
GAO

United States General Accounting Office

Report to the Honorable
Steven H. Schiff, House of
Representatives

July 1995

GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Results of a Search for
Records Concerning
the 1947 Crash Near
Roswell, New Mexico



THE GAO REPORT: RESULTS OF A SEARCH FOR RECORDS CONCERNING THE 1947 CRASH NEAR ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO

This is the final report on the investigation by the United States General Accounting Office on official records relating to the Roswell crash. It was released on July 28, 1995, in response to a request by U.S. Congressman Steven Schiff (D-N.Mex.). The press release issued by Schiff on the same day is reprinted first, followed by the GAO report (the appendices which consist primarily of negative responses from government agencies to the GAO's inquiries have been omitted).

SCHIFF RECEIVES, RELEASES ROSWELL REPORT

Washington: Congressman Steve Schiff today released the General Accounting Office (GAO) report detailing results of a records audit related to events surrounding a crash in 1947, near Roswell, New Mexico, and the military response.

The 20-page report is the result of constituent information requests to Congressman Schiff and the difficulty he had getting answers from the Department of Defense in the now 48-year-old controversy.

Schiff said important documents, which may have shed more light on what happened at Roswell, are missing. "The GAO report states that the outgoing messages from Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF) for this period of time were destroyed without proper authority." Schiff pointed out that these messages would have shown how military officials in Roswell were explaining to their superiors exactly what happened.

"It is my understanding that these outgoing messages were permanent records, which should never have been destroyed. The GAO could not identify who destroyed the messages, or why." But Schiff pointed out that the GAO estimates that the messages were destroyed over 40 years ago, making further inquiry about their destruction impractical.

Documents revealed by the report include an FBI teletype and a reference in a newsletter-style internal forum at RAAF that refer to a "radar tracking device"—a reference to a weather balloon. Even though the weather balloon story has since been discredited by the U.S. Air Force, Schiff suggested that the authors of those communications may have been repeating what they were told, rather than consciously adding to what some believe is a "cover up."

"At least this effort caused the Air Force to acknowledge that the crashed vehicle was no weather balloon," Schiff said. "That explanation never fit the fact of high military security used at the time." The Air Force in September 1994 claimed that the crashed vehicle was a then-classified device to detect evidence of possible Soviet nuclear testing.

Schiff also praised the efforts of the GAO, describing their work as "professional, conscientious and thorough."

A two-page letter discussing a related investigation into "Majestic 12" was also delivered.

A copy of the report may be obtained by calling (202) 512-6000 and referencing Document number GAO/NSIAD-95-187.

THE GAO REPORT

July 28, 1995

The Honorable Steven H. Schiff
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Schiff:

On July 8, 1947, the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF) public information office in Roswell, New Mexico, reported the crash and recovery of a "flying disc." Army Air Forces personnel from the RAAF's 509th Bomb Group were credited with the recovery. The following day, the press reported that the Commanding General of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, Fort Worth, Texas, announced that RAAF personnel had recovered a crashed radar-tracking (weather) balloon, not a "flying disc."

After nearly 50 years, speculation continues on what crashed at Roswell. Some observers believe that the object was of extraterrestrial origin. In the July 1994 *Report of Air Force Research Regarding the Roswell Incident*, the Air Force did not dispute that something happened near Roswell, but reported that the most likely source of the wreckage was from a balloon-launched classified government project designed to determine the state of Soviet nuclear weapons research. The debate on what crashed at Roswell continues.

Concerned that the Department of Defense (DOD) may

not have provided you with all available information on the crash, you asked us to determine the requirements for reporting air accidents similar to the crash near Roswell and identify any government records concerning the Roswell crash.

We conducted an extensive search for government records related to the crash near Roswell. We examined a wide range of classified and unclassified documents dating from July 1947 through the 1950s. These records came from numerous organizations in New Mexico and elsewhere throughout DOD as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the National Security Council. The full scope and methodology of our work are detailed at the end of this report.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

In 1947, Army regulations required that air accident reports be maintained permanently. We identified four air accidents reported by the Army Air Forces in New Mexico during July 1947. All of the accidents involved military aircraft and occurred after July 8, 1947—the date the RAAF public information office first reported the crash and recovery of a “flying disc” near Roswell. The Navy reported no air accidents in New Mexico during July 1947. Air Force officials told us that according to record-keeping requirements in effect during July 1947, there was no requirement to prepare a report on the crash of a weather balloon.

In our search for records concerning the Roswell crash, we learned that some government records covering RAAF activities had been destroyed and others had not. For example, RAAF administrative records (from Mar. 1945 through Dec. 1949) and RAAF outgoing messages (from Oct. 1946 through Dec. 1949) were destroyed. The document disposition form does not indicate what organization or person destroyed the records and when or under what authority the records were destroyed.

Our search for government records concerning the Roswell crash yielded two records originating in 1947—a July 1947 history report by the combined 509th Bomb Group and RAAF and an FBI teletype message dated July 8, 1947. The 509th-RAAF report noted the recovery of a “flying disc” that was later determined by military officials to be a radar-tracking balloon. The FBI message stated that the military had reported that an object resembling a high-altitude weather balloon with a radar reflector had been recovered near Roswell.

The other government records we reviewed, including those previously withheld from the public because of security classification, and the Air Force’s analysis of unidentified flying object¹ sightings from 1946 to 1953 (*Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14*), did not mention the crash or the recovery of an airborne object near Roswell in July 1947. Similarly, executive branch agencies’ responses to our letters of inquiry produced no other government records on the Roswell crash.

REPORTING AIR ACCIDENTS

According to press accounts from July 1947, Army Air Forces personnel from RAAF were involved in the recovery of an airborne object near Roswell. Therefore, if an air accident report was prepared, it should have been prepared in accordance with Army regulations. According to an Army records management official, in 1947 Army regulations required that air accident reports be maintained permanently. An Air Force official said there was no similar requirement to report a weather balloon crash.

According to an Air Force official who has worked in the records management field since the mid-1940s, air accident reports prepared in July 1947 under Army regulations should have been transferred to Air Force custody in September 1947, when the Air Force was established as a separate service.

The Air Force Safety Agency is responsible for maintaining reports of air accidents. We examined its microfilm records to determine whether any air accidents had been reported in New Mexico during July 1947. We identified four air accidents during this time period.² All of the accidents involved military fighter or cargo aircraft and occurred after July 8, 1947—the date the RAAF public information office first reported the crash and recovery of a “flying disc” near Roswell. According to the Army Air Forces’ *Report of Major Accident*, these four accidents occurred at or near the towns of Hobbs, Albuquerque, Carrizozo, and Alamogordo, New Mexico. Only one of the four accidents resulted in a fatality. The pilot died when the aircraft crashed during an attempted take-off.

SEARCH FOR RECORDS

In searching for government records on the Roswell crash, we were particularly interested in identifying and reviewing records of military units assigned to RAAF in 1947—to include the 509th Bomb Group, the 1st Air Transport Unit, the 427th Army Air Force Base Unit, and the 1395th Military Police Company (Aviation).

Document disposition forms obtained from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri, indicate that in 1953, the Walker Air Force Base (formerly RAAF) records officer transferred to the Army’s Kansas City records depository the histories of units stationed at Walker Air Force Base. These histories included the 509th Bomb Group and RAAF for February 1947 through October 1947; the 1st Air Transport Unit for July 1946 through June 1947; and the 427th Army Air Force Base Unit for January 1946 to February 1947. We could not locate any documentation indicating that records of the 1395th Military Police Company (Aviation) were ever retired to the National Personnel Records Center or its predecessor depositories.

The July 1947 history for the 509th Bomb Group and RAAF stated that the RAAF public information office “was kept quite busy . . . answering inquiries on the ‘flying disc.’”

which was reported to be in [the] possession of the 509th Bomb Group. The object turned out to be a radar tracking balloon.” By his signature, the RAAF’s commanding officer certified that the report represented a complete and accurate account of RAAF activities in July 1947.

In addition to unit history reports, we also searched for other government records on the Roswell crash. In this regard, the Chief Archivist for the National Personnel Records Center provided us with documentation indicating that (1) RAAF records such as finance and accounting, supplies, buildings and grounds, and other general administrative matters from March 1945 through December 1949 and (2) RAAF outgoing messages from October 1946 through December 1949 were destroyed. According to this official, the document disposition form did not properly indicate the authority under which the disposal action was taken. The Center’s Chief Archivist stated that from his personal experience, many of the Air Force organizational records covering this time period were destroyed without entering a citation for the governing disposition authority. Our review of records control forms showing the destruction of other records—including outgoing RAAF messages for 1950—supports the Chief Archivist’s viewpoint.

During our review of records at FBI headquarters, we found a July 8, 1947, teletype message from the FBI office in Dallas, Texas, to FBI headquarters and the FBI office in Cincinnati, Ohio. An FBI spokesperson confirmed the authenticity of the message.

According to the message, an Eighth Air Force headquarters official had telephonically informed the FBI’s Dallas office of the recovery near Roswell of a hexagonal-shaped disc suspended from a large balloon by cable. The message further stated that the disc and balloon were being sent to Wright Field (now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio) for examination. According to the Eighth Air Force official, the recovered object resembled a high-altitude weather balloon with a radar reflector. The message stated that no further investigation by the FBI was being conducted.

To follow up on the July 8th message, we reviewed microfilm abstracts of the FBI Dallas and Cincinnati office activities for July 1947. An abstract prepared by the FBI Dallas office on July 12, 1947, summarized the particulars of the July 8th message. There was no mention in the Cincinnati office abstracts of the crash or recovery of an airborne object near Roswell.

Because the FBI message reported that debris from the Roswell crash was being transported to Wright Field for examination, we attempted to determine whether military regulations existed for handling such debris. We were unable to locate any applicable regulation. As a final step, we reviewed Air Materiel Command (Wright Field) records from 1947 to 1950 for evidence of command personnel involvement in this matter. We found no records mentioning the Roswell crash or the examination by Air Materiel Command personnel of any debris recovered from the crash.

QUERIES TO FEDERAL AGENCIES REGARDING RECORDS ON THE CRASH

We sent letters to several federal agencies asking for any government records they might have concerning the Roswell crash. In this regard, we contacted DOD, the National Security Council, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the CIA, the FBI, and the Department of Energy.

“... many of the Air Force organizational records covering this time period were destroyed without entering a citation for the governing disposition authority.”

The National Security Council, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the Department of Energy responded that they had no government records relating to the Roswell crash. The FBI, DOD, and the CIA provided the following information.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

The FBI informed us that all FBI data regarding the crash near Roswell had been processed under Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests previously received by the Bureau. We reviewed the FBI’s FOIA material and identified the July 8, 1947, FBI teletype message discussing the recovery near Roswell of a high-altitude weather balloon with a radar reflector.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

DOD informed us that the U.S. Air Force report of July 1994, entitled *Report of Air Force Research Regarding the Roswell Incident*, represents the extent of DOD records or information concerning the Roswell crash. The Air Force report concluded that there was no dispute that something happened near Roswell in July 1947 and that all available official materials indicated the most likely source of the wreckage recovered was one of the project MOGUL balloon trains.

At the time of the Roswell crash, project MOGUL was a highly classified U.S. effort to determine the state of Soviet nuclear weapons research using balloons that carried radar reflectors and acoustic sensors.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

In March 1995, the CIA's Executive Director responded to our letter of inquiry by stating that earlier searches by the CIA for records on unidentified flying objects produced no information pertaining to the Roswell crash. The Executive Director added, however, that it was unclear whether the CIA had ever conducted a search for records specifically relating to Roswell. In the absence of such assurance, the Executive Director instructed CIA personnel to conduct a comprehensive records search for information relating to Roswell. On May 30, 1995, the CIA's Executive Director informed us that a search against the term "Roswell, New Mexico," in all CIA databases produced no CIA documents related to the crash.

AGENCY COMMENTS

A draft of this report was provided to DOD for comment. DOD offered no comments or suggested changes to the report. The Chief Archivist, National Personnel Records Center offered several comments clarifying matters dealing with records management. These comments have been incorporated into the final report where appropriate.

The CIA, the Department of Energy, the FBI, the National Security Council, and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy also received excerpts from the report discussing the activities of their respective agencies. They had no substantive comments and made no suggested changes to the report.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To determine the requirements for reporting air accidents in 1947, we interviewed military service records management officials, reviewed military record-keeping regulations in effect during this time period, and examined Army Air Forces and Navy air accident reports.

We also sought to identify any government records related to the Roswell crash. In this regard, we visited and reviewed records at the locations listed in table 1.

Our search of government records was complicated by the fact that some records we wanted to review were missing and there was not always an explanation. Further, the records management regulations for the retention and disposition of records were unclear or changing during the period we reviewed.

We also queried the National Security Council, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Department of Energy, the FBI, DOD, and the CIA to determine what government records they have on the Roswell crash. We did not independently verify the information provided to us in their written responses.

In addition to physically examining government records, we contacted the following federal activities to determine

whether they had any information about the Roswell crash:

- Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama;
- Air Force Aeronautical Systems Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio;
- Army Center for Military History, Washington, D.C.; and
- 509th Bomb Wing, Office of the Historian, Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri.

We conducted our review from March 1994 to June 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after its issue date. At that time, we will make copies available to other interested parties upon request.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please call me on (202) 512-3504. A major contributor to this report is Gary K. Weeter, Assistant Director.

Sincerely yours,

Richard Davis
Director, National Security Analysis

REFERENCES

1. According to Air Force regulation, an unidentified flying object is an airborne object that by performance, aerodynamic characteristics, or unusual features, does not conform to known aircraft or missiles, or does not correspond to Air Force definitions of familiar or known objects or unidentified aircraft.

2. These records do not include information regarding mishaps of air vehicles belonging to civilian or other government agencies. These records also do not include mishaps involving unmanned air vehicles such as remotely piloted aircraft, low-speed cruise missiles, and most balloons. ♦

NATIONAL UFO AWARENESS WEEK **CHICAGO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM** **OCTOBER 5-7, 1995**

Extraterrestrial Close Encounters—Outdoor Exhibits **Friday, October 6**

Klucynski Federal Building, 230 S. Dearborn, 11:30 a.m.—1:30 p.m.
Photo displays—Free Literature—Open Forum Discussions

Oct. 6 Lectures, College of DuPage, Fine Arts Theater, 22d & Lambert Road, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, 7:00-11:00 p.m.; \$10

Katharina Wilson, author of "Alien Jigsaw"
John Carpenter, MUFON Director of Abduction Research

Oct. 7 Lectures, Museum of Science and Industry, 57th & Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, 7:00-11:00 p.m.; \$10

Yvonne Smith, Director, Close Encounter Research Organization
Edward Carlos, Professor of Fine Arts