

The Roswell UFO Crash: What They Don't Want You to Know by Kal K. Korff. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1997, 264 pp., \$26.95 (c), ISBN 1-57392-127-0.

The Day After Roswell by Philip J. Corso, Lt. Col., USA (ret.), with William J. Birnes. New York: Pocket Books, 1997, 351 pp., \$24.00 (c), ISBN 0-671-00461-1.

The Roswell Report: Case Closed by James McAndrew, Capt., USAFR. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997, 231 + xii pp., \$18.00 (p), ISBN 0-16-049018-9.

UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth by Benson Saler, Charles A. Ziegler, and Charles B. Moore. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, 224 pp., \$24.95 (c), ISBN 1-56098-751-0.

Roswell is no longer just the name of New Mexico's fourth largest city. It is now very nearly a household word meaning, in essence, "crashed flying saucer captured and hidden by the U.S. government." Its utterance in the precincts of UFOresearch and "fandom" is guaranteed to evoke strong emotional responses, debate, argument, name calling, and worse. It stands for a veritable textbook example of the dangers associated with highly publicized UFO cases, in which "we must assume that some of the data is misleading," the cases receiving a high level of media attention being especially suspect (Vallee). For those who pursue investigations of UFO and other anomalous phenomena, it should be a synonym for *caution!*

In early July 1947, at the height of the first great modern UFO sighting wave, William "Mac" Brazel arrived at the sheriff's office in Roswell with some unusual debris he had found on the ranch he managed near Corona, New Mexico. He thought it might be from "one of those flying saucers" and said there was quite a bit more back at the ranch. Impressed, the sheriff telephoned nearby Roswell Army Air Field and was referred to intelligence officer Major Jesse Marcel.

Marcel and another military man soon arrived at the sheriff's office, and at the direction of their base commander, Col. William Blanchard, the two accompanied Brazel back to his ranch. There they collected a substantial quantity of battered paper-backed foil, balsa struts or "members," strips of weathered rubber, pieces of tough paper Marcel said "looked very much like parchment," some Bakelite-like material, *etc.*, all of which had been scattered over a large area of open range (interview with Robert Pratt; affidavit, Jesse Marcel, Jr.; in Pflock, 1994). Those who contend this was saucer wreckage assert the debris only resembled ordinary foil, balsa, *etc.*

Most intriguing, some of the balsa members carried what Marcel described in a 1979 interview as "something undecipherable.... [H]ieroglyphics [sic]....

[L]ittle markings, two-color [purplish-pink] markings as I recall — like Chinese writing.... Nothing you could make any sense out of” (Pratt in Pflock, 1994). According to fellow officer Irving Newton, Marcel insisted at the time of the incident that this was writing from another planet (U.S. Air Force, 1995). Thirty years and more later, he and others told UFO researchers some of the debris exhibited unusual physical properties, such as very high strength, the capacity to return to its original shape after being crumpled without any signs of the crumpling remaining, and resistance to attempts to burn and cut it, all unlikely if the materials were what they appeared to be.

Returning to base, Marcel reported the situation to Col. Blanchard, who in turn seems to have directed the issuance of a press announcement declaring the U.S. Army Air Forces had recovered one of the mysterious flying disks, which had been sent on to “higher headquarters.” That afternoon, July 8, 1947, the *Roswell Daily Record* bannered the story, “RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch in Roswell Region,” and for a few hours it was a major national and international media sensation.

Then Brig. Gen. Roger Ramey announced it was a case of mistaken identity. What had been found was merely a weather balloon and its radar target. The media quickly lost interest, and until 1978, to the minor extent it was considered by UFO researchers and writers at all, it was generally considered an unfortunate product of the flying saucer excitement of the summer of 1947 (see, e.g., Bloecher, 1967).

In 1978, UFO investigator and lecturer Stanton Friedman was told he should talk to Marcel, who had “handled pieces of one of those things” (Friedman & Berliner, 1992). Soon after talking with Marcel, Friedman learned of another man, Barney Barnett, by then deceased, who reportedly had claimed to have seen not only a crashed saucer in New Mexico about the time of the Roswell excitement, but also the bodies of its hapless crew. Working with William L. Moore, Friedman pursued these and other leads, and in 1980, the results were published in *The Roswell Incident* (Berlitz & Moore, 1980). The book barely made a ripple in UFO research and interest circles, wary of such stories since the crashed-saucer hoax made famous by Frank Scully in 1950 (Scully). However, it did establish the basic elements of the Roswell story: a crashed saucer or saucers and (usually) dead crewmen recovered and hidden by U.S. military authorities under cover of a mundane explanation and threats which silenced witnesses.

Friedman, Moore, and others, notably Kevin Randle and Donald Schmitt in cooperation with the Center for UFO Studies, kept digging. In the fall of 1989, the story reached a much larger audience with the airing of a dramatic “Unsolved Mysteries” segment on the case. Several previously unknown persons claiming knowledge of the incident came to the fore, and in 1991 Randle and Schmitt published their first book on the case, in which they fleshed out the basic story, including the testimony of new witnesses alleging knowledge of the bodies (Randle & Schmitt, 1994). Among these was Glenn Dennis, a

retired mortician who alleged he had been at the Roswell base hospital on other business when the alien bodies were being examined there. Dennis claims he was threatened and escorted from the base when, thinking an aircraft had crashed, he asked an officer if his professional assistance was needed. He said he did not see the bodies, but was told about them the next day by an army nurse who had participated in the examination. According to Dennis, she gave him sketches of the strange beings, and a matter of days after their meeting, she was transferred overseas and, soon after, died in a military aircraft accident.

In 1992, I entered the fray, conducting an independent investigation with the assistance of a substantial grant from the Fund for UFO Research. In short order, I learned much of what had been accepted about the case was not as it seemed. Then, in parallel with others, I discovered the most likely source of at least the great majority of the odd debris and the reason for the army's secrecy concerns: a downed 657-foot-tall flight and instrumentation array launched from nearby Alamogordo Army Air Field in support of a highly classified army air forces research and development project, code named Mogul. The "alien writing" turned out to be markings from tape used to reinforce radar targets flown on the balloon-borne array. As for the bodies, most of the accounts proved highly dubious at best. Only Glenn Dennis' story remained intriguingly plausible, but diligent efforts by myself and others failed to uncover any record of the key witness, the army nurse.

In 1994, the Fund for UFO Research published my interim report, in which I still held open the possibility of a crashed flying saucer being involved (Pflock, 1994). Subsequent developments and disclosures and study of the pertinent formerly classified record have convinced me this was not the case and, moreover, that the U.S. government did not possess any physical evidence of such vehicles before mid-1955 and all but certainly still does not.

Not all students of the Roswell case concur, of course, and there are some legitimate areas for disagreement and debate. However, whatever the objective reality may be, there is no doubt a Roswell myth has come into being and taken on a life of its own, in symbiotic union with a mini-industry akin to that born of the Kennedy assassination. No fewer than 10 books (two of them U.S. Air Force reports) and a book-length monograph have been devoted to it, with at least two more forthcoming, another shamelessly exploiting it, and many more including prominent mention of or making it central to their authors' theses and arguments.

Roswell has been the subject of a congressional/U.S. General Accounting Office investigation, two lengthy air force research efforts, and dozens of magazine and journal articles and tabloid television stories. It continues to be referenced, discussed, dissected, and debated on the Internet and in countless other venues. *Roswell*, a television docu-drama, was released in 1994, and the case is keyed on and mentioned prominently in such major theatrical films as *Independence Day* and *The Rock* and, of course, is a staple on Fox Television's

“The X-Files.” Perhaps the ultimate indicator of Roswell’s popular-culture apotheosis is the roar of laughter inspired by a mention of it — without explanation — on an episode of “Seinfeld.”

The fiftieth anniversary celebration of the 1947 incident drew an estimated 40,000 people and a couple of million dollars to Roswell this summer. The town boasts two UFO “museums,” to which tourists continue to flock. Roswell the Myth seems destined for a long run.

The four volumes being reviewed were released to take advantage of the worldwide publicity associated with the golden anniversary of the events inspiring the myth, and to one degree or another, each surely will contribute something to the lore.

One (Korff) is a superficial, debunking consideration of the case. Another (Corso) is a remarkably bold, crass, and successful attempt to exploit public credulity (its sales put it on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and as this is written, it is in its sixth printing). The third (McAndrew) is an official report which attempts to explain the factual basis for the tales of alien bodies, and the fourth (Saler *et al.*) is an interesting, useful, but flawed attempt to explore the roots, nature, and appeal of the myth.

Korff’s *Roswell UFO Crash: What They Don’t Want You to Know* comes to us from the de facto book-publishing arm of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Korff, a young and enthusiastic UFO researcher who works in the computer-software industry, seeks to explain away Roswell as a tiny kernel of truth (Project Mogul) wrapped in a tissue of lies. At the outset, he correctly observes, “The Roswell incident, and all that surrounds it, is a complex web of events, not easily understandable nor explainable until examined fully and in painstaking detail” (p. 16). He then fails to fulfill his implied promise to his readers, offering up sketchy superficiality instead of substance.

The publisher’s jacket copy declares Korff’s work as “a ground-breaking investigation that finally determines the real truth behind the Roswell mystery.” In fact, while Korff brings some interesting and useful bits of information to light, the important ground concerning the likely non-UFO nature of the case was broken some years ago, principally by Pennsylvania researcher Robert Todd, Prof. C. B. Moore, air force reserve officer James McAndrew, and myself. The fundamental elements of the “real truth” have been known publicly since 1994. These have been supplemented by the two air force reports, released in 1995 and 1997, as well as further elaborations, clarifications, and corrections published by several independent investigators, including myself.

We are told this volume culminates 16 years’ research, yet of the book’s more than 350 notes to text, few suggest any original investigation by Korff, most of these citing telephone interviews conducted in the fall of 1996. The rest reveal where Korff did most of his research: in other books about Roswell. Large sections of text are extracts of others’ words, much space is given over to an appendix taken from the air force’s *Roswell Report: Fact versus Fiction*

in the *New Mexico Desert* (1995), and the majority of Korff's bibliography is given over to references having no bearing on Roswell.

Korff and his publisher promise "information never before published... revelations powerful enough to change public opinion forever" (jacket copy), but they deliver only a few new insights, none well documented, all lacking the touted significance. Even the chapter on a film of an alleged autopsy of an alien body supposed by many to have been recovered near Roswell tells us nothing new of any significance. This is especially disappointing, since Korff is truly expert in computer analysis of imagery, as he so admirably demonstrated in his exposé of the Billy Meier cult (Korff, 1995).

It would be useful to have available a thoughtful and carefully researched volume which sets forth in comprehensive detail the complete case for the from-this-earth explanation of Roswell. Unfortunately, Korff's book is not that volume, although it does help to illustrate the level of passion invested in the case by proponents and naysayers alike.

Adding fuel to this fire is *Corso's Day After Roswell*. A review of his records confirms Corso, now 82, retired from the U.S. Army in 1963 as a lieutenant colonel after 21 years' service, principally as an intelligence and artillery (anti-aircraft missiles) officer. From 1961 until his retirement, he served in and headed the Foreign Technology Division of army research and development in the Pentagon, reporting directly to the Chief of R&D. It is his alleged role during this latter assignment which is the focus of the book.

While on the foreign technology desk, Corso claims, he was responsible for the army's "Roswell Files" and seeding into American industry the alien technologies they contained. He also says he got his first inkling of Roswell years before, on July 6, 1947, as he made his night rounds as post duty officer at Fort Riley, Kansas. In the cargo of a truck convoy traveling from Roswell Army Air Field to Wright Field, Ohio, he claims to have seen the body of an alien being floating in a large, liquid-filled glass container.

If Corso's account is taken as fact, he is responsible for nothing short of making possible the cornerstones of the technological revolution of the second half of the twentieth century — the integrated-circuit chip, lasers, fiber optics — plus many other militarily and scientifically important capabilities, including night-vision systems, Kevlar armor, stealth, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, or Star Wars), high-speed, nap-of-the-earth night flying, and much more.

Corso asserts his work made it possible for the West to win the Cold War. More important, he claims, it was the key to saving the world from hostile aliens by turning their own technologies against them, notably as applied to SDI. (For some reason these shadowy beings did not press their advantage for 14 years; then Corso's efforts doomed their nefarious plans once and for all.)

If ever there was an instance in which the overworked demand that those making extraordinary claims be required to provide extraordinary evidence to back them up, this is it. However, Corso's book lacks even such basics as a

table of contents, an index, source notes, and a list of references. Other than referring to (and once misidentifying) a few of the genuine official and other at best suspect UFO-related documents long known to researchers, Corso provides absolutely nothing to back up his remarkable claims. He relies on the credibility implied by his army career and testified to in a foreword written by U.S. Senator Strom Thurmond. However, at the Senator's insistence, the latter has been stripped from the second and all subsequent printings of the book. Thurmond had written it for Corso's memoirs, the outline of which submitted to the Senator included no mention of UFOs or Roswell. (Thurmond, 1997)

Further calling into question Corso's credibility is the fact that, when he makes important objectively checkable claims, he is most often very wrong. For example, he asserts he and then Chief of Army R&D Lt. Gen. Arthur Trudeau, played a major role in developing and launching Corona, the world's first spy-satellite program, this because, among other things, they wanted a means to detect UFO landings and crashes in the Soviet Union (p. 132). He says they "slipped the Corona photo-surveillance payload directly into the ongoing Discoverer program, reverse-engineering Discoverer to make the payload fit" (p. 142), and identifies Discoverer as a NASA project (p. 138). He also tells us of the "jubilation at the Pentagon" (p. 142) when the photos from the first Corona mission were developed.

However, Corona was a strictly CIA-U.S. Air Force project; NASA and the army had nothing to do with it, not even to provide cover. It began in 1958, three years before Corso was assigned to the Pentagon. It was a "black" program hidden inside the air force's Discoverer "space-medicine research" project, which was expressly created as a cover for Corona. The first mission, launched on February 28, 1959, more than two years before Corso went to work for Trudeau, failed and did not even have a camera aboard. The first photography was provided by the *fourteenth* mission, Discoverer 14, launched on August 18, 1960, almost a year before Corso joined army R&D. (Discovery Channel.)

In sum, there simply is no good reason to take Corso's tale seriously, and many good reasons not to do so. However, that a man of advanced years and with an apparently honorable record of service as a U.S. Army officer would tell such stories is very interesting and important in and of itself, especially to those of us whose research must rely in significant measure on anecdote. Why do such seemingly credible people make such incredible claims? How can we effectively assess the veracity of such persons? What is the psychology underlying the creation of apparently honestly offered but clearly false accounts and, for that matter, out-and-out lies? How might we distinguish confidently between objective truth and fantasy, honestly told or willfully conjured up?

Another rich source of material raising questions along these lines and offering plausible answers to some of the most intriguing aspects of Roswell, is McAndrew's *Roswell Report: Case Closed*. The second of two U.S. Air Force reports on the case, it addresses the origins of accounts of recovered alien

bodies, which first surfaced in late 1978, more than 31 years after the event. McAndrew, an air force reserve captain, concludes these stories are embellished versions of genuine recollections of very real experiences of those recounting them and, in some instances, supplemented by remembered knowledge of other real events. The matters in question, however, had nothing to do with unfortunate visitors from another planet.

While serving on active duty as a member of an air force document declassification review team, McAndrew was assigned to conduct research on the origins of the debris found by rancher Brazel. In the course of this work, he located information which suggested the tales of bodies were not made up out of whole cloth. After the first air force report on Roswell was released (1995), concluding the debris was all but certainly from Project Mogul, McAndrew continued investigating the bodies question. He compared "the actual statements of the witnesses" (included as appendices) and "descriptions *provided by the [Roswell] UFO proponents themselves*" (emphasis in original), and discovered remarkable parallels with documented Air Force activities during the 1950s. The congruence was "much too similar to be a coincidence" (p. 123).

Presenting detailed evidence, McAndrew convincingly argues key persons who claimed to have seen bodies of alien beings and related military activities in the field were basing their descriptions on recollections of seeing and hearing about instrumented anthropomorphic dummies which had been dropped from balloons at high altitudes and operations mounted to recover them, during the period 1953-1959. He makes an even stronger case that Glenn Dennis' story of saucer-crew bodies at the Roswell base hospital derives principally from events related to a fiery crash of an air force KC-97 tanker on June 26, 1956, and an air force manned-balloon accident on May 21, 1959.

With respect to Dennis' account, McAndrew effectively addresses and provides the likely factual basis for virtually all the key elements of the story repeatedly told by Dennis since he was first interviewed by Roswell researcher Stanton Friedman in August 1989. These include the reported condition of the bodies and the overpowering odor exuding from them, the "missing" nurse, a pediatrician Dennis claims had knowledge of the events, a red-headed captain (a colonel in some tellings) who allegedly threatened Dennis if he did not keep silent, two "doctors" who examined the victims, the presence of military police and heightened security at the hospital, and peculiar debris Dennis claims to have seen in the back of an army ambulance parked outside the Roswell base hospital.

The "dummy connection" to other accounts of bodies at first blush seems far-fetched, but McAndrew supports his case with facts which make it difficult to dismiss. There are far too many detailed matches between the accounts of key alleged witnesses and documented air force activities. Two of these persons even used the terms "plastic dolls" and "dummies" to describe what they saw (pp. 191, 216).

More difficult to accept is the idea that events occurring 6 to 12 years apart

could be confused and commingled. However, it is well established the vagaries of memory are such that unrelated events well removed from each other in time and space are often quite innocently blended, especially in circumstances in which psychological and social dynamics encourage it. As McAndrew puts it, "In regard to statements of witnesses that were clearly descriptions of Air Force activities, ...these could be generously viewed as situational misunderstandings or even honest mistakes." (p. 123) Less charitably, it is entirely possible and to my mind more than a bit likely, certain persons chose to embellish their recollections of actual events to give the ring of truth to their accounts, never expecting the basis for their stories to be discovered. Quite probably, the overall truth of the matter is that we have a mixture of honest error and deliberate deception, varying in proportion from one source to another.

While McAndrew sometimes seeks to stretch his evidence to cover more ground than it is capable of covering, his research and conclusions are in most respects quite impressive. They deserve thoughtful and dispassionate consideration not only by those seeking to understand comprehensively the factual basis for the Roswell case and the accretion of lore built up around it, but also anyone working to develop reliable methods of sorting fact from fiction in accounts of anomalous events.

Saler, Ziegler, and Moore's *UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* purports to step outside the fact versus fiction debate and consider the case as folklore. Saler and Ziegler are Brandeis University cultural anthropologists. Moore is professor emeritus of atmospheric physics at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. As a graduate student, he was project engineer for the New York University constant-level balloon program which, in the summer of 1947, conducted research and development flights in New Mexico in support of Project Mogul.

In a sense, Moore is along for the ride. He provides an information-packed chapter and supporting appendix on the NYU balloon flights, related technologies, and detailed weather data and analysis pertinent to assessing the case for one of those flights as the source of the debris which launched the Roswell controversy. He also offers another appendix recounting his experiences with some of the Roswell investigators. All of these are highly useful sources of information for anyone attempting to determine what actually happened 50 years ago and interested in how those events were investigated in later years by UFO proponents. However, they are not central to the arguments of Saler and Ziegler, and it is unfortunate Moore's material was not instead presented independently as refereed articles in journals of physical science, the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, or the *Journal of UFO Studies*.

In their introduction, Saler and Ziegler acknowledge the one point everyone concerned with Roswell agrees to, "something happened in the New Mexico desert in 1947." They then declare, "It is our contention — and the theme of this book — that this objectively real "something" has been mythologized. In

other words, as a cultural phenomenon, the Roswell Incident can be best understood as an example of a modern myth” and “can be analyzed using the theoretical tools and concepts of cultural anthropology.” (Page xi.)

They further assert the exact nature of the factual basis for the myth is of no concern to them, and in the introduction to one of his two individually authored chapters, Ziegler states he makes “no claim to absolute certainty regarding the falsity of the story that extraterrestrial beings were involved” and that, “without prejudging... [its] factuality,” it “can be treated and analyzed along lines that have become well established in cultural anthropology.” (p. 1) This is all well and good and potentially of great value if pursued with rigorous adherence to *objective* consideration of the facts and application of accepted anthropological theory and methods. Unfortunately, the authors’ personal biases tend to inform their work and thus in no small degree undermine its value.

Saler offers a chapter entitled “Roswell and Religion,” which leaves one wondering why it was included. He begins by admitting “the corpus of Roswell myth variants described... does not suggest the existence of what we might conventionally term a religion. Nor, insofar as I know, has the Roswell Incident become the focal *mysterium* or central celebratory event of any cult.” Nonetheless, he contends the Roswell myth “suggests certain elements that we elsewhere associate with religion,” and proposes by considering them as “‘religious’ elements that occur outside of the conventional purview of religion, we might hope to achieve some interesting perspectives on both religion and the [Roswell] narratives themselves.” (Page 115) There follow 32 pages of dense and convoluted prose on the nature of religion and belief and various flying saucer cults, including Heaven’s Gate, sprinkled with tenuous attempts to link all this to Roswell. This concludes with a veiled suggestion the Roswell myth might be exploited by fanatical cult leaders to manipulate “persons open to such stories” and, thus, could be a dangerous “supportive narrative” (pp. 148-149).

Ziegler actually deals with Roswell, beginning by synthesizing six versions of the story from the principal published accounts, in the process distorting in some degree those accounts and the facts behind them. (See, e.g., pp. 26-29, and compare to Pflock, 1994, pp. 81-91 and 113-117.) Despite the distortions, Ziegler demonstrates key elements of the story have evolved significantly and even disappeared and reappeared over time and telling (pp. 17-29). He argues this more often than not reflects the motives and changing beliefs of Roswell researchers, believers, and witnesses rather than the emergence of new and verifiable factual material (pp. 52-65).

Most historical events are embellished and elaborated upon as they are recounted, but their essential elements remain the same. Not so the myths arising from them, and Ziegler contends, I believe correctly, “Roswell as we know it” has passed into the realm of myth. This, he argues, explains the emergence

of several contending crash sites, the contradictory descriptions of the crashed UFO and its crew, the “evolving” accounts of persons claiming knowledge of the crash, *etc.* As he cogently observes, “in a genuine exposé, the stories that result from successive investigations of the same past events generally produce a picture of these happenings that becomes increasingly clear with each story. Key elements in the early stories are not usually contradicted in later stories, but more details are filled in....” (p. 155)

In their concluding chapter, “Three Images of Roswell,” Ziegler and Saler discuss the “public image projected by the media, the scholarly image conveyed by the writings of skeptics, and the believers’ image promulgated in letters, commentaries, and articles by members of the UFO community.” (p. 150) While there is some quite useful discussion of the role of the media and others in shaping beliefs about events such as Roswell — and thus muddying the waters in which UFO and other researchers of anomalous phenomena must work — it is more revealing of the authors’ biases.

Some examples: They define the skeptics’ objections as “scholarly,” yet skeptics to whom they refer are exemplified by such anti-UFO partisans as Philip J. Klass, Robert Schaeffer, and Joe Nickell, who, in a very real sense, are themselves as much members of the UFO subculture as those with whom they contend. They lump in with the credulous those who consider UFO phenomena real and worthy of serious, objective study, labeling the lot true believers and UFO buffs.

Instead of recognizing that government UFO investigations arose from legitimate national security concerns and the right of citizens of a democratic republic to demand accountability from their public servants, they approvingly cite arch-UFO-skeptic Donald Menzel’s complaint that “UFO studies have absorbed... government resources that would otherwise have been used for scientific research,” implying the study of UFOs is beyond the pale of science. They then postulate a nagging, unexamined fear of “believers” that their professed belief may not be objectively true, this to account for recurring “efforts to obtain government support to prove that their belief is in accord with the facts.” (Pages 160-163)

It is this sort of bias which undermines what otherwise might have been an important rather than marginally useful contribution to our understanding of not only the Roswell myth but the complex cultural and psychological dynamics of the UFO and similar subcultures. As it is, this volume tells us more about the imperatives of the cultural anthropology subculture.

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