

## **Questions & Answers with Ann Duffel, author of *Firestorm: Dr. James E. McDonald's Fight for UFO Science***

1. Q. How did you enter the UFO research field?

A. In early summer of 1945, as a schoolgirl, I saw, in broad day light and in a clear blue sky a cohesive, glowing yellow-white object 2/3 times the size of daytime Venus. Apparently very high in the sky, it slowly traversed a straight path from the NNE to the NNW over a period of one and one half hours. My mother and I viewed it for some minutes.

At the end of hour and a half, the object suddenly released smaller, seemingly metallic objects which flew varying paths away from and out from the sides of the object, reflecting the sun as they turned toward different directions. I was awed and frightened and ran into the house to try to persuade my mother to come out again and see what the "thing" was doing. I tried to tell her, from information processed perhaps intuitively from my non-technical brain, that it was "like gravity was not acting right on it." It was about 5:30 p.m. by that time; my mother was cooking dinner and would not come out again with me. I was so awed and frightened that I could not go outside again to continue watching.

We lived in Long Beach, California, an important port city during WW II, but absolutely no media attention was given to this unexplained event. About 2 to 3 weeks after the sighting, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. While reading a newspaper account and trying to understand what it was saying, I felt identical awe and fear that the object in the sky had inspired in me. Years later I learned that the object that we saw was seen around the time the first experimental atomic bomb was exploded in New Mexico. I then was able to speculate that perhaps I had seen a "carrier craft" which had come to conduct surveillance on Earth to monitor mankind's entrance into the atomic age.

2. Q. How did you come to know Dr. James E. McDonald?

A. In 1957 I joined the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) directed by the prominent researcher and author, Major Donald E. Keyhoe (USMC Ret.) When the current UFO research era began in 1947, I instinctively was drawn to the field because of my own 1945 unexplained sighting. Because I knew that what my mother and I had seen was a completely inexplicable aerial event, I surmised that other apparently reputable people, like Kenneth Arnold, who were reporting similar sightings, must be also telling the truth.

NICAP was an objective, active and intellectually-based research organization that worked constantly to bring the UFO phenomenon to the attention of the U. S. Congress, urging open public hearings on the subject. As early as 1958 McDonald began working quietly with NICAP, which he considered a scientifically-oriented organization with which to share his findings. By 1966, he decided to go public with his research with the intent of bringing the UFO question to the full attention of the Scientific Establishment, so that a broad scientific study could result. In the course of his travels around the U. S. involved with his professional atmospheric physics work, he would meet with NICAP investigative subcommittees and affiliates in various cities. I was a member of the Los Angeles NICAP Subcommittee (LANS) and became acquainted with McDonald during these visits. I also shared information with him on various sightings and UFO

photo cases that I personally investigated in the Southern California area.

3. Q. How did you get access to McDonald's private journals and letters?

A. After McDonald's tragic death, I personally went to the McDonald home in Tucson to express my deep condolences to Betsy, his wife. Some time later the scientific organization, Electrical and Electronics Engineers, (IEEE), which had taken great interest in McDonald's UFO work, presented a UFO conference in Los Angeles, which Betsy McDonald attended. During this trip she met with members of our LANS group. In 1991 I obtained a grant from the Fund for UFO Research (FUFOR) to archive McDonald's voluminous UFO files, which his family had carefully protected in their Tucson home. During eight trips to Tucson, involved with this archiving, I developed the idea of writing a biographical account of his UFO research years. Betsy concurred, apparently having trust in my objectivity and ability to produce an accurate, comprehensive work on this subject. We agreed that it would be an authorized biography.

As the archiving and added research/interviews for the biographical account advanced, Betsy shared certain private letters that McDonald had written to her toward the end of his life. These provided additional understanding as to what was happening to him personally and expanded our knowledge of events involved in his tragic death. They also revealed his deep desire to have his UFO files preserved, if possible, in the Personal Collections Section of the University of Arizona, Tucson, so that other researchers could perhaps eventually write the book he planned to write, rebutting the Condon Report.

4. Q. What did you find out about the Hynek/McDonald relationship that wasn't general knowledge before, and what is its importance to the UFO research field today?

A. McDonald wrote frequently in his third and fourth handwritten journals (transcribed by me with Betsy's frequent help) about his encounters and meetings with Hynek during 1966 to 1971. These described vividly the disagreements McDonald had with Hynek over the years, and his efforts to establish a good working relationship with him. McDonald thought that Hynek should admit the undeniable fact that he had given unsatisfactory "explanations" to hundreds of good sightings sent to Blue Book by members of the military and other government agencies. Hynek would never admit he had done any wrong, and kept insisting that if he had tried to convince Blue Book officials that their cases should be well-investigated and documented that he would lose his job as Blue Book consultant.

McDonald could not accept Hynek's explanation, maintaining his position that Hynek should have spoken out frankly to the Scientific Establishment, blowing the whistle on Blue Book and the fact that it was not researching the UFO question in a scientific manner. Jacques Vallee, who has written the "Foreword" to *Firestorm*, knew both men (Hynek having been his mentor and friend) and explains that the two men were of such different personalities that agreement and compromise were probably impossible between them. Hynek was cautious and soft-spoken; McDonald was persevering in his quest for truth and sometimes spoke bluntly. However, both men were sociable and used humor frequently and effectively in their relationships with others, but never with each other. Vallee suggests that if McDonald and Hynek had been able to come to terms with each other and worked together on the UFO question instead of (at times) at odds with each other, that more progress might have been made toward solving the puzzle.

5. Q. Why is the controversy surrounding McDonald's UFO research important today?

A. It is a well-known axiom that if we disregard history, we are doomed to repeat it. McDonald was a prestigious scientist, renowned for numerous contributions to the science of atmospheric physics, climatology and meteorology. He was a near-genius, if not a genius, persevering in searching out Truth in various scientific problems that caught his attention. During his six public years of contacting the scientific establishment, with strong evidential facts of the reality of UFOs he made great headway in interesting numerous individual scientists in the problem. However, facts presented in *Firestorm* demonstrate that an orchestrated attack was made against his UFO research by factions of government as well as scientific agencies inextricably linked to government. These facts serve as a warning to any other top scientists who might set about re-establishing scientific interest in the UFO question.

Such scientists, if they do appear in time, must remember that there is a documented UFO cover-up by factions in the government that have the ability to convince military, government, and scientific agencies to deny UFO reality. McDonald did not have adequate documented evidence of this, considering it a "grand foul-up" instead of a true "cover-up." He was not prepared for the attacks against him, nor did his high contacts in government, military, and science defend him sufficiently to prevent the depression which preceded his death. If he had had a sufficient "support system" within the science community, the tragedy might have been averted. Also, the support he had from numerous professional persons in various fields collapsed when NICAP itself was destroyed by FBI secret agents. What is needed is a cohesive, strong organization of scientific and other professionals who would provide support to any prestigious scientist(s) who might come to the fore to continue McDonald's work.

6. Q. What inspired, and made possible, McDonald's open inquiry/research into a controversial scientific question like UFOs?

A. McDonald's mind was oriented toward solving problems in science; once a problem caught his attention he persevered in his research until he found the answer. This trait was part of his basic personality. In the early 1950's, at a conference in Italy, a local UFO sighting was publicized in the press, and McDonald asked his older colleagues why they weren't taking an interest. They answered that the U. S. government had established Project Blue Book to study UFOs, and that if Blue Book had any questions about that particular sighting, they surely would have contacted the scientific community for answers.

This satisfied McDonald's curiosity for 2 years, until in 1956 he and a group of fellow scientists viewed an unidentified, aerial object south of Tucson. He reported this to Blue Book, who thanked him for his excellent report and assured him that "they were on the case." He heard anything further, causing him to wonder a bit. Then beginning in 1958, local sightings in Tucson, Arizona where he lived and worked at the Institute of Atmospheric Phenomena (IAP) caught his attention and he began to investigate sightings personally. He also contacted NICAP privately and shared data with this organization. Six years of research in and around Tucson provided evidence that a small proportion (about 2 percent) of sightings could not be explained, even after intense study. These were made by groups of reliable individuals in professional occupations. McDonald sought out sightings by multiple reliable witnesses, instead of relying on single-witness sightings. It was this unsolved mystery of the 2 percent unidentified that drove him forward, relentlessly pursuing answers.

7. Q. What made it possible for McDonald to conduct an open investigation of UFOs without concern for his prestige/career when most other scientists cannot?

A. To give a short answer, "academic freedom." McDonald had over ten years' tenure as a Full Professor of Meteorology at the U. of Arizona, Tucson and the same amount of tenure at the IAP. He had numerous contracts with the Office of Naval Research (ONR) for climatology research, knew highly-placed officials at the NSF, the NAS, and other professional scientific organizations, and a highly impressive resume of papers published in refereed scientific journals. His chairman at IAP, Dr. A. Richard Kasser, backed up his right to pursue any scientific question, which hinged on the science of atmospheric physics, as did the President of the University. They did not agree with him that the UFO question was worth his time and effort, but they supported his right to study whatever he chose.

Added to this, was McDonald's basic genius or near-genius, which was respected by his academic colleagues and friends in various scientific fields. Add his personality traits of intense interest in various scientific mysteries, his all-consuming need to pursue answers that he felt were within his ability to pursue, and his overwhelming persistence and perseverance. Even if there are scientists today interested in the UFO question who have McDonald's intellect, curiosity and perseverance, the idea of "academic freedom" is no longer so strong as it was in McDonald's day. The recent firing of a Berkeley tenured professor for participating in the protest against genetically engineered foods is one startling example.

8. Q. What was McDonald's single most important contribution made to the UFO field?

A. That's a little like asking what was Einstein's single most important contribution to physics! There were at least two which were vitally important: First, he proved to the UFO field and to the scientific establishment that Blue Book was a tiny, disinterested "study" of UFO sightings which thrived on bad scientific advice. He revealed its inexpertise, hoping to mend it and trusting that the government would upgrade it into a truly scientific study of the UFO problem. Since Blue Book was essentially a public relations scheme designed to soothe the public and the scientific community into thinking that UFOs were being taken seriously by the government, to McDonald's dismay, Blue Book was terminated right after the Condon Report came out in 1969. The Condon Report concluded that UFOs were not worthy of further scientific study.

Secondly, McDonald, through sheer persistence and contacts in high places, was the first investigator to discover that UFOs were a subject for international interest and attention by various governments. He tracked down the Lakenheath case, which occurred August 13 and 14, 1956. Through the careful study of the mis-paginated pages in the 35-page report, McDonald discovered proof that the multiple flights of UFOs in and around England and the North Sea on that night and early morning, disturbed the English government and the RAF, as well as USAF bases in the area, so much that the Air Defense Command in Colorado Springs became involved. They sent a warning to the White House, a move that could have resulted in the President getting ready to push the "red button" if it became necessary.

9. Q. How established was McDonald in the field of atmospheric physics?

A. He was considered one of the premiere scientists in the field of atmospheric physics. He was

probably the most wide-reaching scientist by virtue of the many contributions he made in published papers in refereed scientific journals. He was also very popular as a speaker at annual prestigious scientific conferences such as the AAAS, the AMS, IEEE, etc., on various subjects involving atmospheric physics, climatology and meteorology. He appeared frequently before Congressional hearings on widely-ranging subjects, such as placement of missile sites around major U. S. cities during the Cold War; his study of the ozone layer and his warnings that the development of SSTs (Supersonic transports) would pollute the ozone layer so badly that it could not repair itself and cause many thousands of additional skin cancer cases each year; and the one-time public hearing before a Congressional Committee on the subject of UFOs.

He not only contributed widely to refereed scientific journals but also wrote extensively in journals easily available to the public on subjects like electricity, using language that any non-technical person could understand. He also researched peripheral studies involving physics, at one time studiously researching the question of what sort of baseball bat was the best for players to hit home runs! His research on this was made possible under an ONR grant and published in a refereed scientific journal. His conclusion that the lighter the bat, the more likely the home run, is still with us today, although I doubt Sami Sosa and other players who use light bats know exactly why they do!

10. Q. What was the UFO research climate in the 1960s?

A. Beginning in the 1950s, and continuing midway into the '60s the field was sharply divided into two conflicting groups. Objective, technically-trained and professional researchers gathered into three or four public organizations, the largest and most objective of which was NICAP. These groups studied UFO sightings reported by the public through various channels and sent complete, proficient reports back to their headquarters. Two widely read newsletters, the NICAP INVESTIGATOR, and the APRO BULLETIN were read by thousands of Americans. They took the UFO problem seriously and, at the instigation of NICAP, conducted letter-writing campaigns to their Congressmen urging Congressional study of the UFO problem.

Contrasting vividly to these objective, hard-working researchers/investigators were the "contactees", a fairly large group of persons around the United States who claimed to have had contact with blond-haired, benevolent "aliens" who gave them rides to Venus, the moon, and other planets and who discussed seriously socio-economic problems affecting the world. There was never any physical evidence to support the contactees' claims and, contrary to the objective researchers, many contactees made money by writing books and appearing at "contactee conferences."

11. Q. Why was there little or no objective coverage in the media before McDonald came on the scene?

Unfortunately, most members of the media (newspapers, radio, TV) preferred to give publicity to the contactees by writing tongue-in-cheek stories about their claims and almost totally ignoring the objective, scientifically-oriented studies by UFO research organizations. On so-called "slow news days" newspaper reporters were always willing to write another story expounding the contactees' fraudulent claims. When McDonald appeared on the scene, almost immediately the media recognized his reputation, his expertise, and his high standing in the scientific community and began reporting his investigations and hypotheses seriously. Other objective researchers

from NICAP, APRO, MUFON, etc., benefited by having local sightings covered seriously by the media, as well.

12. Q. Have things changed significantly as far as coverage in the media presently, since McDonald is no longer with us?

A. Yes, in several ways. McDonald had remarkable presence, objectivity and ability to speak at a level that anyone could understand, even though his research often involved highly technical data. He was tireless and his reputation untarnishable. He has never been replaced as far as a spokesman in the field is concerned. The UFO field went on without him, simply because the phenomenon persisted and we persisted in studying it objectively. Due mainly to McDonald's efforts, the old time contactees gradually faded from the scene, but the interest of the media generally continued to favor the objective work done by reputable researchers.

Beginning in 1973 there was an abrupt proliferation of "abduction reports", such as Charles Hixson, Calvin Parker, Travis Walton and others. Most objective UFO researchers assumed that the field had simply entered a "new phase" in which "occupants" were openly contacting, and harassing, witnesses. During the next two decades, abduction reports virtually "took over" the field and were investigated rigorously by most UFO researchers. The number of "physical unidentified aeroforms traversing earth's atmosphere" (that is, the basic UFO phenomenon from 1947 to about 1973) either fell off sharply, or were ignored by researchers and the media alike, because they were too busy listening to abductees!

13. Q. Would you explain what you mean by the "two-pronged" approach to UFO presently, both in media coverage and in the field itself, and why does the public, and many UFO researchers themselves, confuse it as representing a single phenomenon?

A. Abduction cases held the UFO field's major attention from 1973 until about 1989. Then it became evident to a very few researchers like myself that so-called "UFO alien abductors" could be fended off with simple mental and physical techniques by strong-minded abductees who had a firm sense of their own rights. The evidence first surfaced, for me, during the writing of the updated, paperback 1989 edition of THE TUJUNGA CANYON CONTACTS (co-authored by myself and parapsychologist D. Scott Rogo). From 1989 to the present, "resisters" who use fend off techniques successfully against the harassing "entity phenomenon" took much of my research/writing time, culminating in my book, HOW TO DEFEND YOURSELF AGAINST ALIEN ABDUCTION in August 1998. A few other researchers also investigate this subject and have written books and articles on it.

Skepticism about "abductors" being physical UFO occupants from physical craft has grown considerably in the field, resulting in the present hypothesis that "abduction scenarios" might be parapsychical and/or interdimensional, rather than strictly physical in Earth space-time. So-called "abducting occupants" look and behave differently from the vast majority of "occupants" viewed near landed UFOs before 1970; generally, they seemed startled and rapidly left the scene when perceived by human witnesses. Since most abduction researchers took abductees at their word and attempted to document their experiences objectively, the media went along with the change. Neither researchers nor the media, however, fully recognize the "deceptive" nature of the abduction phenomenon, which seems to be posing as physical UFO occupants for its own unknown motives and purposes and the undeniable fact that the vast majority, if not ALL,

abductions occur in an altered state of consciousness.

14. Q. What is the earliest documented case of a UFO sighting in the United States?

A. Generally the June 24, 1947 sighting of nine large, seeming metallic UFOs by pilot Kenneth Arnold is cited as the earliest well-known sighting. Arnold viewed these craft in broad daylight over the Cascade Mountains from his private plane, setting off a media blitz and the use of the term "flying saucers".

15. Q. Would you give a short synopsis of James E. McDonald, his prestige in the science of atmospheric physics, and how he became involved in UFO research?

A. McDonald was a prestigious atmospheric physics whose curious mind branched out into other scientific questions. When convinced personally, from his own sightings and those sightings of reliable groups of professional witnesses in and around Tucson, that the UFO problem presented a serious question which should be studied on a well-funded, interdisciplinary basis by multiple scientific disciplines, his basic, persistent and untiring personality launched him on a quest for answers. Because of his flawless reputation and impressive research into other scientific questions in meteorology, climatology and atmospheric physics he was listened to carefully by packed audiences when he spoke before hundreds of scientific organizations, military groups, and government agencies between 1966 and 1970. He made great strides in convincing other scientists of the importance of studying the UFO question. (Also see Question #9)

16. Q. What were the facts about McDonald's own personal sighting and the date?

A. When he first came to Tucson in 1954 to found IAP, he and four other scientists saw a bright, anomalous object in the daytime sky while driving on a highway between Tucson and Nogales. Over the Santa Rita Mountains, to the south and east, the object remained in place during a considerable period of time, shining with the appearance of aluminum. In spite of their combined expertise, none were able to identify it, and later McDonald learned from the University's Astronomy Department that it was not Venus, or any other star or planet. He checked through a list of balloons, but none fit the facts. He reported it officially to Project Blue Book, asking if the object possibly could be "flares". Blue Book replied that they had not been able to identify the object, either, and thanked him for his highly professional account. They promised to "look into the matter and report back whatever they found out," but he never heard anything more from them.

He never spoke publicly of this sighting but it continued to puzzle him. When asked if he had ever seen a UFO, he would reply "no", this answer meaning that he had never seen an unidentified "craft". To McDonald's mind, sightings that involved close up views, radar-visual data, or photos of unidentified craft-like objects in the sky reported by credible witnesses were "UFOs".

17. Q. Why is it important to examine the UFO question with science and the public together? Do you have any suggestions on how might this be accomplished?

Members of the public most often view UFOs; scientists sometimes view them but are most reluctant to report them publicly, fearing ridicule and loss of esteem. Therefore, it is all-important that the two groups, including the military and government agencies OPENLY share all

information on UFO sightings. The sharing could be best done by means of a tracking-system, using the most sophisticated technology such as satellites, high-flying jets, etc. This tracking system should be supervised by a combination of scientists, military, government and the public all working together. It is only by this means that secrecy imposed by governmental or other sources can be overcome and the ridicule factor phased out. By such a tracking system, undeniable evidence of overflights of anomalous, craft-like objects traversing earth's atmosphere can be obtained and the information disseminated widely and publicly.

18. Q. What would you like to see happen in UFO research, and do you think that SETI is doing a satisfactory job finding out about possible extraterrestrial visitors to earth?

A. McDonald was the first researcher to read the 1969 Condon Report all the way through. Although most of the 900 pages were fairly meaningless fill" he found, hidden deep within the text, that a full third of the ninety cases covered in the Report were listed as "unidentified". He planned to write a book rebutting the entire Condon Report and elaborating on the "unidentifieds", had completed a list of proposed chapters and begun writing text on several of them. His unexpected death in 1971 brought an end to these plans, but I would like to see some qualified scientist or scientists complete McDonald's book, with the aid of knowledgeable private, objective UFO researchers.

SETI is trying to find meaningful, intelligent signals coming from sources outside our solar system, which would give credence to the hypothesis of the existence of extraterrestrial life. They should be also monitoring signals in earth's atmosphere and in our solar system. The closer the source of such signals, the more likely contact can be eventually made.

19. Q. Why is a scientist who studied the UFO problem 30 years ago still important today?

A. McDonald, in spite of his prestige, talent, perseverance, and genius ran into what might be construed as an orchestrated attack by (apparently) government sources and/or governmental/scientific sources who did not want him to continue cracking open the UFO question. He seemed on the verge of obtaining scientifically-valid PROOF that UFOs, as unidentified, physical aeroforms traversing earth's atmosphere, really do exist. Also, if McDonald's book could be written, it would serve as a basis for public Congressional hearings on the subject of UFOs, which would call together only scientifically-qualified spokesmen. The 1968 public hearing before a congressional subcommittee which McDonald's persistent efforts, combined with NICAP's influence, were the only public Congressional hearing on the subject to date.

McDonald's well-developed ideas for a public tracking system are even more feasible today, due to the considerable increase in surveillance technology developed since 1971.

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