April 28, 1989, MIT professors Ronald R. Parker and Ronald G. Ballinger gave an interview to the *Boston Herald* and alleged that Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann had committed science fraud. After the defamatory story hit the newswires, Parker denied making such accusations.

An audiotape of this interview, however, supports the *Herald* and its journalist Nick Tate. Tate gave the audiotape to Eugene Mallove. The recording was digitized and partially transcribe by Steven B. Krivit and is part of the *New Energy Times* archive.

For the full story, see Chapter 16 "Accused of Fraud" in Steven B. Krivit's book Fusion Fiasco.

Inaudible portions are marked with [xxx].

Parker: . . .accuse them of fraud, one could.

Tate: Can you—can you tell me what the uh—what exactly the significance of the 2.5 is? I mean, understand I've attempted—I'm not a scientist. I've attempted to read as much as I can understand.

Parker: I can give you a short synopsis of that.

Ballinger: Can we, uh—can I make—say something here about —? You're going to publish this right?

Tate: Yes.

Ballinger: You're not a scientific person, right?

Tate: That's correct.

Ballinger: What's the procedure about this? Can we see what you're going to print, before you're going to print it? Not to change anything, but to make sure you don't screw something up here.

Tate: In technical terms?

Ballinger: In technical terms.

Tate: Uhhh—

Ballinger: You know we're talking about serious business here and I have seen crap in newspapers that comes out, you know, that quotes the generation of isotopes which aren't—don't exist and all kinds of stuff like that. Nobody's going to change anything—

Parker: That's a good point. The reason I stopped talking to the Globe, for example, is that I felt that they were reporting irresponsibly.

Ballinger: They interviewed me but didn't [xxx]

Parker: Yeah, and you know they were out there just leading the cheers instead of being objective.

Tate: Let me say this to you, that in general the process is—the policy of the paper is to turn down a story before having it proofread outside of the paper. But I understand what you're saying. I think that given I am not a scientific person, we could work something out. (Source: New Energy Times)

Ballinger: There has to be a way because there's sort of a moral obligation here on our part to make sure that . . .

Parker: Let me—Yeah let me put it another way, I mean we're beginning to get a very short fuse on this whole issue, as you can tell, because for example these guys were down in Congress when Ron was down there on Wednesday asking for twenty-five million bucks.

Ballinger: A hundred and twenty five.

Parker: Well, a hundred. . .

Tate: Was it $125 million?

Parker: Only a mere twenty-five from the government, right?

Ballinger: Twenty-five from the government, the rest from industry.

Parker: And, you know, it's one thing when they come out with something that's

potentially interesting scientifically and so on and so forth. It's quite another thing when they're out there trying to fleece the public money to push something that, uh, has no credibility at this point. Now in a [xxx] way what we're saying is we're ready to begin getting into the controversial issue.

Tate: I should explain to you. . .

Parker: We don't want to do that without trusting the source, Okay? In other words, you know I can't trust the Globe, I'd like to trust you. I can't trust you unless I know what you're going to turn out.

Tate: I guess it depends on what we talk about. What you're suggesting is that what I would like to do based on just a little information that I've heard is write a story that indicates you have serious questions and concerns about what Pons and Fleischmann are saying. . .

Parker: We can go beyond the concerns and questions to say that what they have reported is not true. That's a much stronger statement.

Tate: And potentially what you're suggesting is that—to bring some money into the university.

Parker: I shouldn't say that, I should say that that's your conjecture, not mine. Okay, the fact that they're down there asking for $125 million you can draw your own conclusions from that.

Ballinger: I would suggest that you probably have a tape of the entire hearing.

Parker: Do you have one?

Tate: I don't have one, no.

Ballinger: Well, you should get one and you should look at it and spend the time, because then you'll understand what was going on down there. In terms of your background, it's a very important thing for you to look at. Even though you may be on a deadline and it may be six hours long and all that stuff, you really need to see what was going on.

Tate: What was your impression of what was happening?

Ballinger: It was a fairly well-orchestrated attempt to, in my mind, short circuit in this case

well-established and well-recognized review process for any kind of research much less this kind of research and get uh—diversion of funds to uh from the government from other projects presumably to the University of Utah. And, uh, they used uh you know. If you assume that what they are saying is correct, you may argue about the heavy-handedness of what their logic is of their methods, but for something that's not been proved to be correct, the fact that they used this (xxx) was going on plus the fact that (xxx) to use the argument -

[crosstalk]

Ballinger: If you don't look at the tape, you should read Ira Magaziner's testimony. He is the consultant that they hired to uh . . .

Parker: Is he the one who went into this [xxx] society in Rome?

[crosstalk]

Ballinger: He made a very, you know, a very pseudo-truth — that's the word I'd use. You start out with something which is fundamentally true, but everything is not so true after that. We are, in fact, getting killed by the Japanese. I mean we're great inventors, but we don't do a good job of bringing things to market. The Japanese are excellent at that and were getting beaten. We're getting our ass beaten, right? And that's the argument that he used, we should definitely—we should stuff all kinds of money in here, we should go on parallel paths, we should establish a center—an international center in Utah, naturally in Utah, because that's where the best scientists are. And we should get going on this right away. That makes sense, if you're trying to, if you have an established, verified product. You know, I mean I think I agree that we're getting killed by the Japanese and so therefore we should —there has to be a way to augment the way we do that kind of thing. But he started from a fundamental assumption which was not correct, and that is, we don't have anything that's proven, and moreover not only do we not have anything that is proven, but there's a lot of reason to believe that not only will it be disproven, but it will turn out that it's not correct.

Tate: Let me ask you, just back up a step. You're talking about—I presume you're talking about traditional scientific controls and traditional scientific methods that have not been observed in this particular situation.

Parker: This is sci— I'll give you a quote: This is scientific schlock, Okay.

Tate: Tell me specifically what they've done.

Parker: [Parker laughs].

Tate: That is that may. . .

Parker: I'll just tell you about the neutrons, Okay.. That's really important, Okay. They've taken some data. They didn't even take it themselves, they had people take it for them. They published it in their paper and they claimed that it showed the presence of neutrons from their experiment. The data is patently, has been patently falsely interpreted. Neutrons are not present at anywhere near the level their own data shows. They're not there. They've misinterpreted their results. They falsely interpreted their results. Whether they did this intentionally or not I don't know, but they did not present— they did not interpret their results correctly. It's a key point in their paper.

Tate: Specifically what they're claiming, that it was neutrons they were creating. . .

Parker: That they were creating neutrons from their experiment. Their documentation unfortunately shows that not only was it falsely interpreted, but there were no neutrons at anywhere near the level they claimed. You can use the data in two ways, to show that they falsely interpreted it, but also that there weren't neutrons at the level they claimed.

Tate: So at best it's misinterpretation and at worst it's — as you were saying. . .

Parker: It's fraud.

Tate: Now do you know this from studying their research, from reviewing their information -

Parker: Yes

Tate: - or have you tried—and I presume you've, in addition, attempted to parallel what they've done?

Parker: We reproduced their results so we completely understand why they misinterpreted. Let me put it a different way, we don't see why they misinterpreted, we understand what they should have seen and didn't.

Tate: So you've reproduced their experiment?

Parker: We've simulated the neutrons. We've said, suppose there were no neutrons, what would it have looked like? And we find something quite different from what they claim.

Ballinger: We find what we should expect.

Parker: We found what we should expect [crosstalk] and what all of the scientific literature says we should expect and what they have found is something at variance with all the scientific literature on the subject. And yet they published it and said [xxx]

Tate: Would you care to speculate on their intent?

Parker: I think Ron made it perfectly clear that when you're asking for $125 million for the university, I mean I don't want to be tied into that quote, but I mean you have to draw the [xxx]. They were in Washington Wednesday asking for $125 million dollars.

[Ballinger starts reading some news stories; not transcribed. There is some crosstalk.]

[Parker receives a phone call.]

Parker (to phone caller): [xxx] Yeah. I just talked to Richard [Garwin] who wrote the Nature piece. I don't know if you saw that? But he and I basically chuck it off, I mean you know I said his piece was the best thing written so far. And he told me he did see the original submission and it did have the line at 2.5 [MeV]. The original submission had the line at 2.5 so, you know that's, uh, the smoking gun with fingerprints, Okay, you don't even need [xxx]. Oh, gee, I don't want to quote him, but that's a good question, but the original submission to the journal had 2.5, just as the 2.5 in the equation, so you know now it transcends I think the question of whether they misinterpreted to the question of whether there was deliberate fraud. Okay, alright. . .(xxx). Well, all your detective work was correct, but now he has the smoking gun with the fingerprints on it, right? [Laughs] Okay, right, see ya! Bye. . .

Ballinger: Is that the Nature [xxx] you're talking about?

Parker: Yeah.

Ballinger: whole article. I haven't, I don't have the whole article

Parker: [xxx]

Ballinger: circulate around

Parker: [xxx] more sensible [xxx] look the neutron peak [xxx] don't show the whole spectrum [xxx]

Ballinger: I'm sure he's gotten a lot of information from people like us too.

Parker: Well, yeah, then he talks about the calorimetry, do they have stirring [xxx] So I thought he would be good to talk to and he just volunteered. He'd seen the original submission to the journal. The line was at 2.5.

Ballinger: That's what we suspected. (Source: New Energy Times)

Parker: That's right.

Ballinger: If the line was actually at 2.5.

Parker: So it's bogus, it's completely wrong.

Tate: The line you're talking about -

Parker: neutron

Ballinger: it says gamma ray peak that results from the 2.4 or 2.3

Parker: 2.45 MeV

Ballinger: fusion neutron

[crosstalk]

Parker: effective slow neutron by the time it reacts with a proton.

Ballinger: but it says [xxx] 2.5 it should be at 2.2 if its a real thing.

[crosstalk]

Tate: They shifted it down from 2.5 to 2.2.

Ballinger: The original publication had the peak at 2.5.

[crosstalk]

Parker: This is where I'm, I'd say, uh, we just don't know, I mean best interpretation or was it malicious. So, what are you going to do with this, uh, Nick? You know this is [xxx] what you're hearing is that we think it's a scam, right?

Tate: Why is it today that you think it's a scam? [xxx]

Parker: We have been studying the evidence together very slowly and meticulously and we want to have a paper out on this before we actually blast them.

Tate: When do you think -

Parker: Monday we're putting a paper out on it.

Tate: Okay, would writing a story for tomorrow

[crosstalk]

Tate: I can wait. Do you want me to wait?

Parker: Well, it depends on what magnitude you want to break it.

Tate: Well, it seems to me that it's a very significant story for you to be saying that you -

Parker: It's the first time I've said it this strong. I've actually been [xxx] this strong. Up until now I've been hoping...

Tate: I mean everybody thinks you have been very skeptical, as have other teams (xxx) can reproduce it. . .

Parker: Open to the possibility. I think after five weeks we are basically getting to the point where we can no longer suspend the disbelief.

[Parker gets a phone call from science reporter Bob Bazell of NBC-TV]

Parker (to Bazell): Hello, Bob. Thanks for calling me back. Okay, appreciate it because uh [xxx] we don't want them to have a chance to uh come up with any sort of [xxx] Now I promise on Monday we'll have it out. I'll fax it to you. Okay, alright? I've got one in my

office! Ha, ha. It's a local paper. No, we have not done anything as far as a press release. . .Uh, well maybe we can work something out. It depends on how big a story he wants to do. Well, if they didn't see neutrons. You know I just talked, by the way, to Richard Garwin and he confirmed that the first paper that Pons and Fleischmann submitted had the line at 2.5 MeV. Did you know that? Well, that's important because they moved it. And now the question is, is it fraud, or is it [xxx]

[crosstalk]

Parker: Well, that was Bazell, Bob Bazell wants to know something on it — you know who he is, of NBC?

Tate: I don't.

Parker: He's a little concerned about how you're going to handle it. He's concerned and I am too, because he's been very good to me as far as being confidential and respecting my views.

Tate: He's where now?

Parker: NBC. He's at the [xxx] right now where he wants to run something on this. And I feel like I'd like to, you know, I don't mind if it hits the streets the same day, but I think it would be -

Tate: That's fine.

Parker: I think if you'd respect that we can probably give you more -

Tate: That's fine. I mean, I think, everybody obviously knows this is a tremendous story. This is a big story, not only for the scientific community but people who have been reading daily about what's happened or the potential.

[Crosstalk]

Tate: It's a sensitive story, everybody wants the scoop. I'm perfectly willing to wait until the deadline, your embargo,

Parker: Monday, couple of papers [xxx] Baltimore [xxx] simultaneously.

Tate: I would just ask that no other media outlets get this information beforehand. I think

that’s fair.

Parker: I was just thinking in my mind. I have a list of sort of good [xxx]. . .

Ballinger: Technology Review. . .

Parker: Yeah, they’ll come out months from now. We’ll have to give it to MIT actually, I mean Mallove.

Tate: I’m not real hot to scoop anybody with the story. It’s a big story. I’d like to do that and respect your wishes. But if it comes out in another publication, a competitor or a daily publication . . .

Parker: It’s not coming out in the Globe.

Tate: Okay.

Ballinger: And I don’t answer phone calls unless they’re from inside MIT. . .

Tate: Would it appear in any other publication before Monday?

Parker: No, out of the question.

Tate: So you don't want it Sunday, you want it Monday. Can we get a copy of that paper? On Monday?

Parker: On Monday.

Tate: Okay. I think because of other things were talking about, obviously, we’re going to need to get into more of the technical aspects of it. Can you tell me some of those for that story in Monday’s paper or would you prefer to handle that?

Parker: I’m going to have to leave in ten minutes anyway, so it’s not going to be great. Let’s see, how to handle it. We’re going to get into trouble with Mallove, if we don’t apprise him on Monday. But you could break the story on Monday. So you could be a day ahead.

Parker: We’re also working with a guy called Wrighton, who is an electrochemist [xxx] Well, I'll check it out. I there will be, next week we’re definitely going to hit them [xxx]

By the way, one other thing, I don't know if you know this, but in the original submission to the journal, they had the gamma plotted at 2.5 MeV. Do you know that? Well you have the errata, you've seen the errata, right? That's okay. So the original submission was at 2.5. I know it now. Well I got it from Richard Garwin who I think is a really reliable source.

[Crosstalk]

So meanwhile, we're pretty much going to blast these guys on Monday — on the neutrons. . . Well you know, you can take that one on. I'm not going to get into the calorimetry. I think, having done the calorimetry for several weeks now, I understand much better about the problems, and I think I could speculate on what they did or didn't do. I certainly know enough to discount completely the Stanford experiment, only because they published enough details so I could see where they went wrong. Now in the case of Utah, they didn't publish details, so I can't say. . . All I'm going to focus on— I know the following facts. They published a peak initially at 2.5, they then moved it to 2.2 for the same data, alright? Now that could be either fraud or it could be just misinterpretation. I'm not going to comment on that. However, the line that they finally show is xxx sodium iodide, 3-inch crystal. . .

Parker: How are we going to leave it? You're going to hold this for Monday, right?

Ballinger: I'd really like to see it for technical content. You know nobody's going to try to, and although we might like to sometime.