

Roswell Update: Fading Star?

DAVE THOMAS

The Roswell incident is often held up as the best-documented case of alien visitation. It involves the alleged crash of an alien craft near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 and the purported government cover-up of the debris and alien bodies. Something actually did crash in the desert near Roswell in 1947—but it wasn't from outer space. It was almost certainly launched from Alamogordo, New Mexico, as part of a top-secret project (Mogul) in which the United States attempted to spy on Soviet nuclear tests by positioning microphones high in the atmosphere on arrays of balloons (Thomas 1995).

By the fiftieth anniversary of the Roswell incident in 1997, Roswell was all the rage. It was featured on magazine covers, provided the basis for several films and television shows, and was synonymous with aliens and UFOs. The city's annual UFO festival attracted 40,000 visitors that year. One of the enticements of the 1997 gathering was the presentation of some long-awaited, physical proof of the alien crash landing. The "proof" was revealed on schedule, provided by one Russell Vernon Clark, a San Diego chemist: it was metal, supposedly from the "crash," with unusual isotopic ratios, proving its alien nature. The finding flopped. For one thing, "non-earthly" isotopic mixtures can be cooked up in college chemistry and government labs. Also, Clark's claim that the sample contained germanium-75 (an element so radioactive that it would decay into other elements in just days) was ridiculed, causing him to later acknowledge that the evidence was "inconclusive" (Fleck 1997).

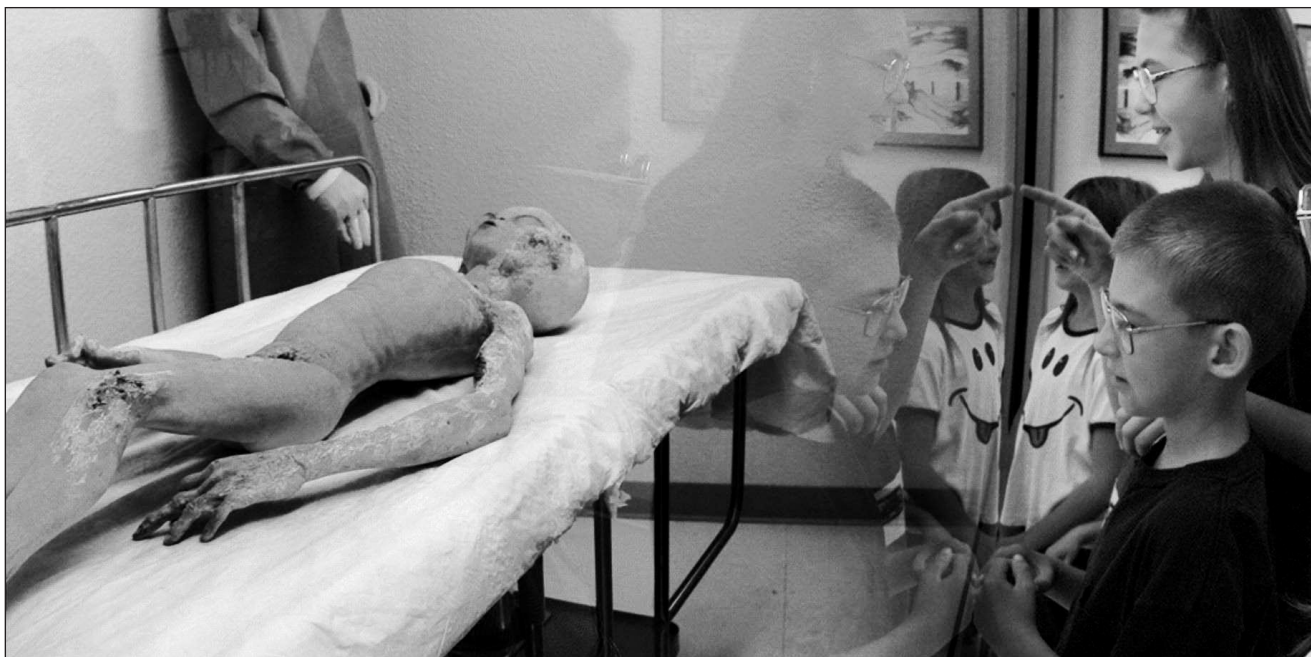
Other than the Roswell incident's star fading, not much has changed in the years since then. Stanton Friedman still tours the UFO fests, and Tom Carey and Donald Schmitt still pump out Roswell-related UFO television projects and tabloid books. A Sci-Fi channel project in 2002 promised hard, scientific proof of aliens at Roswell, but all that was delivered was

David Thomas works as a physicist/programmer in Socorro, New Mexico. He is president of the New Mexicans for Science and Reason and is also a SKEPTICAL INQUIRER consulting editor and Committee for Skeptical Inquiry fellow. He can be reached at P.O. Box 1017, Peralta, NM 87042-1017 or by e-mail at nmsrdave@swcp.com.

a barren "archaeological dig" led by Bill Doleman and a very dubious attempt by David Rudiak to read Army memos from grainy 1947 photographs (Thomas 2003).



How much clout did the Roswell incident enjoy at its sixtieth anniversary in 2007? It's quite difficult to find figures for the 2007 event, but a Roswell Daily Record article on the 2008 festival notes: "Officials from the International UFO Museum and Research Center stated this year's 'Roswalien Experience' was a success as attendance jumped more than 25 percent. Julie Shuster, the museum's executive director, said 7,216 UFO enthusiasts attended the lectures, workshops,



An "alien autopsy" exhibit at the International UFO Museum and Research Center. The "autopsy" was a hoax.

celebrity appearances and other events held during this year's festival from Thursday through Sunday. . . ." (Toney 2008). If the 2008 attendance of 7,216 was 25 percent bigger than the previous year's, it follows that 2007's sixtieth-anniversary attendance was a mere 5,773. That's only a seventh of the 1997 total and a clear sign that Roswell's "fifteen minutes of fame" is running out.

The sixtieth-anniversary "surprise" at the 2007 fest was the publication of a new book by Schmitt and Carey, *Witness to Roswell* (Carey and Schmitt 2007). The centerpiece of the book was a new affidavit allegedly written by Walter Haut, the Army base public information officer in 1947. Haut, who died in December 2005, stated in a 1993 affidavit that he was convinced the material recovered was "from outer space," that Col. Blanchard had seen the material, and that Major Jesse Marcel told him (Haut) the material photographed in General Ramey's office was not the same debris he had seen. Haut's new "death-bed" affidavit went way beyond this and offered this shocking new detail: on the morning of July 8, well before the debris was flown to Fort Worth, Texas, for examination by General Ramey, it was discussed at a briefing attended by Marcel, Col. Blanchard, counterintelligence Captain Cavitt, Brigadier General Roger Ramey, and his chief of staff, Col. Thomas J. Dubose. This would strongly contradict the common understanding that General Ramey never saw the debris until it was flown out from Roswell the afternoon of July 8. Numerous other new claims, such as Haut witnessing alien bodies, also spiced up the new statement.

However, even staunchly pro-Roswell researcher Dennis

Balthaser attacked the alleged affidavit, writing: "We have learned that Walter Haut did not write the affidavit he signed in 2002, but rather it was prepared for his signature based on comments and remarks Haut had made over a period of time to Schmitt, Carey and others. . . . Neither Schmitt nor Carey were present when Walter supposedly signed the affidavit, and the witness's last name on the 2002 document is not shown . . . the oral history videotape of Walter Haut done on November 15, 2000, and copyrighted by Wendy Connors and myself shows a man that couldn't remember where he took basic training, names, dates, etc., while the 2002 affidavit is very detailed and precise Why was it necessary for Major Marcel to fly debris from Roswell to General Ramey's office in Ft. Worth, since they had all handled the debris in the meeting and apparently set up the cover-up operation?" (Balthaser 2007).

Is Roswell still the "best" UFO incident? If it is, UFO proponents should be very, very worried. □

References

- Balthaser, Dennis. 2007. Walter Haut, Roswell, and a whole lotta questions. Available online at www.truthseekeratroswell.com, Oct. 1.
- Carey, Tom, and Donald Schmitt. 2007. *Witness to Roswell: Unmasking the 60-Year Cover-up*, Career Press.
- Fleck, John. 1997. Scientists scoff at chunk of Roswellian "unearthly" silicon. *Albuquerque Journal*, July 25.
- Thomas, Dave. 1995. The Roswell incident and Project Mogul. *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, July/ August, 19(4) 15-18.
- . 2003. Bait and switch on "Roswell: The smoking gun." *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, March/ April, 27(2) 16-18, 22.
- Toney, Lauren. 2008. Fest attendance jumps 25 percent. *Roswell Daily Record*, July 8.