

MJ-12 Papers 'Authenticated'?

A look into the claim that linguistic analysis has proved these crashed-saucer documents to be genuine.

Philip J. Klass

“LINGUISTICS EXPERT Vouches for MJ-12 Briefing Paper” was the headline in the *MUFON UFO Journal*. *The International UFO Reporter*, published by the Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS), headlined its article “MJ-12 Document Authentic, Says Expert.” *UFO* magazine’s headline was “Linguistic Analysis: MJ-12 Document Validated.”

This disputes my own findings that the “Top Secret Eyes Only” documents—which seemingly reveal that the U.S. government recovered two crashed flying saucers and the bodies of four UFO-nauts in 1947 and 1950—are counterfeit, for the many reasons detailed in *SI*. (See Winter 1987-88: 137-146; Spring 1988: 279-289.)

The newsletter *Focus*, published by William L. Moore, who released the MJ-12 documents, which seemingly confirm claims made in a book he coauthored in 1980, headlined its article: “MJ-12 Document Is Real, Says Expert.”

The “expert” is Roger W. Wescott, professor of linguistics at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, whose vita suggests he should be well qualified for such an assignment. Wescott also has a longstanding interest in a broad spectrum of the paranormal, including UFOs, which could explain why he was selected to make a linguistic analysis of the MJ-12 papers by Robert H. Blechman, MUFON’s state director for Connecticut.

Wescott finds the popular extraterrestrial-craft explanation for UFOs too prosaic for his taste. Instead, as he later explained to me, he sees a direct connection between UFOs and “these things that have been around for

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centuries [such as] fairy phenomena, wee folk, strange events of all kinds, strange appearances that baffle people.”

Wescott spent a total of eight hours on his analysis, for which he was paid \$1,000—jointly provided by MUFON (Mutual UFO Network), CUFOS, Fund for UFO Research, and Moore’s own “Fair Witness” organization.

The principal portion of the MJ-12 papers is what purports to be a Top Secret/Eyes Only document used by Rear Adm. R. H. Hillenkoetter to brief President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower on November 18, 1952, on the history of the so-called Top Secret Majestic-12 Committee. This committee allegedly had been created by President Harry S Truman on September 24, 1947, to analyze the crashed saucers and alien bodies and to cope with resulting national defense issues.

Hillenkoetter had been director of the Central Intelligence Agency in mid-1947, when the first crashed saucer allegedly was recovered. He held that post until the fall of 1950, when he returned to the Navy and was assigned a post in the Pacific. If the MJ-12 papers are to be believed, Hillenkoetter not only continued as a member of MJ-12 during his Pacific duty but was selected to brief President-elect Eisenhower.

On November 1, 1987, after I learned that Wescott had been approached by Bletchman, I sent him several white papers, pointing out what seemed to me to be serious discrepancies that indicated the documents were counterfeit.

The most important of these focused on a stylistic issue that I expected would especially interest Wescott. The alleged Hillenkoetter briefing document *consistently* used an extremely unusual mixed military-civil format for writing a date. The format typically used by civilians, for example, is “November 18, 1952” while the military format would be “18 November 1952.”

But the MJ-12 briefing paper *consistently* used a mixed format with a superfluous comma, for example, “18 November, 1952.” Additionally, when there was a single-digit date, the MJ-12 document had a zero before the digit, i.e., “07 July, 1947.” This style was not used in the United States in the early 1950s, when the document allegedly was written.

I also sent Wescott a white paper that revealed that William L. Moore *consistently* used this same unusual format, with a “superfluous comma” and a “preposed zero” before a single-digit date. My paper provided photocopies of 13 examples from Moore’s personal letters to me with superfluous comma and preposed zero underlined.

A critical question was whether Hillenkoetter also used this mixed military-civil date format prior to November 18, 1952, when the briefing document was allegedly prepared. At my request, the Truman Library provided me with four letters Hillenkoetter had written to President Truman in 1948-1950 during his tenure as CIA director.

Every one of these genuine Hillenkoetter letters/memoranda used the traditional military date format, *without a superfluous comma*. Three of the four were written on single-digit dates but *none used the preposed zero* found in the MJ-12 document.

To the best of my knowledge, the only two examples of the consistent use of this mixed military-civil format for writing the date and a preposed zero are William L. Moore's letters and the alleged Hillenkoetter briefing document.

In early 1988, Stanton T. Friedman, Moore's longtime collaborator, who has strongly endorsed the MJ-12 papers, visited the Truman Library to obtain copies of Hillenkoetter letters/memoranda so that he could give them to Wescott for his comparison of their style-format with that of the MJ-12 papers.

Friedman later provided me with copies of 16 additional Hillenkoetter letters/memoranda written between 1947 and 1950, before he returned to sea duty. *Every one of these uses the conventional military date format, i.e., without a superfluous comma.* Four of these were written on single-digit dates but *none of these used the preposed zero found in the MJ-12 documents.* Additionally, every one of these authentic Hillenkoetter letters/memoranda showed the writer's name as "R. H. Hillenkoetter," whereas the MJ-12 papers refer to the briefer as "Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter."

For Wescott's linguistic analysis of the MJ-12 papers, he was supplied with a total of 27 Hillenkoetter documents, including those he wrote as CIA director as well as private letters written after he had retired.

Wescott told Bletchman he would make his assessment based on "stylistics"—a discipline of linguistics that deals with the more or less unique design and syntax characteristics of a person's written language. On April 3, 1988, Wescott wrote Bletchman to render his verdict. Wescott's letter revealed that he had misunderstood the issue of the *mixed* military-civil date format and superfluous comma that I had earlier raised and documented for him.

Wescott said: "The stylistic evidence that [Klass] cites seems to me to be quite inconclusive: I myself, for example, alternate between writing 'April 3, 1988' and '3 April 1988' in my own letters." He added: "In ambiguous situations like this, I tend to follow an equivalent of the legal principle 'innocent till proven guilty.' My analog is 'authentic till proven fraudulent.' "

Four days later, on April 7, 1988, Wescott again wrote to Bletchman to say that Stanton Friedman had just called, seeking a less ambiguous endorsement of MJ-12 authenticity. This motivated Wescott to offer the following endorsement: "In my opinion, there is no compelling reason to regard *any* of these communications as fraudulent or to believe that any of them were written by anyone other than Hillenkoetter himself. This statement holds for the controversial presidential briefing memorandum of November 18, 1952, as well as for the letters, both official and personal."

I couldn't believe my eyes when I read the foregoing in the *MUFON UFO Journal*. The 27 unquestioned, authentic Hillenkoetter letters/memoranda had been supplied to Wescott to provide a stylistic benchmark for appraising the authenticity of the MJ-12 papers. But judging from Wescott's statement, seemingly he spent some of his eight hours in assessing their authenticity. It is not clear what he used as a benchmark for this process.

Wescott sent me a copy of his letter of May 15, 1988, to Mark Rodeghier,

scientific director of CUFOS, thanking him for payment and offering additional views on MJ-12. In this letter, Wescott mentioned the "mixed military-civil format" but again completely failed to grasp the obvious stylistic issue involved.

Commenting on the proposed zero before single-digit dates, which I claimed had not come into use until the 1970s, Wescott said: "If it is like most other matters of style and usage, I would say, it came in gradually and sporadically rather than suddenly and systematically." The critical issue was *when* did the proposed zero first begin to come into use in the United States.

On May 23, I wrote Wescott and asked him to supply me with photocopies of five U.S. military or CIA documents written prior to the MJ-12 document date that used the proposed zero in one-digit dates. To provide additional incentive, I offered to contribute \$100 to his favorite charity for each such letter he provided, up to a maximum of \$500. On June 18, having failed to hear from Wescott, I wrote him and raised the ante. I offered to contribute \$100 per letter for up to ten letters, or a total of \$1,000.

After a month passed without a response from Wescott, I wrote to make an additional offer: For each authentic Hillenkoetter letter/memoranda dated prior to November 18, 1952, that used a proposed zero and bore the name "Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter" (rather than "R. H. Hillenkoetter") I would contribute \$200 to Wescott's favorite charity, up to a maximum of \$2,000.

Thus, if Wescott had any hard evidence to support his claim, he could obtain as much as a \$3,000 contribution from me for his favorite charity simply by sending me photocopies of any such documents. Wescott never replied to any of these offers.

By early October, I had written Wescott six letters to which he had never replied, the last being on August 30, so I decided to call him. I reached him in Chattanooga, where he now lives, having accepted a two-year assignment at the University of Tennessee as the "first holder of the endowed chair of excellence in the humanities."

In early correspondence, Wescott had written that in his examination of the MJ-12 papers he had found no "clear evidence of fraud," prompting me to ask for illustrative examples of what he would consider to be "clear evidence of fraud." Wescott replied: "If someone were to come forward and confess fraud and then could show the means by which the fraud was perpetrated, that would be relatively conclusive."

When I asked Wescott, who is 63, how many documents of questionable authenticity he had analyzed during his long career, he replied: "A small number . . . several." He added that authentication "isn't something that I usually do." Wescott said, "The Hillenkoetter documents are the first in which I was asked to do anything official." He explained that in the other instances he had not conducted an analysis and had simply been asked for his "impressions" as to the document's authenticity. Wescott added, "This is not my specialty."

On June 10, 1988, Wescott had sent out a form letter addressed to "Dear Colleagues" to thank those who had written about his then recent assessment

of the MJ-12 papers. He admitted that he had “stepped into a hornet’s nest of controversy.”

“On behalf of those who support the authenticity of the memo, I wrote that I thought its fraudulence unproved,” Wescott wrote. “On behalf of its critics, *I could equally well have maintained that its authenticity is unproved.*” (Emphasis added.) *But he opted not to do so.* The question of crashed saucers, Wescott wrote, “like the larger ‘ufological’ topic of which it is a part, *will remain to perplex us, I suspect, for a long time.*” (Emphasis added.)

During my telephone conversation with Wescott in October, I asked if he agreed that “if the MJ-12 papers are authentic, it indicates the most extraordinary event of at least the last two millennia?” Wescott replied: “Oh no, I don’t think I would go that far.” I was surprised at his reply and noted that if the documents were authentic then the United States would have solid proof of extraterrestrial visitations. Wescott replied: “They wouldn’t have to be *extra-terrestrial*. They could be what’s called ‘*ultraterrestrial*.’” When I sought a clarification of the latter term, Wescott explained: “Meaning they didn’t come from outside the earth. . . . Another possibility is that simply there are more dimensions to our existence than we understand and that occasionally there are interferences from one domain to another.”

In one of Wescott’s very few responses to my letters, he wrote on May 13 to say that he was “not as impressed by CSICOP and the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER as you, because I don’t find them genuinely skeptical.” Instead he characterized them as “counterfaith.”

The foregoing should provide a useful perspective for readers who chance to read an article that cites Wescott’s endorsement of MJ-12 authenticity, such as *UFO* magazine’s article. It began: “After eight hours of stylistic analysis, noted linguistics expert Dr. Roger W. Wescott has offered what can be considered the first professional authentication of . . . MJ-12 documents. . . .” The magazine quoted Moore as commenting that Wescott is “saying flat out that in his opinion . . . Hillenkoetter wrote it.”

The *International UFO Reporter (IUR)* article began: “After comparison with letters and other materials known to have been written by Adm. Roscoe Hillenkoetter, Roger W. Wescott . . . has concluded that the much-disputed MJ-12 document was composed, as claimed, by Hillenkoetter. A later issue of *IUR* carried Wescott’s more equivocal assessment of June 10, under the headline: “Statement from Roger Wescott.” There was no CUFOS comment or reference to the earlier *IUR* claim that Wescott had authenticated MJ-12.

Considering that the MJ-12 papers represent Wescott’s first “official” role in trying to assess the authenticity of a document of great potential importance, some might expect he would write a paper for an appropriate journal. But when he was asked about this possibility, he said he had no such intentions.

Under the circumstances, that is not surprising. ●