
WHAT THE GAO FOUND: NOTHING ABOUT MUCH ADO

BY MARK RODEGHIER AND MARK CHESNEY

Did you know that the General Accounting Office (GAO), on July 28, 1995, released the long-awaited report of its investigation into the Roswell incident? It is very possible you may well be unaware of this important event because it was not a major news item in any media. In contrast, when the Air Force released its report on Roswell in September 1994 it was covered by the *New York Times*, by major television networks, and sundry other media outlets. But the GAO report was released to deafening silence. Only the Associated Press, of the major news media, covered the story, with a bare-bones report that appeared in newspapers on July 30. Even this story did not mention the previous Air Force report, although the GAO report found no evidence to support the Air Force's theory that the Roswell debris was the result of the crash of a Project Mogul balloon.

What did the GAO find? What did they conclude about Roswell? Although we summarize their findings in this commentary, we will not spend much time recapitulating the details of the report. This is because the full text of the report, entitled "Government Records: Results of a Search for Records Concerning the 1947 Crash Near Roswell, New Mexico," has been reprinted in this issue of *IUR* to allow you to read exactly what the GAO says about its search. We can do this because, like many GAO reports, the Roswell report is relatively brief, only twenty pages long, with lots of blank space on each page. The body of the report is just eight pages, with appendices comprising the remainder. We are also publishing a press release from Congressman Steve Schiff, who requested the GAO investigation.

We strongly urge you to read the full report before continuing with this commentary, as many of our observations will be more understandable if you know what the GAO (and other agencies) wrote about Roswell.

THE BASIC FINDINGS

With one exception, the GAO's sixteen-month investigation turned up nothing whatsoever. Except for two documents which are already known to the UFO community, no new documents concerning the Roswell crash were discov-

ered in any government agency, including the supersecret CIA and National Security Agency (NSA). The GAO did determine that Army regulations in 1947 required that air accident reports be maintained permanently, but the same did not apply to weather balloon accidents (no accident report was filed, in any case).

The fact that nothing was found, save two documents, may hardly be surprising to those who believe that Roswell involved the crash of an alien spacecraft that was immediately and effectively covered up by the government. Of course, they will say, there are no documents to be found because the records were either destroyed or removed to a separate record system. That might be true, but consider the alternative hypothesis, that the Air Force is correct and the Roswell debris came from a Project Mogul balloon. Shouldn't there be some record of that event in some government agency beyond the FBI telex and note in the *Combined History of the 509th Bomb Group*? Yes, absolutely, yet no documents that refer to the Roswell debris as coming from Project Mogul were located, which strikes us as very peculiar (we return to this point below).

As a consequence, the GAO did not conclude its report by stating that it believed the Roswell debris to be from Project Mogul. The GAO offered no conclusion as to the source of the debris, supporting neither outstanding hypothesis concerning the nature of the debris.

THE MISSING RECORDS

The most intriguing and, perhaps, ominous, finding of the GAO came when it searched the National Personnel Records Center for Roswell Army Air Field records on outgoing message traffic from October 1946 through December 1949 and for administrative records from roughly the same time period. The GAO investigators found that these records were destroyed, and the "document disposition form did not properly indicate the authority under which the disposal action was taken." Nor does it indicate who destroyed the records or when, though the archivist at the Records Center believes the destruction occurred over 40 years ago.

The message traffic records would have been especially valuable, since they would have contained communications between officers at Roswell and Fort Worth and Washington concerning the Roswell event. Although it might appear that the missing records are proof of a cover-

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up, the Chief Archivist at the Records Center said that many Air Force organizational records were destroyed from this time period without proper documentation. Nevertheless, the destroyed records are certainly consistent with the existence of a cover-up.

Even more disturbing is the fact that the records of the 1395th Military Police Company were never even sent to the Records Center. The Chief Archivist did not comment on this circumstance, but we believe the failure to send military police records to the archives is stronger evidence for a cover-up than are the destroyed records. The MPs would have guarded the crash site, as confirmed by several witnesses, and the records concerning the number of personnel deployed, to which sites, and so forth would have been clear evidence for one of the two competing explanations for Roswell.

In sum, the missing records from Roswell are specifically those that would have compromised the security and effectiveness of the cover-up. That these records are missing is consistent with a cover-up. As Ian Fleming wrote, "Once is happenstance, twice is coincidence, but three times is enemy action."

THE SCOPE OF THE GAO INVESTIGATION

It might appear that the GAO investigation was thorough and comprehensive. The investigators visited well over a dozen government agencies during the search and contacted several others for additional information. The investigators examined previously classified records as yet unavailable to the public, but they still came up empty-handed. For example, they reviewed Army Counterintelligence Corps reports from 1947 (recall that Sheridan Cavitt, a counterintelligence officer, accompanied Jesse Marcel to the crash site), but found nothing.

The investigators also searched at the Records Center for Eighth Air Force messages and correspondence from 1947 to 1950 (the 509th Bomb Group at Roswell was a member of the Eighth Air Force). We assume, and hope, this implies that they examined records kept at either Fort Worth Army Air Field or in Washington at Air Force headquarters for messages received from Roswell in the relevant time frame. If so, no mention of the Roswell event was found in these records as well, which is rather extraordinary, as is the GAO's conspicuous failure to note this fact in their report. It is one thing to destroy messages at one Air Force base, but quite another to selectively go through message traffic and remove critical records from messages received in Washington. That the GAO did not mention this is puzzling.

On the other hand, perhaps the GAO investigators didn't do any cross-checking of messages sent from Roswell (again, one can't be positive from the language of the report). In that case, the effort of the GAO is less than exemplary. In other GAO investigations we have reviewed, the agency often does extensive validation and cross-checking, but if that was not done in this instance, it may be an indication that

the GAO did only the minimum necessary to fulfill the request of Representative Schiff.

THE RESPONSE OF OTHER AGENCIES

Near the end of its investigation (why not earlier is unclear), the GAO contacted several government agencies to ask whether they had any information on the Roswell crash. All responded in the negative, although the NSA did not even give the GAO the courtesy of a written response.

The response from the CIA is most revealing, since that agency searched "all of our data bases" for the terms "Project Mogul" and "Roswell, New Mexico." This search, incredibly, yielded no documents related to either of these terms. First and foremost, if the Roswell event was caused by the crash of a Project Mogul balloon, it seems rather odd that the CIA records don't support that scenario. Although skeptics might claim that the CIA only deals with intelligence collection overseas, it is well known that CIA databases contain information on domestic events for purposes of reference and background information, especially events concerning national security at the highest levels. We find it unthinkable that there are no CIA records on Mogul.

Also surprising is that there are no CIA records concerning Roswell. Note that the CIA didn't search for "Roswell, alien spacecraft crash," but instead searched under the placename in New Mexico. Given that the 509th Bomb Group was the only atomic bomb wing in the 1940s, and the likely efforts of the Soviets to penetrate security at Roswell, it is rather peculiar, to say the least, that the CIA has no records whatsoever findable through the keyword "Roswell."

The bottom line, even if one rejects our interpretation, is that the CIA was unable to offer support for either hypothesis about the Roswell crash. Moreover, the lack of records on Project Mogul and Roswell again raises the specter of a cover-up at the highest levels of government.

THE GAO'S TREATMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

In a column dated June 1, 1995, before the report was released, Jack Anderson and Michael Binstein reported on the GAO investigation into Roswell. Given the contents of the report, it appears that the information in the column was accurate. Anderson and Binstein talked to sources close to the investigation, who said that the report would not be accusatory toward the Air Force, and although the Air Force had not been forthcoming, that fact might not be mentioned in the final report (it isn't) because "it might imply that the GAO believes a UFO landed at Roswell." The GAO doesn't want to fuel UFO theories, according to Anderson and Binstein.

These columnists must have good sources, because a kid-gloves treatment is exactly what the Air Force received

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experience), the apparent motives of the reputed abductors (whether they are here to serve their own nefarious objectives or to save the earth from catastrophe), and how investigators and mental-health professionals should deal with experiencers seeking their services (for example: what the ethics of abduction-experience research and treatment should be). These differences of opinion do not go unnoticed. To Bryan's credit he captures much of the flavor of abduction research as well as the nature of the abduction experience itself.

Bryan begins his book by framing the Abduction Study Conference at MIT in terms of Pritchard's call for "a critical analysis and an exploration of all the possibilities." Ultimately, both the conference and Bryan's book can be judged by how well this call has been met. By the strictest of standards, both may have fallen short of the mark. But both are among the best representatives of their kind for objectivity and open-mindedness.

Ironically, for this very reason both have been and will continue to be criticized. ♦

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from the GAO. First, the GAO report hardly mentions the Air Force conclusion, even though it obviously bears on the work of the GAO. When it does mention it, it simply states the Air Force's position, with no critical commentary and no explicit mention of the fact that the GAO was unable to find any records to verify the Air Force's claim.

The GAO's description of the CIA database search is quite revealing, as the report only mentions a search against the term "Roswell, New Mexico," but never alludes to the other search for the term "Project Mogul." Mentioning the lack of records about Mogul at the CIA would make it clear that there is no documentation for the Air Force's claim, and the GAO evidently wanted to embarrass the Air Force as little as necessary (as a GAO spokesman stated to Anderson).

Since the Anderson column was so accurate, it is worth citing this quote from his report, from a source close to the investigation. "But we do believe that something did happen at Roswell. Something big. . . . But everything we've seen so far points to an attempt on the part of the Air Force to lead anybody that looks at this down another track." We couldn't agree more, but it's too bad that some statement to this effect wasn't added to the GAO report, if this is indeed what the GAO investigators believe.

THE PROJECT MOGUL EXPLANATION

We may never know why the Air Force released its report last September claiming that the Roswell debris was from a

Mogul balloon, but it surely was an ill-advised move, given that there was no supporting documentation that unequivocally showed this to be the source of the debris. More to the point, the Air Force should have stuck to its original cover story and insisted that an ordinary weather balloon was misidentified at Roswell. The GAO found that military records did not have to be maintained for weather balloon mishaps, so the Air Force could plausibly claim that the lack of records did not undermine their version of events. But by admitting an initial cover-up and suggesting Mogul as the source, the Air Force made its position much more vulnerable to falsification. The GAO's lack of success at finding records linking Project Mogul and Roswell has to undermine the Air Force's purported explanation.

Even former Air Force personnel are getting in the act and attacking the Air Force explanation. In a recent interview, Irving Newton, the weather officer who identified the debris at Fort Worth Army Air Field as from a weather balloon, doesn't buy the Project Mogul explanation. He still believes that he saw debris from a standard weather surveillance balloon. We agree with Newton, because the available evidence shows that the Air Force substituted a weather balloon for the real debris brought to Fort Worth with Major Marcel. Project Mogul debris was never found near Roswell by Marcel or brought to Fort Worth.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As you can read from Schiff's press release, he doesn't appear satisfied yet that we've learned the truth about the Roswell crash. In an appearance on Larry King's talk show, Schiff reinforced this point. However, he has not yet called for any further inquiry on Roswell, as of this writing. We strongly support, as does CUFOS, congressional hearings on Roswell, before all living witnesses are gone (far too many have passed on already).

Despite the lack of documentation found by the GAO, its report should be seen as further support for the position of most in the UFO community that something truly extraordinary crashed near Roswell. The GAO did us the service of looking in classified records off-limits to civilians, but still couldn't find any records about Roswell. They have further narrowed the possible sources of the Roswell debris, and they caused various government agencies to search for Roswell records, something no civilian Roswell investigator could have ever hoped to accomplish.

In our view, the GAO report makes it less likely that Project Mogul was the source of the Roswell debris, since no records were located to support that conjecture. And since the Air Force has previously stated that the weather balloon explanation is incorrect, that doesn't leave many (if any) terrestrial causes for the debris. That is the fundamental and important upshot of the GAO report, even if the GAO was too timid to say so forthrightly in its report. ♦