

The Roswell 50th Anniversary

Without the 1947 “Roswell Incident” there are, for all intents and purposes, no alien visitors, no flying saucers, no alien abductions. Roswell is Ground Zero for UFOlogy. There is probably no other single occurrence (or non-occurrence, depending on your point of view) within the whole field of the UFO phenomena that fires such passions, ridicule, suspicion, allegations and intrigues.

Roswell is the Great Divide of belief, the watershed along which the voices of UFOlogy divide and seek their own lowest levels. Even a casual observer of the events and accumulated ‘evidence’ generated over the last 53 years is forced to the hard reckoning; either a flying saucer crashed in the New Mexico countryside in 1947 or humans have created a sleep walking theatre of the absurd.

The story of Roswell has been retold in many forms: On June 14, 1947, Mac Brazel a rancher, found scattered debris on his land that he could not readily identify; shreds of a thin, extraordinarily tough, lightweight material, rubber, sticks and strips of tape with flower patterns on it.. More than two weeks later, he retrieved the material, after having read newspaper accounts of flying saucers such as Kenneth Arnold’s current and highly publicized sighting Brazel told local sheriff George Wilcox that he thought he might have found one of the ‘flying disks’ mentioned in the media. Significantly, most flying saucers or discs seen at this time were thought to be of terrestrial nature, secret American aircraft or even Russian secret weapons probing America’s defenses.

Sheriff Wilcox contacted Major Jesse Marcel, the intelligence officer at the Roswell Army Air Field, who went to Brazel’s ranch with two unidentified men in civilian dress, collected all of the pieces and returned with them to the Army Air Force base. On July 8, 1947, the headlines of the Roswell Daily Record proclaimed “*RAAF Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell Region*”. The report further stated ‘Major Marcel and a detail from his department went to the ranch and recovered the disk... After the intelligence office here had inspected the instrument it was flown to ‘higher headquarters’’. Photographs taken at the time show Marcel holding shredded and curling sections of a shiny foil-like material fastened to a number of thin spars. Later Marcel would profess that the material resisted attacks by “fire, knife and sledgehammer’. Two days after the story appeared in the Roswell Record the Air Force denied that a flying saucer had crashed landed. Citing “national security” they declined to reveal anything more about the debris, where it was taken or what they had determined it to be ” The Roswell Incident” was born.

The Roswell case remained relatively forgotten until the combative Stanton T. Friedman, a well known, if not respected Ufologist, came into contact with the aging Major Marcel in the late 70s. Marcel told Friedman of his recovery of the saucer debris and its subsequent disappearance into the labyrinthine depths of the Air Force’s facility at Wright Patterson Field. Further, Friedman uncovered a secondhand story of a crashed flying saucer some 200 miles northwest of Roswell, only this time the story included dead aliens. Published in 1980 as “*The Roswell Incident*”, by Charles Berlitz and William Moore, (with no acknowledgement to Friedman who had done most of the research), the book told the classic tale of an encounter by surveyor, Barney Barnett, who came upon the aftermath of the crashed flying saucer and its crew of three dead aliens. As Barnett came closer to investigate the gruesome intergalactic wreck a convoy of army vehicles suddenly arrived with soldiers and shadowy government agents and cordoned off the area. Friedman held much of the UFO research field in awe that he had been able to unearth hitherto unknown incidents and sources, further broadening the web of government deception and cover-up. Only much later did it arise that the secondhand telling of Barnett’s crash encounter had been first portrayed in Frank Scully’s sensationalist and long-discredited 1951 novel, “Behind the Flying Saucers”.

The extent of alleged conspiracy and intimidation perpetrated by the Eisenhower administration was publicly revealed in 1987 with the “*MJ-12 Papers*”. First heard of as scuttlebutt within the UFO research community as early as 1980, MJ-12 was an acronym for the Majestic 12, a group of highly placed scientists and government officials charged with maintaining the cloak of silence about the reality of extraterrestrial visitation and spreading disinformation to prejudice public opinion against vocal

UFO investigators. One of the alleged members of MJ-12 was esteemed Harvard astronomer Dr. Donald Menzel, who in his public utterances had vehemently denounced any possibility that flying saucers were remotely real. In a related instance in 1984, a sealed anonymously sent package arrived at the door of film producer Jaime Shandera. Inside was 35mm. film picturing two documents, one of which detailed a brief from Eisenhower to the MJ-12 ordering them to investigate a crashed flying saucer that had been recovered in Roswell, New Mexico, in July of 1947.

1991 saw the release of Kevin Randle and Donald Schmitt's "*UFO Crash at Roswell*" which moved the story of Barnett's saucer crash encounter back to within a few miles of Mac Brazel's saucer debris find. Ignored in Randle and Schmitt's book was the fact that Barnett's wife's diary places him over 300 miles to the west of the crash site on the days in question. Stanton Friedman and a new co-author Don Berliner entered the fray again in 1992 with "*Crash at Corona*", which reasserted the authenticity of the MJ-12 papers and put forward the scenario that **two** saucers had crashed after colliding in midair, with an alien body count of eight, with possibly one or two surviving the crash.

As a nuclear physicist Stanton Friedman has long enjoyed a degree of built-in credibility, after all, he dealt with dangerous and mysterious substances in a field that requires a balanced, methodical approach. That credibility came under serious attack in 1994 with Randle and Schmitt releasing "*The Truth About the Crash at Roswell*". Along with other information, this new book demolished one of Friedman's 'star' eyewitnesses, Gerald Anderson (five years old at the time of the saucer crash), revealing Anderson's deceptions and outright omissions of important facts. Schmitt and Randle proposed that there was in fact only one crash site, and now placed it 35 miles north of Roswell and on an a different date entirely, July 5. In turn, Randle and Schmitt unveiled a new eye witness, an archeologist, Dr. Curry Holden, stating "there is no reason not to believe he had been there), although Holden's diaries place him at a wedding in Texas.

From the hard skeptics side of the debate, Karl T. Pflock produced "*Roswell in Perspective*" which offered that in fact the crashed saucer debris examined by Major Marcel was part of a then top secret "Mogul" balloon array designed to detect Russian nuclear tests. Other researchers produced evidence that Major Marcel had lied extensively about his service career in the military, his degree in physics from George Washington University and having written Harry Truman's on air address to Americans about Russia having exploded their first atomic device (Truman's report was never broadcast).

All previous debates concerning saucer debris were swept away in the summer of 1995 with the release of a filmed autopsy of one of the dead aliens. British film producer Ray Santilli stated that he had been offered the footage by a retired military cameraman while researching historic footage of Elvis Presley performances in Cincinnati. Although the film immediately released a string of accusations of hoax from both sides in the UFO debate it was purchased for broadcast in over twenty countries and sold tens of thousands of video copies for home use. In an effort to refute the charges of hoax Santilli released a videotaped interview with the alleged cameraman "JB". Silhouetted by strong backlight to disguise his face, JB recounted his story of being summoned from his job in Washington, to Wright Patterson Field in Ohio, flying by military transport to Roswell, and then by truck over twisting narrow roads and dirt track to the crash site. Arriving at the site, JB observed that "heat was still radiating from the ground around it (the crashed saucer)" and "that nothing had been done as everyone was just waiting for orders". The whole ordeal was made worse JB notes "by the screams of the freak creatures that were lying by the vehicle."

British researchers James Easton and Rob Irving reconstructed the cameraman's movements and travel in order to develop a plausible timetable of events surrounding the crash and subsequent filming. Given the stopovers, accumulating gear, loading and unloading and aircraft of the period, an elapsed time in excess of twelve hours would have been necessary to arrive at the site. JB's account would have us believing that military personnel stood beside aliens screaming in agony for the better part of a day, smoking cigarettes and chatting. Despite the inconsistencies with standard autopsy procedures apparent in the film, only these two Britons seriously delved into its authenticity. Today still frames and excerpts from the film are still used and presented as proof of the existence of extraterrestrials.

Against this background the United States Air force called a press conference on June 24, 1997, 50 years after Mac Brazel first came upon the shimmering debris on his ranch. Standing at a podium with the seal of the Pentagon behind him, Colonel John Haynes read the summary of a "*The Roswell Report: Case Closed*". Soon to be reviled within the flying saucer community as "The Crash Test Dummies Report", this latest (and last) Air Force report offered evidence of the then secret "Project Mogul", the failed experiment to float high altitude balloon trains into the stratosphere to detect Russian nuclear tests. The reports of alien humanoids retrieved by military personnel, Haynes reported, was part of another set of test dummies dropped from balloons to determine rescue methods. While admitting that the 'crash test dummies' experiments followed the events of 1947 by almost ten years, Haynes suggested that the real problem was the 'memory compression' of witnesses who confused and altered time sequences over a long elapsed time period.

During the question and answer portion of the press conference questions were directed at the veracity of the Air Force report and for many reporters in attendance it was only another arrogant attempt by a duplicitous government to dupe them into dismissing the basis of much of the reality of alien visitations to Earth.. Exasperated by reporters' accusations that "Col. John Haynes is going to go down in UFO lore as one of the people who took part...in the continuing cover-up by the government.", Haynes guilelessly offered that "We (the Air force) can't even keep single secrets! How could we have a conspiracy or a cover-up?"

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The Roswell UFO Encounter '97: The 50th Anniversary of the UFO Crash was a six day event sponsored by the city of Roswell with a broad supporting cast drawn from service groups and civic-minded citizens. Riding on the wave of publicity and public awareness generated by the 1996 film "*Independence Day*", the television series "*X-files*" and the alien autopsy video release, the Roswell 50th promised to be a momentous occasion - a open swell of public opinion that might force the government to finally come clean about the truth about flying saucers. To diehard Ufologists, the Air Force's "Case Closed" report, coming the week before the Roswell Anniversary was an attempt to stifle controversy and forestall the very critical mass outpouring of support for the extraterrestrial hypothesis that Roswell promised to be.

In the days before the anniversary celebrations opened media reports told of projected crowds of 60,000 to 100,000. Hotels and motels were reportedly sold out for hundreds of miles around six months prior to the July 1st opening. As the press releases for keynote speakers, films and other events went out from the Roswell Tourist and Convention Center, an incoming rush of national television crews, reporters and journalists descended on Roswell, to bear witness to what many anxiously anticipated as the 'Woodstock of Ufology'.

Events for the week included a UFO film festival (open to amateur and professional), a long list of guest speakers (including many names mentioned above), Crash Site Tours (now four sites to choose from), Flying Saucer Pancake Breakfasts, UFO Expo (hundreds of alien related items for sale), the UFO Cycling Classic bicycle race, and the 'Crash and Burn Extravaganza" a parade of alien inspired flying saucer floats and alien beings.

Every where in town the influence of aliens could be found, whether a sombrero-wearing alien outside Rosa's Mexican restaurant, UFO hamburgers featured at the Sonic burger drive-in or the "Crash With Us" message mounted on several motel marquees. Although the crowd numbers were below what had been forecast visitors ensured that the towns service industries benefited enormously. David Kinsel, a waiter at the Dennys restaurant saw his tips increase sufficiently to pay for the cost of his wedding. "Basically, aliens are paying for me to get married." he observed. Former Roswell mayor William Brainerd was more sanguine in his comments. "It strains the imagination to think of anything extraterrestrial. But I know the UFO Museum is good for business. It's like a natural resource - you take it, you manipulate it, you add value to it and you sell it."

In the convention center, row upon row of tables had been converted into elaborate stalls merchandising every possible permutation of alien or flying saucer object and souvenir. Beyond the prosaic abduction T-shirt ("My Grandma was abducted to Mars and all I got was this lousy shirt!"), convention goers could drink alien bottled water, nibble alien cookies, scratch their back with a long alien arm backscratcher, hold their pants up with alien suspenders, cushion their feet in alien socks, while licking purple alien lollipops. From every poster, key chain, bumper sticker, lampshade, coffee mug, collector's spoon, windshield decal, the wide, almond-eyed diminutive gray alien cast his gaze on me as I crossed the concrete room.

It's a short walk from the UFO Expo to the Conference Room where the roster of guest speakers present their ideas in 90 minute blocks that seem to constantly run into each other in overtime. Stanton Friedman, the last holdout for the authenticity of the MJ-12 papers recounted familiar topics already found in his books and repudiated some of his earlier repudiations. Don Schmitt appeared on the conference billing without his former co-investigator Kevin Randle. Randle and Schmitt had separated as a team after it came to light that Schmitt had misrepresented his credentials to Randle, having in fact been a postman. Philip Corso, a retired Army Colonel reacquainted the audience with details from his "*Day After Roswell*". Corso puts forward claims that he was given responsibility for filtering the technology acquired from the crashed Roswell saucer back into American industry, thus providing us with the miracles of Kevlar, laser weapons, fiber optics and the transistor. Paul David, producer of a Showtime TV special on Roswell presented a scientist, Russell Clark, who stated that a piece of debris found at one of the crash sites exhibited "isotope abnormalities" that clearly indicated manufacturing processes not of earthly origin. In the ensuing media crush Clark was whisked out the back door of the auditorium while David barred the reporters way, refusing to answer any questions put to him by a "hostile press".

The fractious and opposing views and beliefs of the conference attendees could be heard in the grumbings of the shifting crowds at the back of the conference room. Those promoting the extraterrestrial hypothesis dislike the arguments put forth by those who maintain that flying saucers are remnants of secret Nazi technology from WWII, and in turn are suspicious of the abductees, who feel sullied by the promoters of the hypotheses that flying saucers are real but are a joint U.S. government/alien plan. Many of the revealed hoaxes were held to be further proof of deliberate government disinformation efforts to present poorly constructed and easily disproven scenarios as a method of undermining the awareness and ultimate reality of the flying saucers.

Reeling from the hall-of-mirrors maze of theories I walked out into the sunlight along the main street of Roswell. On the street corner I met a man in his early sixties, wearing a large Stetson hat. Luke "Ducky" Dodger had come up from his cattle ranch in south Texas and welcomed the opportunity for conversation. Under one arm Dodger held a thick portfolio of pamphlets garnered from the booths and stands of the UFO Expo. In the other was a red telephone receiver, its cord running into a glass Coke bottle. Inside the bottle was suspended a plastic bag of a red glutinous substance that could have been hamburger. A dial thermometer and a 3 foot aerial joined the red telephone cord, immersed into the bagged substance in the bottle. "I get signals from this," Dodger offered seeing my gaze following the cord's path. "Can't always figure them out ..but I don't see its any worse than anyone else's technology here."

On October 25th 1997, at the Governors Conference on Tourism held in Taos, the Roswell Encounter '97 was awarded top honours for Tourist Event of the Year.