ROSWELL UFO CRASH

Competing accounts

The existence of so many differing accounts by 1994 led to a schism among ufologists about the events at Roswell. The Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) and the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), two leading UFO societies, disagreed in their views of the various scenarios presented by Randle–Schmitt and Friedman–Berliner; several conferences were held to try to resolve the differences. One issue under discussion was where Barnett was when he saw the alien craft he was said to have encountered. A 1992 UFO conference had attempted to achieve a consensus among the various scenarios portrayed in *Crash at Corona* and *UFO Crash at Roswell*, however, the publication of *The Truth About the UFO Crash at Roswell* had "resolved" the Barnett problem by simply ignoring Barnett and citing a new location for the alien craft recovery, including a new group of archaeologists not connected to the ones the Barnett story cited.

In mid-1947, a United States Army Air Forces balloon crashed at a ranch near Roswell, New Mexico. Following wide initial interest in the crashed “flying disc”, the US military stated that it was merely a conventional weather balloon. Interest subsequently waned until the late 1970s, when ufologists began promoting a variety of increasingly elaborate conspiracy theories, claiming that one or more alien spacecraft had crash-landed, and that the extraterrestrial occupants had been recovered by the military, who then engaged in a cover-up.

In the 1990s, the US military published two reports disclosing the true nature of the crashed object: a nuclear test surveillance balloon from Project Mogul. Nevertheless, the Roswell incident continues to be of interest in popular media, and conspiracy theories surrounding the event persist. Roswell has been described as “the world's most famous, most exhaustively investigated, and most thoroughly debunked UFO claim”.

Problems with witness accounts

Hundreds of people were interviewed by the various researchers, but critics point out that only a few of these people claimed to have seen debris or aliens. Most witnesses were repeating the claims of others, and their testimony would be considered hearsay in an American court of law and therefore inadmissible as evidence. Of the 90 people claimed to have been interviewed for *The Roswell Incident*, the testimony of only 25 appears in the book, and only seven of these people saw the debris. Of these, five handled the debris. Pflock, in *Roswell: Inconvenient Facts and the Will to Believe* (2001), makes a similar point about Randle and Schmitt’s *UFO Crash at Roswell.* Approximately 271 people are listed in the book who were “contacted and interviewed” for the book, and this number does not include those who chose to remain anonymous, meaning more than 300 witnesses were interviewed, a figure Pflock said the authors frequently cited. Of these 300-plus individuals, only 41 can be “considered genuine first- or second-hand witnesses to the events in and around Roswell or at the Fort Worth Army Air Field,” and only 23 can be “reasonably thought to have seen physical evidence, debris recovered from the Foster Ranch.”

Of these, only seven have asserted anything suggestive of otherworldly origins for the debris.

As for the accounts from those who claimed to have seen aliens, critics identified problems ranging from the reliability of second-hand accounts, to credibility problems with witnesses making demonstrably false claims, or multiple, contradictory accounts, to dubious death-bed confessions or accounts from elderly and easily confused witnesses. Pflock noted that only four people with supposed firsthand knowledge of alien bodies were interviewed and identified by Roswell authors: Frank Kaufmann; Jim Ragsdale; Lt. Col. Albert Lovejoy Duran; Gerald Anderson. Duran is mentioned in a brief footnote in *The Truth About the UFO Crash at Roswell* and never again, while the other three all have serious credibility problems. A problem with all the accounts, charge critics, is they all came about a minimum of 31 years after the events in question, and in many cases were recounted more than 40 years after the fact. Not only are memories this old of dubious reliability, they were also subject to contamination from other accounts the interviewees may have been exposed to. The shifting claims of Jesse Marcel, whose suspicion that what he recovered in 1947 was “not of this world” sparked interest in the incident in the first place, cast serious doubt on the reliability of what he claimed to be true.

In *The Roswell Incident*, Marcel stated, “Actually, this material may have *looked* like tinfoil and balsa wood, but the resemblance ended there. They took one picture of me on the floor holding up some of the less-interesting metallic debris. The stuff in that one photo was pieces of the actual stuff we found. It was not a staged photo.” Timothy Printy points out that the material Marcel positively identified as being part of what he recovered is material that skeptics and UFO advocates agree is debris from a balloon device. After that fact was pointed out to him, Marcel changed his story to say that that material was not what he recovered. Skeptics like Robert Todd argued that Marcel had a history of embellishment and exaggeration, such as claiming to have been a pilot and having received five Air Medals for shooting down enemy planes, claims that were all found to be false, and skeptics feel that his evolving Roswell story was simply another instance of this tendency to fabricate.

Air Force reports, 1994–1997

In response to these reports, and after United States congressional inquiries, the General Accounting Office launched an inquiry and directed the Office of the United States Secretary of the Air Force to conduct an internal investigation. The result was summarized in two reports. The first, released in 1994, concluded that the material recovered in 1947 was likely debris from Project Mogul, a military surveillance program employing high-altitude balloons. The second report, released in 1997, concluded that reports of recovered alien bodies were likely a combination of innocently transformed memories of accidents involving military casualties with memories of the recovery of anthropomorphic dummies in military programs such as the 1950s Operation High Dive, mixed with hoaxes perpetrated by various witnesses and UFO proponents. The psychological effects of time compression and confusion about when events occurred explained the discrepancy with the years in question.

The Air Force reports were dismissed by UFO proponents as being either disinformation or simply implausible, though skeptical researchers such as Philip J. Klass and Robert Todd, who had been expressing doubts regarding accounts of aliens for several years, used the reports as the basis for skeptical responses to claims by UFO proponents. After the release of the Air Force reports, several books, such as Kal Korff's *The Roswell UFO Crash: What They Don't Want You To Know* (1997), built on the evidence presented in the reports to conclude "there is no credible evidence that the remains of an extraterrestrial spacecraft was involved." In the 1990s, skeptics and even some social anthropologists saw the increasingly elaborate accounts of alien crash landings and government cover ups as evidence of a myth being constructed.

Evidence

Although there is no evidence that a UFO crashed at Roswell, believers firmly hold to the belief that one did, and that the truth has been concealed as a result of a government conspiracy. B. D. Gildenberg has called the Roswell incident “the world’s most famous, most exhaustively investigated, and most thoroughly debunked UFO claim”.

Pflock said, “The case for Roswell is a classic example of the triumph of quantity over quality. The advocates of the crashed-saucer tale simply shovel everything that seems to support their view into the box marked ‘Evidence’ and say, ‘See? Look at all this stuff. We must be right.’ Never mind the contradictions. Never mind the lack of independent supporting fact. Never mind the blatant absurdities.” Korff suggests there are clear incentives for some people to promote the idea of aliens at Roswell, and that many researchers were not doing competent work: “The UFO field is comprised of people who are willing to take advantage of the gullibility of others, especially the paying public. Let’s not pull any punches here: The Roswell UFO myth has been very good business for UFO groups, publishers, for Hollywood, the town of Roswell, the media, and Ufology. The number of researchers who employ science and its disciplined methodology is appallingly small.”

B. D. Gildenberg wrote there were as many as 11 reported alien recovery sites and these recoveries bore only a marginal resemblance to the event as initially reported in 1947, or as recounted later by the initial witnesses. Some of these new accounts could have been confused accounts of the several known recoveries of injured and dead servicemen from four military plane crashes that occurred in the area from 1948 to 1950. Other accounts could have been based on memories of recoveries of test dummies, as suggested by the Air Force in their reports. Charles Ziegler argued that the Roswell story has all the hallmarks of a traditional folk narrative. He identified six distinct narratives, and a process of transmission via storytellers with a core story that was created from various witness accounts and was then shaped and molded by those who carry on the UFO community's tradition. Other “witnesses” were then sought out to expand the core narrative, with those who give accounts not in line with the core beliefs being repudiated or simply omitted by the “gatekeepers.” Others then retold the narrative in its new form. This whole process would repeat over time.

In September 2017, UK newspaper *The Guardian* reported on Kodachrome slides which some had claimed showed a dead space alien. First presented at a BeWitness event in Mexico, organized by Jaime Maussan and attended by almost 7,000 people, days afterwards it was revealed that the slides were in fact of a mummified Native American child discovered in 1896 and which had been on display at the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum in Mesa Verde, Colorado for many decades.