

# Brother John

(Ford, John)  
and the Diabolical UFO Coverup

"He was arrested for conspiring to murder three local politicians. By poisoning them with radium. Police charge that he schemed to put the radioactive material in their cars, in their food and even in their toothpaste ... According to prosecutors, Ford was a terrorist intent on killing, to help end a UFO coverup. Today, Ford, 49, resides in a state-run psychiatric center, having been found unfit to stand trial ... But for the believers, the story isn't over. The coverup continues, as always. The coverup is eternal."

## OUT THERE

**They Thought UFOs Had Landed.**

**A Case of Hysteria, Politics, Poison and Toothpaste**

by **Michael Colton**

**Washington Post Staff Writer**

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BELLPORT, N.Y. -- For the believers, the obvious place to look for captured aliens was on government property -- specifically the huge, guarded facility on Long Island called Brookhaven National Laboratory. A former military base, Brookhaven was known to be the site of experiments involving DNA and particle accelerators, using equipment like an alternating gradient synchrotron and a high-flux beam reactor.

The aliens had to be there.

John Ford, chairman of the Long Island UFO Network, knew something big was happening on Long Island, renowned among conspiracy buffs as the site of the Montauk time warp project and, more recently, the mysterious crash of TWA Flight 800. Ford and his 400-member group had investigated many weird sightings on the island over the past decade. Some residents were convinced that saucer crashes had caused forest fires, that they'd seen airborne battles between spacecraft and military helicopters, that people had been abducted and animals mutilated. This place could be the next Roswell, or an East Coast Area 51.

Ford, a retired bailiff, frequently called the Brookhaven lab with questions and accusations. He was cordial and articulate, and lab spokeswoman Mona Rowe wished she could give him more interesting answers; as a sci-fi fan herself, she believes extraterrestrial life exists. Just not at Brookhaven National Laboratory. She even invited Ford to tour the place, to open any door he wanted and allow his own experts to search for UFO evidence. She had nothing to hide.

Ford never made it to the lab, though the lab eventually made it to him. In a plot as strange as anything on "The X-Files" or "The Outer Limits" -- two of Ford's favorite shows -- he was arrested for conspiring to murder three local politicians. By poisoning them with radium. Police charge that he schemed to put the radioactive material in their cars, in their food and even in their toothpaste.

After midnight on June 13, 1996, Mona Rowe's phone rang. She was on call for Brookhaven's radiological assistance program, a sort of radiation SWAT team. She accompanied the team to a Bellport home surrounded by police, where they found hot radioactive sources encased in lead in the back of a pickup truck.

John Ford, the "UFO guy" she and others had always considered a harmless eccentric, was under arrest.

Never mind that the radium would have taken decades to kill anyone. According to prosecutors, Ford was a terrorist intent on killing, to help end a UFO coverup.

Today, Ford, 49, resides in a state-run psychiatric center, having been found unfit to stand trial -- just as he had hoped. One of his alleged conspirators is in jail; another friend awaits sentencing. Ford's home is boarded up, and the Long Island UFO Network (LIUFON) is defunct.

But for the believers, the story isn't over. The coverup continues, as always. The coverup is eternal.

## Seriously Weird

Ford's case is strange, even for Long Island, and that's no small feat. This is the place where teenage tramp Amy Fisher shot the wife of grease monkey Joey Buttafuoco. Where John Esposito kept 9-year-old Katie Beers locked in an underground dungeon for two weeks. Where Colin Ferguson killed six people on a commuter train, where Judge Sol Wachtler stalked his lover, where "Angel of Death" nurse Richard Angelo injected muscle relaxants into four patients.

To be weird in Long Island, you have to be seriously weird. Some blame the power lines and the water supply for producing, among others, Howard Stern, Geraldo Rivera and the 1,200 pounds of Walter Hudson. "People here are open to strange ideas," says Mona Rowe, who comes from Hawaii, where these things don't happen.

Of course, equating John Ford with killers and torturers is unfair; all we know for sure is that he liked to talk about doing away with those who he thought did him wrong.

thought did him wrong.

Still, Ford lived in an area that seems to be fertile ground for his odd ideas -- and in a fertile era. At the end of the millennium, it seems that no one trusts anyone, least of all authority. Corporations are too powerful, governments are too secretive. Planes explode in midair; war veterans contract mysterious ailments. A Japanese television cartoon emits flashes of light that cause children to convulse.

Strange days, indeed.

With so many seemingly impenetrable coverups and interesting "coincidences," it is up to the average citizen to expose the evil-doers. Theories are plentiful; facts are harder to come by. "Perception is reality," the FBI's James Kallstrom said last year, explaining why the bureau's investigation of Flight 800 spent so much time refuting rumors of a missile attack.

Of course, this article itself could just be part of the "official version" -- or, as one of Ford's supporters, Peter Moon, put it, "damage control to make everyone on Long Island look crazy."

A number of Ford's friends and colleagues, who have followed his case on the Internet and in UFO publications, believe he has been set up, framed, railroaded. He's innocent, they say, and they produce theories as to why he was arrested: He was getting too close to a government coverup; he was silenced for his outspoken beliefs; he was a patsy.

His attorney, John Rouse, wishes these folks would shut up. They're not helping Ford's case. "I don't want to sound too flippant, but my impression is that these people can find a conspiracy in a cheesecake," he says. Rouse believes Ford is innocent, but says the case has nothing to do with the CIA, UFOs or other acronyms. It has to do with a far more mundane scourge: politics.

Ford's life -- his version of his life, anyway -- is like an "X-Files" episode written by Thomas Pynchon (another Long Island product, natch). John Ford believed in UFOs, as do many people. But he was a lonely man prone to extreme gullibility, an ineffectual citizen whose political aspirations were thwarted and who found a sense of power by espousing incredible theories. People listened to him.

Ford is probably insane -- even some of his friends admit that. To pursue UFOs is to suspend a degree of rationality for an equal measure of blind faith. Ford's case shows how fragile the balance can be.

There is one question that people on both sides of this case ask of those who want information. The answer to this question, they assert, immediately places you on one side or the other. It defines whom you will trust, and how much you will trust them.

"Do you believe in UFOs?"

## Looking to the Sky

John Ford spent most of his adult life working on the side of the law, as an officer of the same court he would later appear in as a defendant. With a face like John Belushi's and a voice like Elmer Fudd's, Ford appeared odd but non-threatening to those who knew him. After graduating from St. John's University in Queens in 1971 with a degree in philosophy, he started work at the Brooklyn criminal court, earned a master's degree in public administration and transferred to Suffolk County in 1982.

Friends say Ford had a big heart, adopting dogs from the pound and delivering supplies when Hurricane Gloria hit; he cried when he accidentally ran over a cat. He dated, and was engaged twice, but his most constant companion was his mother, Catherine, with whom he lived. "She was his right-hand man," recalls a LIUFON member.

An avid gun collector, Ford made model tanks and occasionally read Soldier of Fortune magazine. His co-worker John Marafino insists the gun collection was simply for show, like baseball cards. The only time Ford shot a gun was to pass his exam as a court officer, Marafino says, "and he wasn't even a good shot."

At work, he carried a service revolver; locked up at home were at least 35 licensed handguns and rifles, along with bulletproof vests, knives, ammunition and assorted military junk. He ran his UFO investigations with walkie-talkies, acting as if he were leading a paramilitary operation. He got a kick out of it.

In the 1970s and '80s, Ford became active in local politics, forming a Conservative Party club in Suffolk County, supporting his mother in her bids for highway superintendent and county legislator, and running for several party positions himself. Frustration over Suffolk County's Republican rule caused him to quit politics, but his hatred of county Republicans never left him.

Ford formed the Long Island UFO Network in 1988, and as he became engrossed in abductions and coverups, he came to believe the government was harassing him. His colleagues at work still found him dependable, but others noted his obsessions and mercurial moods.

In 1989, Ford conducted his first big investigation, of a supposed UFO crash in Moriches Bay -- the same bay that TWA Flight 800 plummeted into seven years later, coincidentally (or not). On Sept. 28 of that year, several people reported seeing glowing orange lights in the sky -- even Brookhaven's Rowe noticed them as she drove home, though she assumed they were flares.

Ford concluded, after extensive interviews of witnesses, that military helicopters shot down a UFO over the bay, killing 17 aliens that were later taken to Brookhaven. Others accepted the explanation that the helicopters dropped aerial flares over the bay that night so the Coast Guard could better rescue a sinking fishing boat.

LIUFON attracted more attention in the paranormal world for its investigation of the so-called South Haven Park Incident in November 1992. For four days the park was closed to the general public because of duck hunting, officials said. Ford, though, believed that a UFO crash caused a fire in the park, and he was backed by several witnesses. Plus, he had a videotape that he believed showed burning UFO wreckage.

He traveled to conferences to show the tape, which Ford said came from a firefighter on the scene. It supposedly revealed uniformed men placing

something on the ground, and what appeared to be a body.

Even some UFO investigators were skeptical about the videotape, which Ford admitted was of shoddy quality. But Ford, and those like him, have an amazing capacity for belief: In defiance of physical laws, despite not witnessing the event firsthand, Ford was sure that visitors had come to Long Island for the second time in three years.

## Time Traveling

Preston Nichols was sure, too. Portly and absent-minded, he lives with his father in a small, shoddy house cluttered with electronic equipment, books, videotapes and a rock collection. Sitting in his driveway is a school bus Nichols bought to transform into a "mobile UFO investigative unit." On a recent rainy day in East Islip, he fires up the bus's space heater so he can comfortably catalogue his UFO-detection equipment. There's a magnetic detector; a Geiger counter; a gas detector, for residuals of exhaust from helicopters; a mine detector; an ionization detector.

A LIUFON member and friend of Ford's, Nichols, 50, writes books on time travel and government experiments. He has theories about Ford's arrest. Ford got too close to the truth, Nichols claims. He talks of his own intelligence connections and fears that government agents have tampered with the lug nuts on his car.

In his living room, while his fat dog snores, Nichols cues up a video and announces, "I didn't believe in time travel until I saw evidence that I had time-traveled."

He shows part of that evidence: a 1995 tape of a local newscast that briefly features a young firefighter who resembles Nichols. He believes it is his "double," a younger self, visiting from the past.

But wait. Couldn't it just be someone who resembled him? No, Nichols says. Too many people have argued that the resemblance is uncanny.

He sighs. It's hard to convince the non-believers.

## The Plot Thickens

"This is possibly one of the greatest events in the history of man," John Ford told the Riverhead (N.Y.) News-Review, talking about the alleged saucer crash at South Haven Park. He made the papers and evening newscasts with his pronouncements. People were seeing things in the sky, and Ford became a local "expert."

In 1993 Ford left work on a disability pension after injuring his back; in 1995 his mother died of cancer, leaving him alone in the house. He had more time to pursue UFOs, and more time to worry. Steve Iavarone, his loyal vice president at LIUFON, noticed Ford's increasing paranoia and hostility.

A month before his arrest, Ford told Iavarone that a car in Ford's driveway had money hidden in the gas tank, "but we can't get it out because there's a special detonating device and the car will explode." Iavarone checked out the car, even jumped around on top of it, and it didn't blow up.

Though Iavarone, a burly electrical contractor, laughs at Ford's obsessions, he insists that his own suspicions are true. His phones are tapped and his house is being watched, he believes. Computer-altered voices leave menacing messages on his answering machine. "People look in my window all the time," Iavarone says.

In 1995 Ford began to investigate another alleged crash, which he believed started the August forest fires in eastern Long Island (the ones that may have attracted Preston Nichols's younger self, sent to recover the UFO). In a LIUFON bulletin, Ford wrote that "the government's particle beam weaponry" may have shot down a UFO, and that ["this plot involves newspaper sources, county, state and federal officials."](#)

Believing his life to be in danger, Ford started carrying guns at all times. It was around this time that he met Joseph Mazzuchelli -- referred to in the local press as "a wiry, tattooed hot-rod" or "a tough-talking former junkyard employee." He was also a convicted burglar.

Ford took in Mazzuchelli "like a stray dog," says Ford's co-worker John Marafino. Other friends say Mazzuchelli, 44, began to take advantage of Ford, who gave him money, a cell phone and a credit card. Ford believed that Mazzuchelli had a Mafioso uncle who would finance LIUFON. He gave the ex-felon guns -- which Mazzuchelli allegedly tried to sell.

Enter Kevin Koch. He was interested in Mazzuchelli's guns. He also was under investigation for minor criminal activities. He became a snitch. He told the police about a guy named John Ford, who he heard was hatching a strange scheme involving radium.

According to Koch, Ford claimed that he had hidden outside Republican leader John Powell's home with a rifle two weeks earlier. The night of June 12, 1996, authorities wired Koch and followed him to Ford's house.

## Setting the Trap

At 11 p.m. Ford was hanging out with his friends Joe, Kevin, Freddie, Skipper and Teddy. (The last three are wire-haired fox terriers.) The men talked about guy stuff -- who gets more sex, why you can't trust women -- and politics. The conversation took on a dark cast.

"I got that very dangerous stuff in the back of the truck," said Ford, according to a transcript of the police recording.

"How bad is it?" asked Koch.

"It's in...a three-inch lead container, and it's leaking five roentgens per hour."

The dogs bark. Ford puffs his pipe. Somebody goes into the kitchen for drinks. Talk turns to burning down the offices of the Suffolk County

Conservative Party, throwing elections into disarray.

Ford mentions Tony Gazzola, an old political adversary. "This isotope, he'll start glowing in 24 hours." They all laugh.

"Put it in a bag, take the little bag and put it underneath his car seat," says Ford.

He also boasts: "I'll kill that [expletive] President Clinton -- up the [expletive]. I'll do it."

"Does Gazzola eat Italian food?" asks Ford. "Take the yellow [expletive] powder, and mix it in with chopped garlic. The radium in with the chopped garlic."

Were the three planning a crime or just joking around? The interpretation of the tape depends on who's listening

Many have criticized the recording for its poor audibility, but according to the prosecution's official transcript, this was a conspiracy to undermine the local Republican Party, in part by poisoning various officials. Ford specifically mentions John Powell, the chairman of the Suffolk County Republican Committee; Fred Towle, a Suffolk legislator, and Gazzola, the head of the Conservative Party in Brookhaven (and a onetime treasurer of Ford's Conservative Party club).

Police cars filled the normally tranquil Sundial Lane. Ford and Mazzuchelli were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit murder, criminal solicitation, illegal possession of radioactive materials and reckless endangerment.

Later that day the police and the radiation team were sent to the home of Ford's friend Edward Zabo in nearby Medford, where they found more radioactive materials, several guns, blasting caps, detonators, fuses and bombs. Zabo was arrested on weapons, explosives and radioactive materials charges.

Zabo, 51, had known Ford since college. A Defense Department employee who worked as an electronics quality-control specialist at Northrop Grumman, Zabo told the radiation team that his radioactive and explosive materials came not from the Grumman plant but from a friend -- and Zabo gave them to Ford for disposal.

For many years, radium was used to make watches glow in the dark. It's still used to calibrate Geiger counters, such as those Ford owned. It is a mild carcinogen -- but it's also used to treat cancer.

Despite Ford's pronouncement, captured on tape, that Gazzola would "glow" in 24 hours and Powell would "fall" in 30 days, the radium would actually take nearly 20 years to kill someone if ingested, at which point the victim would be elderly and at a greater risk for cancer anyway. "They picked the wrong substance," says Steve Musolino, a health physicist at Brookhaven.

Powell, Gazzola and Towle were shocked to find out that they were Ford's alleged targets. "This is not something you expect to have to deal with in local elected office, especially in the Suffolk County legislature," says Towle, who holds office in Ford's district.

According to a rambling manifesto Ford wrote from jail, the three officials were responsible for setting forest fires to cover up the 1995 UFO crash. They also planned to "eliminate" Ford so he could not reveal the truth.

## The Invaders

When defense lawyer John Rouse got involved with Ford's case, he figured that someone accused of something so outlandish had a prior record of threatening behavior. He subpoenaed Ford's internal-affairs file from the New York State Court Administration, which contained at least four complaints about LIUFON-related threats.

"There was a whole investigation done over a couple years, with similar incidents of huffing and puffing," says Rouse. In each case, officials found that the allegations had no merit and never disciplined Ford.

The lawyer believes his client has been subject to "selective prosecution" -- and is a victim of local politics. Republican District Attorney James Catterson was supported in his November reelection bid by Powell, the Republican chairman. "The DA makes it look like he's saved the Republican leader's life," says Rouse. "He blew this way out of proportion." (Catterson responds that Rouse is "a bitter individual" who "knows better.")

Rouse unsuccessfully sought a change of venue. He then pursued an insanity plea, and four psychiatrists and psychologists determined that Ford was delusional and not fit to stand trial.

One psychiatric evaluation noted that, in the 1970s, as a Conservative Party activist, Ford believed Communists were poised to invade Long Island. Indeed, Ford said, they'd already landed, in submarines.

Years later, it was the UFOs that were invading. Some experts see a correlation between the end of the Cold War and an increasing conspiracy mind-set among Americans. Lacking real enemies, we look for them in our own government -- and in the sky.

## Secret Agent Man

Both Zabo and Mazzuchelli have pleaded guilty to lesser charges in exchange for testimony against Ford. Mazzuchelli was sentenced in November to three to nine years for conspiracy; Zabo is free on bail until his March sentencing for weapons and explosives possession. If Ford ever goes to trial he could face up to 75 years in prison. Meanwhile, he is periodically evaluated.

Ford declined to be interviewed, but in letters to Steve Iavarone, the LIUFON vice president, he explained how he hoped to avoid a trial:

"If I go up to Mid-Hudson Psychiatric [Center] for six months as incompetent to stand trial then I'll come back and most likely the charges will be dismissed. ...So far I left the first doctor mumbling to himself with all the information I gave him. I guess I'll have a repeat performance with the next doctor tomorrow."

He did not have to lie or exaggerate to the doctors to be found unfit; he simply told them what he believed to be true, which seemed so fantastical that they could only label it delusional behavior.

Among Ford's beliefs, as stated in his recent handwritten 102- page manifesto, "My Statement to the Media":

He has been a CIA agent since the age of 19, leading a life hidden from family and co-workers. He was not paid, so there is no record of him. Joseph Mazzuchelli was an officer of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency.

Ford was recruited to observe Soviet KGB agents in Queens, who tried to assassinate him five times. He personally stopped a KGB penetration of the Reagan for President Committee.

The AIDS and Ebola viruses were created by aliens to eliminate the population of sub-Saharan Africa. President Nixon, Jackie Gleason, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato and New York Gov. George Pataki, among others, have all seen UFO evidence.

"The court says I am not competent based upon these statements," Ford wrote. "Are they ravings of a madman or the writings of a perfect and master spy?"

Some of his supporters are willing to believe the latter. "He seems to me to fit the profile of an agent," says Peter Moon, who publishes conspiracy books on Long Island.

But others, like Preston Nichols, think that spending 17 months in jail pushed Ford over the edge. " He's as loony as they come, but he's a coherent loon," says Nichols, the time traveler.

Ford knows he's not really crazy, though. He's certain that, in the end, he'll triumph. "I'll bring home the bacon for everyone," he wrote to Iavarone. "Then we'll rebuild LIUFON and destroy the [coverup](#)."

He ends the letter his usual way, with a familiar motto from popular culture:

"The truth is out there..."

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#### **Stop Presses!**

Regarding Ford, Elaine Douglass of Operation Right to Know (ORTK), together with several others, has established a John Ford Defense Committee, devoted to raising money to help him out. The paranoia here is that Ford must have been on to Something Big, or else he would not be treated this way. Stay tuned!

-Saucer Smear, Jan. '97

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