balloon. Where have we heard that before? Perhaps the reasons were a lot less obvious than Mr. Oberg has previously thought. The real question is "How valid is the Air Force's explanation?" JEO: This is a fair question, and the first step towards answering it is to obtain the 30-page report from the Blue Book archives and see what the documentation is supposed to have done. But has Cohen done this? In fact, as far as we can tell, has ANY UFO researcher or writer who has mentioned this case ever done this? To the best of my knowledge, the answer is "No", even "Hell, NO."

Cohen provides an excellent example of his own style of determining reality: self-supportive imagination. Here: "Furthermore, to think that another department in our defense system hasn't been quietly receiving all this UFO information without studying it would be to

imply that our defense system is highly incompetent. Since we all know this is not the truth, I would hope it is safe to assume that some defense group(s), somewhere is (are) well appraised of the situation." I leave it to the amusement of the reader to put this in syllogistic form and see just how atrocious the reasoning is.

Cohen reaches the end with a question: "One final question to all skeptics who have read these essays to this point thus far: `Are you honestly all as positive as you were before reading them, that Gordon Cooper was not telling the truth about what he saw?' Remember, the date of Cooper's claimed landing at Edwards AFB was May 3rd, 1957 (as per Mr. Oberg), six months prior to the Kirtland case which occurred November 4th of the same year."

Cohen gets the legal presumption precisely on its head. The question is not to be positive that Cooper was NOT providing an accurate account ("telling the truth" is another lawyer trick to semantically stack the deck of a supposedly innocent question). The question is, is the veracity of his account certain `beyond reasonable doubt'? Here, Cohen's argumentation ends....

But it's worth recalling some of Cooper's own comments from a quarter century ago. His own words on the Edwards case, told in 1977 to interviewer Lee Spiegel for the "The Credibility Factor" (the UFO record), are as follows: he recalled "...the case of one that landed out on the dry lake bed right out from a number of camera crews we had who filmed it. And the film was there and was sent forward to the safekeeping somewhere in Washington, never to be seen again." It's not HIS camera crew, it's our crews (more than one), and what did HE actually see? In 1978, in his second interview with Spiegel (this time for OMNI magazine), he evaded any discussion of the Edwards case by saying, "I'd just as soon not get into the Edwards incident. I didn't get to see anything personally, it was all second hand evidence really." But in the recent SciFi channel `Out of the Blue' show, the story has become that Cooper is out on the lakebed watching the UFO land and then take off again.

As to the accuracy of the rest of Cooper's recollection of the "Edwards UFO", eyewitness Gettys had this to say in 1982: "I am amazed that Gordon Cooper said the object landed -- as far as I know, he never even saw it.... His story sounds kind of funny to me."

And to me, too. But that's not slander.

What still puzzles me, though, is that after all of Cohen's defiant

defense of all of Cooper's statements, on ANOTHER part of his website he waffles: "I believe the probability that ex-astronaut Gordon Cooper is telling the truth regarding, at the minimum his early sightings, is extremely high." What does he mean by "at the minimum" – that Cooper may NOT be telling the truth about his LATER sightings? The inquiry continues....