

A ROSWELL REQUIEM

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B. D. "Duke" Gildenberg is a meteorologist who was personally involved with most of the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) and U.S. Air Force (USAF) activities responsible for triggering the Roswell Incident, including Project Mogul in 1947. He conducted research for Project Blue Book in the 1950s, and he was both a prime witness and a researcher for the final (1997) Pentagon investigation into Roswell, *The Roswell Report: Case Closed*.

During the last decades of the 20th century the alleged flying saucer crash at Roswell developed into the UFO world's most influential and celebrated myth. After 55 years of commercial exploitation the mythology has reached frenzied heights while serious support from truth-seeking UFOlogists has gradually diminished. During the 1980s and 1990s Roswell became popular culture's archetypal recovered UFO tale—a mythic foundation for all manner of fabulous fictions and conspiracy theorizing that completely eclipsed the facts of the 1947 incident.

The last two decades have seen an explosive growth of Roswell literature. A tangle of sources refer to other sources that question the veracity of still more sources—each group accusing the others of conspiracy mongering. The topics favored by Roswell theorists and critics appear almost designed to sow confusion: coverups, classified projects, hearsay testimony, contaminated memory, and the melding of contradictory claims. The uncertainties are exaggerated by the passage of decades.

Despite the popular books that refer to the event as "the greatest happening of the 20th century,"¹ the bottom line is that the "Roswell Incident" was one of the worst candidates ever proposed as proof of alien visitation. The original public announcement (by the Army!) that a real flying saucer had been recovered was headline news, worldwide, for one day...before it was utterly and publicly discredited. The non-story was then justifiably forgotten, ignored, or dismissed by UFO believers, skeptics, and government agencies until it was dredged up by the *National Enquirer* in 1980 (following a UFO author's 1978 lead). Nonetheless, the Roswell Incident still exerts a powerful hold on the global imagination.

The Long "Who Cares?"

Because most readers have known the Roswell myth for most or all of their lives, one really essential part of the picture has been frequently forgotten or glossed over—for more than 30 years no one anywhere cared about the incident at Roswell. No one. It wasn't part of the UFOlogists' lore, nor was it an issue for critics of the paranormal, nor was it part of science fiction or tabloid entertainment. It was a forgotten footnote, not because it was cleverly concealed, but because it was a lousy case.

Philip J. Klass notes that when "in 1967, long-time pro-UFOlogist Ted Bloecher published *Report on the UFO Wave of 1947*, whose chronological listing showed a total of 853 UFO reports that had been carried by the news media during the last week of June and the month of July," Roswell didn't make the list of the top 853 cases for the five-week period during which it occurred!²

Why wasn't it the star attraction that it is today? The 30-year silence was a direct result of the original descriptions of the Roswell debris by the principal witnesses: whatever it was, it was made with aluminum foil, balsa wood, and scotch tape—hardly the material of a starship!

Although I worked on Project Mogul, the Top Secret government research program that provided the debris on which the Roswell myth was based, I myself was not aware of the incident until its revival, decades after the fact. The Roswell "crash" was not covered in our Blue Book records. Had we heard of it initially my colleagues and I would have simply laughed, because almost every one of the early Skyhook (high altitude) balloon flights generated UFO reports.

1947, and Project Mogul

In 1947, I was involved in exciting work based out of New York University (NYU), where we were developing balloon equipment under contract for a classified U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) research initiative, Project Mogul. Our job was to develop and test the equipment necessary to detect the upper atmosphere acoustic signatures of Soviet nuclear bomb tests or ballistic missiles. Activities associated with Mogul were based in various locations, and in the summer of 1947

part of our university group was launching test flights from New Mexico's Alamogordo Army Air Field (AAAF), about 100 miles west-southwest of Roswell.

The dawning US/Soviet arms race made this research extremely sensitive, and it was secret to such a degree that we did not even know that our own project was called Mogul. Even Professor Emeritus Charles Moore, NYU's Constant-Level Balloon Project Engineer and head of the Mogul work at Alamogordo, was not aware of the title of the program until 1992! However, our enormous balloon trains were physically visible from long distances, so the official explanation, if anyone happened to ask, was that we were doing vague "balloon research" using weather balloons. (Project Mogul was eventually declassified in 1972, almost a decade before the first stirrings of a popular literature about the Roswell Incident.)

Initially, Mogul actually did employ standard weather balloons, arranged in huge clusters or flight trains up to 600 feet long. These balloons, and the more advanced plastic balloons which followed, were often spotted over New Mexico and reported as flying saucers in formation. Below the balloons, radar reflectors (light, kite-like aluminum foil boxes) and assorted other equipment were attached to the lines. The reflectors were a somewhat jury-rigged solution for the technical problem that our balloons were invis-



An illustration of a typical Project Mogul radar reflector, constructed from aluminized paper over a balsa wood frame.

SECRET BALLOON PROJECTS AND EARLY FLYING SAUCER HYPE

Only recently has it come to light that various military branches were engaged in high altitude balloon research in parallel to Mogul, each insulated from the others by the pervasive culture of military secrecy. Several advances in high altitude balloon technologies were made around this time, and the ability of balloons to penetrate the uppermost reaches of the atmosphere at modest cost made them an attractive research platform for numerous agencies. The widespread use of these balloons in classified projects was instrumental in generating early flying saucer hype. The Navy's Skyhook program, for example, is now known to have generated numerous saucer stories in the late 1940s (it also seems to have led to the death of a National Guard fighter pilot who attempted to intercept a Skyhook balloon at heights beyond the reach of his F-51 aircraft). This program was sufficiently secret to avoid being discovered during the US Army Air Force's investigations into the UFO outbreak, Project

Sign (or by its successors, which were united under the umbrella title Project Blue Book).



Scale
 illustration of a typical Project Mogul balloon train, with the Seattle Space Needle and an African bull elephant for comparison. Radar reflectors shown in exploded detail.



THE REAL ROSWELL INCIDENT: JUNE AND JULY OF 1947

- June-July—UFO reports generated by Mogul balloons from Alamogordo AAF, NM, and balloon clusters out of Colorado.
- June 4—Prof. Charles Moore launches Mogul Flight #4.
- June 14—Rancher Mack Brazel finds paper, rubber, and foil debris.
- June 24—Kenneth Arnold sights unknown objects over Oregon and Washington state described as saucers skipping across water.
 - Press coins term “flying saucer” (or “flying disk”).
 - Incident touches off the world’s first and most intense flying saucer craze.
- July 4—Peak of saucer craze.
- July 5—Mack Brazel first hears of saucer news.
- July 7—Mack Brazel informs Roswell Sheriff of wreckage.
 - Sheriff informs Roswell Army Air Field.
 - (Air Field was not involved in the classified balloon work.)
 - Maj. Jesse A. Marcel and Capt. Sheridan W. Cavitt investigate.
- July 8—Marcel flies to Fort Worth Army Air Field with debris.
 - Marcel’s office proactively issues flying disk press release.
 - Roswell Daily Record* runs the story in the evening edition.
 - Associated Press picks up story.
 - Telegram informs J. Edgar Hoover that debris are from a balloon.
- July 8-9—Debris identified as scraps of the radar reflector of a downed weather balloon.
- July 9—Fort Worth *Morning Star-Telegram* runs debunking story with weather balloon explanation and the famous debris photos.



Professor Emeritus Charles Moore. In 1947, as head of the Mogul work at Alamogordo, he triggered the Roswell Myth with the launching of Mogul Flight #4.

ble to the marginal radar systems of the period.

Mogul used several variations on the radar reflector theme (as did others encountering the same problem), but they were all foil and balsa constructions designed to be as visible as possible to radar for tracking purposes. Ours were made to order by a New York toy company, which used a distinctive decorative tape printed with purple or pink flowers and other fanciful shapes. These “alien hieroglyphics” were later to be noted by various witnesses to the Roswell debris.

Throughout June and July of 1947, Professor Moore’s NYU team launched Mogul balloons from Alamogordo AAF, while another NYU group launched similar balloon clusters out of Colorado (generating more UFO reports). Several of the early Alamogordo flights were preliminary tests, did not carry classified hardware, and were never recovered by Mogul personnel. One such flight, launched in early June, came down on a Roswell area sheep ranch, and created one of the most enduring mysteries of the century. Review of project records has identified that flight, with a very high degree of certainty, as Mogul Flight #4, launched on June 4th.³ Analyzing newly available weather data, and following the lead of Professor Moore, I have also linked a later Mogul flight (launched on July 7th) to the legend. The gear known to have been on

this particular flight was described almost exactly in a famous telegram to J. Edgar Hoover, which is quoted without comment in most pro-alien Roswell literature.⁴

The Roswell Incident

On June 14, 1947, a rancher named Mack Brazel found a large amount of paper, rubber, and foil garbage scattered across his land—and ignored it. Mogul Flight #4 would then have remained lost forever, had not a “businessman pilot” by the name of Kenneth Arnold sighted the world’s very first flying saucers ten days later. While flying over Oregon and Washington State, Arnold spotted and reported several apparent aircraft in a formation “like the tail of a kite,” with a motion he described as like that of stones or saucers skipped across a pond. Press coverage of this sighting coined the phrase “flying saucer” (or “flying disk”), and touched off the world’s first and most intense flying saucer craze (which reached its hysterical peak on Independence Day). In the space of weeks, almost a thousand flying saucer reports emerged from throughout the nation. Government agencies were at a loss to explain these sightings, or to ascertain what, if anything, was so casually penetrating U.S. airspace. The hype continued to swell, reports came pouring in, and breathless headlines carried the news across the country.

On July 5th, Mack Brazel drove into town, where he heard this news for the first time. Once he learned that flying saucers were swarming over America, he hurried back to his ranch to reexamine the debris that he had ignored weeks earlier. It was not the first time that weather balloons had come down on his property, but, now that he knew about flying saucers, he wasn’t convinced that this was another one. The scattered pieces of silvery foil suggested something more futuristic than a balloon.

He returned to town on July 7th, and reported to the Roswell Sheriff, “kinda confidential like,” that he just might have gotten his hands on wreckage from a genuine flying saucer. The Sheriff contacted the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF), a facility that was in no way connected to the classified balloon work being conducted out of Alamogordo. From the Roswell base, Intelligence officer Major Jesse Marcel and Counterintelligence officer Sheridan Cavitt were

dispatched to investigate. They visited the impact site, where they gathered more of the unidentified materials. By noon of the 8th, Marcel had boarded a plane bound for Fort Worth Army Air Field (FWAAF), where the debris would be examined by higher authority. While Marcel was in transit, his office proactively issued a press release to the Roswell media announcing that, “the many rumors regarding the flying disk became reality yesterday when the intelligence office of the 509th Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force, Roswell Army Air Field, was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disk....” That evening, the *Roswell Daily Record* carried the headline, “RAAF Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell Region.” After 55 years, it is no longer known for certain whether Marcel acted on his own authority when ordering the press release, or whether he acted under orders from Colonel William Blanchard; in either case, the local saucer story was released formally through regular channels, and it would never have reached the attention of the American public otherwise. This point perhaps deserves extra emphasis: *we only heard about Roswell because the Army told us.*

That night (July 8th) the story went out over the Associated Press wire, and things really hit the fan. Not surprisingly, the nation’s papers responded in droves, with inquiries from across the U.S. and from Europe. Even FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover was kept updated on the developing story, and reporters descended on Roswell.

Meanwhile, Marcel and his cargo had arrived at FWAAF, where his flying saucer was quickly identified as scraps from the radar reflector of a downed balloon. At almost the same time that the first headline was hitting the streets in Roswell, a reporter named Johnson, from the Fort Worth *Morning Star-Telegram*, was photographing Marcel with the actual debris. A clear photo, and the story behind it, appeared the morning of the 9th (less than 24 hours after the infamous press release was issued in Roswell), printed beneath the headline “Discovery Near Roswell identified as Weather balloon by FWAAF Officer.” Because the AP announcement had generated massive interest, it was a widely publicized event when the “object found near Roswell” was “stripped of its glamour as a ‘flying disk.’”



The Debris

The materials photographed with Marcel in the office of General Ramey weren’t publicly identified as components from the top secret Project Mogul, of course, but their general nature was clearly visible: foil, balsa wood, and scotch tape. The Roswell debris was simply and obviously a radar reflector from a balloon. Once available, this official explanation was accepted as self-evidently true by news outlets and military sources. All one had to do was look at the photo to be convinced, or listen to the accounts of the men who had made the discovery. Although neither Brazel nor Marcel was convinced by the Army’s weather balloon story, they both went on record that week with descriptions that render extraterrestrial interpretations extremely implausible.

Major Jesse Marcel holds the foil and balsa Roswell debris in a famous photo taken for the Fort Worth *Morning Star-Telegram* in the office of General Ramey (July 8, 1947).

Johnson's account cites Marcel concerning the discovery of the "tin foil and wooden beams of the kite and the synthetic rubber remains of the balloon." Likewise, Brazel's interview for the *Roswell Daily Record* (distributed on the evening of the 9th) contains his account of finding the wreckage, which was composed of "rubber strips, tin foil, a rather tough paper, and sticks." Brazel further noted that, "Considerable scotch tape and some tape with flowers printed upon it had been used in its construction," and went on to describe the debris field, the total weight and quantity of the gear (about five pounds), and other details consistent with balloons but not with spacecraft. Allegations that Brazel's testimony was issued under duress as a result of military intimidation or threats are contrived—after all, he concluded that same interview by denying the Army explanation, bluntly asserting that, "I am sure what I found was not any weather observation balloon."

Modern UFOlogists have tried to sidestep this devastating eyewitness testimony and photographic evidence by accusing the FWAAF staff of fraudulently switching the real flying saucer debris for a radar reflector, but Marcel himself denied this. In 1978, *after emerging as a crashed saucer whistleblower, and despite his allegations of a coverup*, he insisted that, "The stuff in that one photo was pieces of the actual stuff we found. It was not a staged photo."⁵

Various first-hand witnesses who weighed in on the authenticity of the debris confirmed Marcel's claim that he was photographed with the real thing. Then Warrant Officer Irving Newton, a weather officer at Fort Worth AAF, was the first to identify the debris as a radar target.⁶ He confirmed this fact in Johnson's article, and he remained convinced of it in later decades. Retired Colonel Albert Trakowski, who had been director of Project Mogul from early 1947 to 1949, presented pertinent sworn testimony for the 1995 Pentagon report.⁶ According to Trakowski, he was called by Colonel Marcellus Duffy, the previous head of Mogul and then C/O of Wright Field AAF, a few days after the Roswell event. Colonel Duffy noted that the debris arriving at Wright Field looked like some of a Project Mogul flight train; after hearing a detailed description, Col. Trakowski was able to definitely confirm that it was exactly that. From the military perspective, this repre-

sented the bottom line for the whole affair.

Other witnesses later supplied details consistent with Mogul equipment. Several witnesses, for example, noted the distinctive tape associated with our radar reflectors and the toy company that manufactured them, calling the pink flowers and other printing on the tape "alien hieroglyphics." Brazel's daughter, Bessie, noted some aluminum rings in the wreckage,⁸ which were connectors for the Mogul flight train (this has been almost totally ignored in the UFO literature). Sheridan D. Cavitt, the Counter Intelligence officer who accompanied Major Marcel to the debris field, noted a black box amongst the debris, which would be the Project Mogul battery box (this too is rarely mentioned in the popular literature).⁹

The original Roswell story was very cut and dried—a sheep farmer found some material that looked like it could be from outer space. The Army was able to identify it, after having first created a PR fiasco with premature speculation about its nature. We have the pictures and can identify it ourselves. Even the first-generation negatives have been located and studied.

It is important to realize that the original story comprised this single chain of events. In 1947, there were no reports regarding alien bodies, autopsies, or multiple crash sites. Nor do these original accounts ascribe magical properties to the debris, such as imperviousness or the ability to liquefy like the evil robot from the motion picture *Terminator 2*. None of the original impact site witnesses reported bodies. Other New Mexico saucer legends had long since adopted the alien bodies convention when, 40 years after the fact, secondary witnesses began updating Roswell to include the first such descriptions. Contemporary accounts also do not mention "Men in Black" (the MIB mythology did not exist in 1947, nor did the phrase), misdeeds by the Army, massive conspiracies, or the other background assumptions that became standard in UFO circles in the decades that followed. All of these features were added decades after the fact, and we could simply dismiss them if they hadn't become so integral to the public perception of the legend. The story in 1947 was very different, and so was the context for the story: when the Roswell PR mix-up occurred, the very phrase "UFO" had yet to be coined, and the term "flying saucers" had only existed for a month.

"Brazel further noted that, 'Considerable scotch tape and some tape with flowers printed upon it had been used in its construction,' and went on to describe the debris field, the total weight and quantity of the gear (about five pounds), and other details consistent with balloons but not with spacecraft."

1948-1978, Pushing the Envelope

Project Mogul was eventually concluded and other avenues were pursued to detect Soviet nuclear capabilities. However, spin-off techniques and technologies from the secret project were soon utilized in other, unclassified Skyhook balloon programs also based out of Alamogordo (renamed Holloman Air Force Base in 1948). I was privileged to be involved in several over the next 30 years, including the 1950s Project High Dive and Project Excelsior, which led to some of the grandest adventures ever conceived. These programs were designed to push the envelope of aerospace research, taking advantage of the proven ability of our Skyhook balloon systems to deliver payloads into the uppermost reaches of the atmosphere and keep them there for hours at a time. We were also engaged in the development and field testing of emergency escape systems for pilots of high altitude or orbital craft, work that earned us the title “The Pre-Astronauts” in the decades that followed. Project personnel from the U.S. Air Force Aeromedical Laboratory laid the groundwork for the manned space program by dropping hundreds of instrument packages, anthropomorphic dummies, and eventually human beings from airplanes or high altitude balloons. The climax of this research was the establishment of the still-standing world-record high altitude parachute jump. In 1960, Captain Joseph Kittinger jumped from a balloon at 102,800 feet (19 vertical miles), at the practical edge of open space, while my team and I monitored conditions from the ground. Before opening his parachute, Kittinger accelerated in freefall for 4 minutes and 38 seconds—reaching an incredible terminal velocity of 614 miles per hour (or 92% of the speed of sound)! Almost 14 minutes after leaving the balloon, Kittinger landed safely.

These experiments, and the later balloon-based near-space and reentry testing of spacecraft components, involved the launching of more than 2500 balloon flights and the recovery of anthropomorphic dummies throughout central New Mexico, all with a significant military presence and impressive displays of unusual, comparatively futuristic hardware. The dummies’ onboard instruments were the payoff for these experiments, so we would move in quickly with our military vehicles and assorted manpower to locate



ABOVE: Kittinger (left) poses in front of a balloon gondola with mission meteorologist Duke Gildenberg in (1957).

the dummies when they landed. During this time, the Roswell Incident remained forgotten.

1978, Roswell Becomes an “Incident”

In 1978, after 31 years of obscurity, Jesse Marcel was working as a TV repairman in Houma, Louisiana, when a friend mentioned him to a UFO writer—none other than the now famous Stanton T. Friedman.¹⁰ Friedman contacted him, and Marcel told his dusty old tale. Although it was too weak to be an immediate hit (Marcel could no longer recall even the year in which his brief international celebrity had occurred), the Roswell story began slowly to reemerge onto the radar of the UFO community. Marcel was soon invited to tell his story in some other UFO venues, including the tabloid documentary *UFOs Are Real*. In February of 1980, an interview with Marcel was featured in the *National Enquirer*, launching him into permanent fame, and returning the long-forgotten Roswell Incident to newsstands.

Over the ensuing decades media coverage, book publications, and witnesses of various stripes emerged to expand the myth and integrate it with the larger mythology of UFO culture. The original story was subsumed into the framework of popular belief about a government conspiracy to withhold the truth about flying saucers, and the Roswell Incident ballooned to accommodate details provided by new witnesses. Along the way, an unexpected tourist boom dawned for an obscure New Mexico town, writers and TV producers made good money, and complete unknowns became famous. Marcel’s version drifted over time, from a modest adventure recalled with difficulty to a great whopper of a tale remembered in vibrant detail. Slowly, the debris he remembered



ABOVE: At 102,800 feet above sea level, Capt. Joseph Kittinger plunges from his balloon with the words, “Lord, take care of me now.” This photo was captured by a remotely controlled *National Geographic* camera installed on the balloon gondola (1960).

TIMELINE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN ROSWELL MYTH

1940s

- 1945: Atomic bombs exploded; end of WW II; U.S./Soviet arms race.
- 1947: Chuck Yeager breaks the sound barrier.
- 1947: Summer, balloon launches from NM Army Air Field, near Roswell.
- 1947: June, July, Arnold sighting touches off intense flying saucer craze.
- 1947: Roswell debris forgotten after being identified as balloon wreckage.
- 1947: US Army/Air Force begins to investigate UFO sightings.
- 1948: Navy conducts Skyhook balloon program.
- 1948: US Air Force establishes Project Sign to determine if reported objects are real, and if they are a national security threat.
- 1948: National Guard F-51 pilot dies trying to intercept Skyhook balloon.

1950s

- 1950s: Project High Dive and Project Excelsior drop instrument packages, anthropomorphic dummies, and eventually human beings from airplanes and altitude balloons.
- 1951-1969: Project Blue Book. "Blue Book" was a title encompassing several Air Force UFO investigations (including Project Sign).
- 1954: Project High Dive started.
- 1954: Alien prototype was usually short humanoids dressed in space suits.

1960s

- 1960: Captain Joseph Kittinger jumps from a balloon at 102,800 feet.
- 1967: Roswell still considered so insignificant that when pro-UFOlogist Ted Bloecher reported on the 1947 UFO Sightings Wave he listed 853 UFO sightings for the time period of the last week of June and all of July, but he never mentioned Roswell.
- 1969: Project Blue Book ends in December. No further official Air Force investigations into flying saucers until 1994.

1970s

- 1972: Project Mogul declassified.
- 1977: The movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* released.

1978-1980: THE RISE OF THE OF MODERN ROSWELL MYTH

- 1978-1980: Stanton T. Friedman interviews Jesse Marcel. Media such as *National Enquirer*, documentary film *UFO's Are Real* embrace Marcel as a crashed saucer whistleblower.

1980s

- 1980s: Grey aliens triumph over competitors. Aliens now often naked.
- 1989: Stanton T. Friedman discovers witness Glenn Dennis while filming an *Unsolved Mysteries* episode in Roswell Glenn Dennis introduces the alien autopsy concept into Roswell myth.

1990s

- 1990s: Don Berliner and Stanton T. Friedman solicit new UFO witnesses.
- 1991: Glenn Dennis founds the International UFO Museum in Roswell.
- 1991: Glenn Dennis' story appears in the Kevin Randle and Don Schmitt book *UFO Crash At Roswell*.
- 1992: Professor Charles Moore first learns the name of his secret project—"Mogul."
- 1992: Moore and Gildenberg inform Berliner and Friedman about Mogul. Berliner and Friedman are not impressed.
- 1994: The General Accounting Office (GAO) and NM Congressman Steven Schiff launch UFO inquiry.
- 1995: *The Roswell Report: Fact vs. Fiction in the New Mexico Desert* published.
- 1997: Final Pentagon Report, *The Roswell Report: Case Closed*.

gained magical properties, such as imperviousness to sledgehammers and fire. A movie based on his claims was produced with Marcel himself as the lead character, played by the perpetually mysterious Kyle MacLachlan (of *Twin Peaks* fame).

As the Roswell Incident became an industry, TV networks and book authors aggressively pursued new witnesses during the 80s and 90s, often soliciting new accounts with advertising. Don Berliner and Stanton T. Friedman, for example, ran a newspaper ad in 1992 soliciting new witnesses, "In order to strengthen their case for government knowledge of what they call 'the truth behind almost 50 years of UFO sightings.'"¹¹

Around this time, Professor Charles B. Moore and I met with Berliner and Friedman. Mogul was not then well known, though it had been declassified in 1972 (six years before the reemergence of Roswell), and it seemed an important aspect of local aerospace history that the authors would do well to note. We were in an extremely strong position to comment on the crash at Roswell because Professor Moore almost certainly launched the specific balloon recovered by Brazel in 1947. However, our Mogul information was not well received, and it was suggested that we were secret agents providing disinformation in an effort to deceive them.

Regardless, the strategy of soliciting new witnesses was fruitful for media sources, and a number of fantastic stories emerged. Soon it appeared that the Roswell incident had involved flocks of flying saucers crashing into New Mexico during July of 1947 (or one saucer crashing in several places), with up to 11 completely different crash sites claimed. These locations neatly bracket the White Sands Missile Range, and define the operational area of Mogul and subsequent balloon programs, which suggests that military activity was the source for the accounts. If accurate, claims for 11 distinct impact sites scattered over a wide area also suggest a series of events, perhaps scattered over many years.

In a parallel scenario, a number of witnesses eventually claimed to have been threatened by Military Policemen (MPs) in 1947, at or around the 11 crash sites. Over a number of years, of course, there were many actual military activities during which civilians in remote areas on or around a missile testing range would have been

asked to leave. For example, numerous ICBM sites were secretly constructed in the vicinity of Roswell during the years following 1947, and all had strict security enforced by MPs.

Several sensational new stories contained descriptions of actual aliens killed or stranded by the various crashes. In 1989, Roswell was featured as the chestnut *du jour* on television's *Unsolved Mysteries*, and the on-location shooting, national airing, and hotline following the show conjured up several new witnesses. Among these, former mortician Glenn Dennis offered what would become the most famous account of recovered ETs at Roswell.

Dennis' Alien Autopsy Tale

Dennis' tale is striking not only for its science-fictional drama, but also for the number of half-true details it contains. While much of his story is just plain wrong, some specific details of his story were accurate, but displaced in time by many years.

According to Dennis,¹² he was a mortician working at Roswell's Ballard Funeral home on July 4, 1947, when he received a series of phone calls from the RAAF's Mortuary Affairs office, in which he was asked whether he had any child-sized caskets available. That same day, the funeral home's ambulance service was called to respond to a minor accident in Roswell, in which an RAAF airman had been injured. Dennis drove the ambulance, picked up the injured man, and delivered him to the base hospital. While there, he noted parked military ambulances, each loaded with wreckage and guarded by MPs.

Dennis claimed that he entered the hospital, where a nurse he knew warned him to "just get out of here." He noted the presence of another acquaintance (a pediatrician), and then asked an officer about the wreckage and whether a plane

crash had occurred. The officer responded by instructing two MPs to throw Dennis off the base, which they were in the process of doing when a menacing "black sergeant" and a "big redheaded colonel" stopped them. The colonel (or perhaps captain) suggested to Dennis that he "did not see anything. There was no crash here." When Dennis protested, the pair threatened his life, explaining that that "Somebody will be picking your bones out of the sand." The black sergeant emphasized this point, explaining that Dennis would "make real good dog food." They then had him physically carried off the base.

The next day, Dennis tried to phone the nurse he had spoken to, but was only able to reach another nurse, Captain "Slatts" Wilson, who took a message. Later that day, his friend returned the call, and they met at the officers' club on the base. She was upset, and explained that she had accidentally walked in on an alien autopsy being conducted by two mysterious, unknown doctors the day before. She was able to describe this autopsy in some detail, and explained that the bodies were then moved to another base.

After this meeting, she was never seen again. Dennis claimed that she was transferred that afternoon, perhaps to London, England, from which he later received a single letter. His response to her single letter was returned, marked both "return to sender," and "deceased." When he again spoke to Captain "Slatts" Wilson, she told him that his friend had apparently been killed in a plane accident.

Years later, Dennis visited his pediatrician friend, then living in Farmington, New Mexico. This friend acknowledged that he was at the base hospital that day, but declined to discuss details, claiming that his involvement was peripheral.

"This narrative—complete with alien autopsy, sinister threats, erasure of the prime witness, and a lone truth seeker—was an immediate hit when it emerged in 1991. Interestingly, Dennis and his business partners founded the International UFO Museum and Research Center at Roswell in 1991..."

TABLE 1. TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE ALIEN AUTOPSY HOSPITAL

GLENN DENNIS' VERSION	PROF. EMERITUS LORENZO KIMBALL'S VERSION:
Received a call from the base Mortuary Affairs office	.Mortuary Affairs Office did not exist in 1947.
Mortuary Officer asked if small caskets were available	.No small caskets existed either in town or at the base. Kimball would have known this as he was the medical supply officer.
Dr. Johnson pronounced the aliens dead	.Johnson was radiologist, not a pathologist; the staff member who would have had this duty.
Big redheaded colonel was hospital C.O.	.Tall, redheaded Colonel Ferrel did not become hospital C.O. until 1954.
Surviving alien walks up ramp in hospital rear	.No ramp in 1947.
Aliens autopsy in operating room suite	.Suite non-existent in 1947.

MEMORY AND THE RAVAGES OF TIME

In the original 1947 press coverage, the Roswell story is very different from the tales later recalled by witnesses. Although many UFO theorists assume that a coverup is responsible for these disparities, all investigators have had to acknowledge that the original press coverage went unchallenged for over 30 years before being contradicted by witnesses, pseudo-witnesses, and folks reporting second- and third-hand testimony. The accuracy of old memories has become a key issue for skeptics and UFOlogists alike; after all, 30 or 40 years is a very long time in which to muddle things up, swirl events together, and confuse personal history with popular culture.

As far as possible, UFOlogists have resisted the idea that memory is slippery stuff because there simply is no case for an alien crash at Roswell without recollections recorded decades after the fact. Unfortunately for Roswell enthusiasts, the fact that memories become decreasingly accurate over time is not very controversial—memories just do that.

Most of the Roswell mythology as it has developed is built on memories that are decades old. Of 55 witnesses processed by UFO author Kevin Randle, for example, none were contacted earlier than 42 years after the event! How many of us remember what year Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier, or Jackie Robinson the color barrier? It was 1947!

This narrative—complete with alien autopsy, sinister threats, erasure of the prime witness, and a lone truth seeker—was an immediate hit when it emerged in 1991. Interestingly, Dennis and his business partners founded the International UFO Museum and Research Center at Roswell in 1991 (which would, by 1996, receive the “Top Tourist Destination of New Mexico” award from the Tourism Association of New Mexico). The museum’s exhibits naturally emphasize the alien autopsy scenario popularized by Dennis.

Unfortunately, the story he told seems to have been utter hogwash, interesting primarily for the way in which Dennis embellished and compressed the few accurate facts it contains. For example, Kevin Randle, author of the most scholarly and detailed of the pro-alien Roswell books, searched in vain for Dennis’s missing nurse.¹³ He writes, “Glenn Dennis, who had once been considered one of the important witnesses, now seems to be another who was just out to grab the spotlight. There is little that can be said except that nothing has been found to confirm that his nurse exists or existed.” Randle tells us that independent researchers, using both police resources and interviews with surviving Roswell hospital staff, failed to uncover anyone who matched the name and description of the missing woman. Each time an exhaustive search failed to find the nurse under a name provided by Dennis, he would simply change her name—not once, but over and over. Quite reasonably, Randle notes that “such changes do not bode well for the credibility of the tale,” especially when “no documentation, no corroboration, nothing verified the existence of the nurse.”

Later, military investigators also had no luck finding the nurse, under any name, but they did uncover interesting similarities in Dennis’s descriptions of hospital personnel to real individuals.¹⁴ The extremely tall, skinny Captain “Slatts” Wilson that Dennis described also seems never to have existed; but, another nurse had the same rank and the same unusual nickname. Captain Lucille C. “Slatts” Slattery actually was Chief Nurse at the Roswell AAF hospital in 1947. However, Slattery was short, had a different surname, and first arrived at the hospital in August, a month after the Roswell incident. Dennis’ “Slatts” Wilson could have been a composite character combining the real Captain Slattery with another officer, Captain Idabelle Miller, who was tall and thin, and who took the surname Wilson when she married in 1958. However, Captain Miller did not begin working at the hospital until 1956, nine years after Dennis’ story takes place.

In a similar example of garbled memory, Air Force investigators were able to establish that the pediatrician Dennis described did exist, and that he did move to Farmington after concluding his military service. However, that pediatrician, former Capt. Frank Nordstrom, did not work at the Walker AFB/Roswell AAF hospital until 1951. Further, he insisted in a sworn statement that, “Even though I believe that I am the person Mr. Dennis referred to in the interviews, I do not remember him.” Nordstrom was not aware of any explanation, rational or otherwise, for Dennis’



claims regarding alien autopsies, nor could he explain why Dennis would claim to know him personally.

Dennis' big, redheaded colonel (or captain) has two plausible real-life analogues: Colonel Lee Ferrel, who was the hospital C.O. from 1954 through 1960; and, then-Captain Joseph Kittinger, Jr., who was almost certainly a man described often by other crash-site witnesses. In fact, Kittinger and a black sergeant did represent our Skyhook group at the Roswell hospital in 1959. However, that Skyhook group did not exist in 1947, and, regardless of what fragments of real events Dennis may have drawn upon, neither did military desegregation!

Randle also acknowledged that the hospital commander during 1947 had seen nothing resembling an alien autopsy.¹⁵ Prof. Emeritus Lorenzo Kimball, who was medical supply officer at Roswell Army Air Base that year, confirmed that nothing of the sort had taken place; in fact, Kimball refuted almost every detail of Dennis' autopsy scenario (see Table 1 on page 67).¹⁶

Fact v. Fiction In the New Mexico Desert

In 1994, the General Accounting Office (GAO), at the behest of New Mexico Congressman Steven Schiff, launched an inquiry into the events at Roswell. The GAO directed the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force to conduct an exhaustive internal investigation into reports of recovered spacecraft and the possibility of a sinister shadow government conspiracy to conceal such spacecraft. Students of Roswell benefit from the addition to the public record of the resulting Pentagon document, *The Roswell Report, Fact vs. Fiction in the New Mexico Desert* (1995). It is voluminous, with too much peripheral material; moreover, it did not address the "alien" body dilemma, an omission that resulted in its total rejection by most of the UFO community. But within its rather pedantic pages, there is vital information that is hardly ever acknowledged.

The primary finding of the report was that the original Roswell incident involved the crash and recovery of a Project Mogul balloon, a conclusion that original Mogul personnel had already reached. This explanation was not well known to civilian investigators prior to this report, and it clarifies outstanding questions surrounding the original tale.

MEMORY and TIME COMPRESSION

Two relevant aspects of memory (both well known to psychologists but insufficiently appreciated by most of the lay public) operate in any attempt to recall old events, UFOlogical or otherwise. Memory is, to begin with, always reconstructive. Human brains do not record events like video documentaries, but in a manner more like the notes a student might take in class. Important facts about an incident are just sort of jotted down, with the brain reading between the lines when the event is recalled. Recollection involves the reconstruction of a moving picture from a few facts dropped into a more general contextual template. For example, recall a truly great party you attended some years ago. You can picture it immediately, but who else was at the party, really? Combing over the facts in a forensic manner will usually reveal that some of the specific people your memory placed in the picture weren't really there, and that some of the non-specific background faces were actually close friends. This isn't a hopeless situation, for our brains sometimes take very good notes, but it is certainly important for our understanding of the evolution of the Roswell Incident.

The most slippery aspect of the reconstruction process through which recall is filtered may be the ease with which memories become contaminated. The research on what is termed False Memory Syndrome describes extreme examples of this phenomenon, but all recollections are influenced to some extent by external suggestion. In your reconstruction of the party, the music may be updated to include your current favorites, and the beauty and youth of the people you picture may very well involve impressions assimilated from beer commercials.

Another key aspect of memory is that these metaphorical class notes change over time. Every time you access and resave a memory, the notes include part of the previous reconstruction, which is why eyewitness testimony gets more elaborate and compelling with each retelling. However, if a memory is rarely accessed, it disintegrates over time. Reconstructing older memories is a less accurate process than reconstructing newer ones, because the filing system for all those notes gets mixed up, fragmented, and indexed incorrectly. This leads to compression effects, in which similar or related events are combined into a single memory, even when years pass between the actual occurrences. This happens all of the time, and is detectable in our own memories. For example, many people find it difficult to disentangle the memories of all the birthdays they've ever had, or even the last few (despite the fact that these birthdays were, as days go, generally memorable).



A Sierra Engineering Company "Sierra Sam" model anthropomorphic dummy.

Case Closed and the Anthropomorphic Dummies

In response to widespread criticism of the 1995 report's failure to engage the frequent claims of alien bodies and multiple impact sites, a small office was kept open to continue follow-up work for the Roswell investigation. This office closed in 1997, with its findings published in a document entitled *The Roswell Report: Case Closed*, which deals almost exclusively with claims of alien bodies. The report's primary discovery was that actual military activities in New Mexico during the 1950s closely resembled the reports of spacecraft crashes that emerged decades later. One of these activities, Project High Dive, involved lifelike anthropomorphic dummies loaded with sensors mounted in cages that were dropped out of the sky and later collected by caravans of military trucks and equipment. Some landed near Roswell, with witnesses transforming the cages into escape capsules from a mother ship, and the dummies, clothed

in flight suits, into aliens. UFO author Kevin Randle notes that in 1954 there was one kind of alien reported—short humanoids in space suits.¹⁷ That year marked the start of Project High Dive.

Case Closed concludes that this project probably generated the later claims of witnesses, partly through the mechanisms of time compression and memory contamination.

UFOlogists were quick to ridicule the first Air Force report on Roswell, despite the incontrovertible strength of the evidence connecting the Roswell Incident to Project Mogul; they were even quicker to reject the conclusions of *Case Closed*, but the Air Force case for the relationship between alien body claims and dummy-drop programs is compelling (if also circumstantial). It rests on several pillars:

- Neither the hypothesis that one or more alien craft crashed near Roswell, nor the counter-hypothesis that all crash witnesses were lying or crazy has been proven, suggesting that additional or alternative explanations are needed.
- Activities surrounding our balloon programs really did look like much of what witnesses reported, particularly at the recovery sites for balloon payloads.
- Claimed crash sites are located in the same geographical range as dummy recoveries and other balloon operations.
- Actual events are easily combined with suggested memories after 30 or 40 years.
- Many witnesses were relating hearsay from others, a process that tends to distort and inflate, or were shown to have made major recall errors, or both.
- Many witnesses specifically described alien bodies as resembling dummies or robots.

At a 1997 Pentagon press conference a reporter asked a question that reflected the public's reaction to the release of *Case Closed*: "How do you square the UFO enthusiasts saying that, they're talking about 1947 [sic]? You're talking about dummies used in the '50s, almost a decade later."¹⁸ This seemingly forced correlation has been difficult for many to swallow, including viewers of a History Channel documentary that Michael Shermer and I participated in. Viewers, in general, were favorably impressed by the case against alien crashes, but they were puzzled by (or rejected outright) the Air Force argument that witnesses have sometimes integrated separate memories accumulated over decades. But time compression is a well-understood aspect of the psychology of memory (as well as being a foundation for myth composition).

Even Roswell eyewitnesses are aware that such a phenomenon operates, at least sometimes, in their own accounts. For instance, Glenn Dennis told *Omni* magazine in 1995 that an earlier interview "was the first time I tried to recall the whole experience in 40 years or more... It's hard to get such old memories straight." Another witness explained forthrightly that, "Since it's been 27 years...I may even have been influenced by other descriptions I've seen or heard in the interim..."¹⁹

The evidence regarding the anthropomorphic dummies of Project High Dive has been conveniently ignored by the popular literature, but primary witnesses and UFO theorists have reported

seeing dummies for years! For example:

“I thought they were plastic dolls...I didn't think they were real.”²⁰ Witness Gerald Anderson's description is far more suggestive of manufactured objects than living creatures!

“They was using dummies in those damn things...they could use remote control...”²¹ Witness James Ragsdale suggested that he had seen dummies long before anyone realized that we had spent more than a decade dropping and retrieving actual dummies in the area, but he remained firm for a 1947 date. More recently, however, his wife indicated that they didn't arrive at Roswell until 1959!

“The mouth apparently does not function as a means of communications or as an orifice for food ingestion; no perspiration or body odor; the tissue appears mesh-like.”²² The dummies' plastic skin was constructed with a mesh-textured material.

“No apparent reproductive organs. They appear to be formed out of a mold, sharing identical facial characteristics.”²³ They were, indeed, formed exactly thus! Other typical descriptive terms such as “bald” or “pale” are also accurately applied to our dummies.

A reference to an alien with bandages “around his midsection and partially over his shoulder”²⁴ identifies parachute straps.²⁵

Many aliens were described wearing flight suits identical, in color and detailing, to suits used on our dummies.²⁶

Our balloon launching and dummy recovery activities resembled crash-site accounts down to the number and specific type of vehicles employed and the supervising presence of a redheaded captain. The “field anthropologists” that witnesses described who arrived on site ahead of military vehicles were also visible in actual dummy recovery activities—in the early 1950s our Project High Dive officers were cleared to wear tropical gear in the desert (including khakis and pith helmets).

Even had the memories been fresh, witnesses would have had difficulty seeing what was happening since we generally landed dummies far from roads. People happening across dummy recovery or balloon launching events would have seen a good deal of unusual military activity out in the middle of nowhere, usually from a considerable distance. Dummy parachutes were not obvious to witnesses, both because they were partially deflated by explosive devices upon



landing, and because by the time the “bodies” were in recovery trucks the parachutes were already collected and stashed below where they would not have been visible.

The argument of *Cased Closed*, in a nutshell, is that people who saw these real operations might well have recollected them as alien spacecraft recoveries 30 or 40 years later—under the influence of popular media UFO culture, and prompted by television programs hunting for anyone who had witnessed suspicious activities.

The fact that our mannequin-like dummies looked something like the Grey Aliens (who would, in the 1980s, triumph over their numerous scaly, green, giant, hairy, or Scandinavian competitors as the “official” alien visitor) was somewhat coincidental. On the other hand, since Roswell, the prototype for the recovered flying saucer legend, was founded on balloon operations, it is not surprising that the modern concept of saucer recovery would parallel the appearance of real balloon operations.

“Recovered aliens” were usually described as smaller than our 5.5 to 6 foot dummies, although some witnesses remembered dummies stored at Wright Field for repair as 7 foot tall alien beings.²⁷ But in 1977, a few years prior to the rise of the modern Roswell myth, many witnesses-to-be were deeply impressed as diminutive aliens descended to the accompaniment of reverberating organ peals and blinding light in the hit movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Some Roswell alien descriptions seem to be obvious composites of our anthropomorphic dummies with creatures from a fictional film released almost 30 years later.



TOP: A Project High Dive anthropomorphic dummy launch (1957). Recovery operations were generally conducted much further from roadways.

BOTTOM: The molded face of an Alderson Laboratories type dummy.



TOP: A tethered mini-blimp at Holloman AFB, N.M. (1965).

BOTTOM: A UFO sketched by an anonymous crash witness (flipped vertically for emphasis). From *The Truth About the UFO Crash at Roswell* (1994).

Hoaxes and Coverups

The Roswell myth as it exists today is built partly on hoaxes (such as the infamous Majestic 12 documents, or the so called “alien autopsy” film) that have long been exposed by other sources. Interestingly, serious investigation has also revealed that at least two types of real cover-ups have influenced the story over the decades—though neither closely resembles the colossal government conspiracy alleged by UFO lore.

Although wrong on other points, the pro-alien literature correctly links a Roswell cover-up to the Air Force (or to its predecessor, the Army Air Forces). The 1995 Pentagon report and other sources have firmly linked a real Roswell cover-up to the AMC (Air Material Command). Project Mogul was a classified AMC program, and its primary launch site, Alamogordo AAF, was then an AMC base. Many witnesses claimed Wright Field, Ohio, the AMC headquarters, was the final destination for the debris. General Nathan Twining, C.O. of the AMC (and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) has frequently been implicated in “the Roswell plot.”

In fact, the Army Air Forces did deliberately conceal the truth behind the Roswell crash from the American people, claiming that the debris came from ordinary meteorological equipment and research; this was untrue, and the Army knew it when they said so. This was a cover story designed to conceal the classified Project Mogul, a military research program at the forefront of the nuclear arms race. To this end, a staged Mogul flight (without the classified payload of detection equipment) was presented to the press after the NYU crew left, and the “weather balloon” half-truth was used both before and after the saucer crash story emerged.

A second coverup, of a completely different type, has been discussed most thoroughly by Philip J. Klass. Since the resurrection of Roswell in 1978, UFO authors, movies, and TV “exposés” have systematically suppressed the inconvenient,

mundane, and generally unprofitable real facts of this odd bit of history.²⁸ Those who scream cover-up are the very authors and producers who market the exploitative treatments that have misled the public for decades. Long-exposed hoaxes are still paraded about like prize ponies, disconfirming facts are omitted, and sources (including witnesses) are misquoted to imply precisely the opposite of what they actually intended to say. In some cases, voice-over narration “paraphrases” an expert’s testimony over footage that makes a completely different and more damning point. Many critics of UFOlogy are now reluctant to participate in such “documentaries,” knowing from experience that their interview will be butchered and reassembled to support a pro-alien slant.

A Few More Nails in the Coffin

Confabulated memories are also embedded in other Roswell testimony. For example, in addition to the Roswell debris that was actually flown to Fort Worth, there were also claims that larger spacecraft debris were crated and flown to Los Alamos. In fact, Roswell AAF was, at the time, the only military installation on earth that was flying hot nuclear bombs. Everything about this was, of course, highly classified, but Los Alamos was the source and depository for the bombs. It appears that people who witnessed the unusual shipping procedures used for armed nuclear weapons later “remembered” that they had witnessed the shipping of large spacecraft parts.

The 1995 Pentagon report on Roswell includes an interview with retired Lt. Col. Sheridan D. Cavitt, who was with Counter-intelligence at Roswell AAF in 1947. All UFO literature agrees that Cavitt was at the impact site with Major Marcel (whose testimony single-handedly converted some relatively low-tech human activity into the UFO event of the century). Cavitt’s testimony, however, contradicted Marcel’s on almost every detail regarding that event (see Table 2, below).

TABLE 2. TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE DEBRIS SITE VISIT

MAJOR JESSE A. MARCEL	CAPTAIN SHERIDAN W. CAVITT
He and Cavitt went to the impact sight with debris discoverer Brazel	Never met Brazel
They spent the night at a ranch with Brazel	Spent no night at a ranch
Cavitt tested debris with a Geiger counter	Had no Geiger counter
They rode in a carryall (a small van)	They rode in a Jeep
Cavitt returned with MPs the next day	Did not return with MPs

In still another example of memory confusion, descriptions of alien ships in several cases precisely matched our mini-blimps. Years after the Roswell incident, our prime USAF Skyhook launch site on the White Sands Missile Range employed a number of large, streamlined, tethered blimps for gathering wind data. These sometimes escaped from their tethers in high winds, and one rogue blimp did land near Roswell around 1960. Eyewitness sketches of some crashed spacecraft published in UFO books are strikingly similar to these distinctive blimps (see previous page).

Another mini-blimp, which landed near Socorro NM, was described almost perfectly by a prime witness: "Kinda balanced up one of the trees. It crossed my mind that it was a blimp that had crashed."²⁹ Nonetheless, a few paragraphs later the witness transforms the blimp into a spacecraft with alien bodies, integrating the downed blimp with an anthropomorphic dummy launch in that same location 10 years later. He even mentioned our tracking aircraft. Both incidents were compressed into a narrative set in 1947, a year when he was still a child.

Conclusion

Pulling back to look at the big picture, one must appreciate the slapstick aspect of the story's basic premise. According to UFO theorists, hyper-intelligent aliens, having crossed light years through the yawning interstellar void with their super-advanced technology, reach the Earth, only to promptly blunder into the desert floor—either once, or several times, or perhaps in a flock like lemmings or beached whales! (Others suggest that two of their ships collided, after cruising safely for umpteen light years!) These inconceivably sophisticated craft, perhaps capable of transcending basic physics, failed to avoid flattening themselves on the state of New Mexico as a result of: very scattered thunderstorms (verified by the actual weather data); confusion caused by our marginal 1947 radar; an inability to evade a primitive 1947 WSMR missile (there was only one there in the time that passed between events and interviews);³⁰ or, a collision with a balloon!

After 55 years, there still isn't a shred of evidence that a saucer crash occurred, but there is evidence far beyond a reasonable

doubt that a series of regular terrestrial events did. The truth about Roswell is that it was always a marginal case, and for most of its history all interested parties agreed. Although it has been recently, and profitably built into a pop phenomenon, real evidence has only diminished with every investigation—including those by the most respectable UFOlogists. Small towns, enterprising individuals, and (most of all) book publishers and TV producers have kept the Roswell Industry alive, but the real-life foundation for the Roswell legend is now known in detail.

Roswell is the world's most famous, most exhaustively investigated, and most thoroughly debunked UFO claim. It's far past time for UFOlogists to admit it and move on. Those who hope to discover alien life are going to have to look where the aliens are—which is (if anywhere), *somewhere else*. Perhaps outer space would be a good place to start. ▼

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