

New Mexico's UFO mystery lingers

By Marilyn Haddrell
El Paso Times

Forty years ago this week, Army officials announced that a UFO had crashed 75 miles northwest of Roswell on a remote ranch.

Within hours, the Army said the announcement was a mistake and the object was just a wrecked weather balloon.

But those familiar with the incident say the weather balloon story was a coverup. The mystery and controversy of

Document: UFO believers say declassified information supports their case / 2A

the "Roswell incident" remains, and flared again last weekend at a symposium on UFOs.

Walter Haut was a first lieutenant and public information officer at Roswell Army Air Field July 8, 1947, when the post commander, Col. William Blanchard, "called me and said, 'We've got this thing. Get

a release out on it, get it into town to the news media so that we don't look like we're trying to hide anything.'

"After I did that, all hell broke loose."

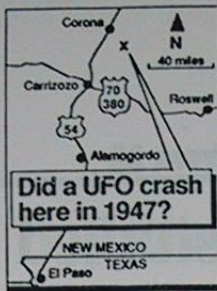
In a recent interview, Haut said the Army's subsequent story about the weather balloon made little sense in light of the extraordinary secrecy surrounding what the government claimed was an ordinary weather balloon.

Documents alleged to be proof of a government cover-up

of the incident were a major topic in Washington at last weekend's International Symposium on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.

"It's the most significant case of all (alleged UFO sightings) because it was the beginning of the cosmic Watergate," said **Estanislao Friedman**, a UFO researcher and nuclear physicist. Friedman was among about 400 people attending the symposium, which marked the 40th

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anniversary of the first reported UFO sighting June 24, 1947, in Washington state. Other reported sightings followed throughout the summer of 1947, including several in New Mexico.

Some UFO researchers believe alien bodies were found in the crash northwest of Roswell. But no mention of any bodies was made in reports at the time of the crash.

The wreckage reportedly was taken to Fort Worth Army Base, where, shortly after Haut's announcement, Brig. Gen. Roger Ramey called a news conference. Ramey and other officials displayed what they said was debris from the site, and explained it was just a weather balloon and its radar detection equipment.

But others have joined Haut in challenging that version.

• A former Army intelligence officer who had helped gather the debris said it wasn't a weather balloon.

• A television newsman, who then was working for a Roswell radio station, said he was visited often by government officials who warned him not to talk about a conversation he had with the rancher who found the wreckage.

• The rancher's son, who later found more pieces washed up by rainstorms, said that two years after the incident he bragged in a bar one night about his collection. He said he was visited the next day by



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UFO investigator Clifford Stone of Roswell visits the Corona, N.M., area where a UFO allegedly crashed in 1947.

military authorities who took the fragments away from him.

The story began a couple of weeks before the Army's announcement and the quick retraction, when Corona, N.M., area rancher Mac Brazel discovered the wreckage on his land.

Floyd Proctor, then 11 years old, lived on a nearby ranch. He said his father was approached by Brazel, who wanted his neighbor to have a look at the debris. Proctor said his father never got around to visiting the site, but that Brazel traveled to Roswell July 6 to report the find.

Before the military got involved, Brazel stopped to visit radio newsmen Frank Joyce because the rancher had heard newscasts about flying discs.

Joyce, now an Albuquerque television newsmen, said government officials found out about the conversation and demanded that he remain silent about it. Joyce said he kept quiet about the crash for about 25 years, after government agents repeatedly visited him into the early 1960s to ensure his silence. He still won't disclose details of his conversation with Brazel.

Joyce said he traveled to the

Brazel ranch to report the crash, but never saw any of the material because authorities confined him to a closed room.

After the weather balloon story was issued, Brazel appeared with military personnel to answer questions from reporters. "If I find anything also short of a bomb, it's going to be hard to get me to talk," he said in one Associated Press account.

His son, Bill Brazel of Capitlan, N.M., said his father later kept quiet about the event because of a pledge made to military authorities.

Bill Brazel said that during

the next two years, he picked up a few pieces of the wreckage, bragged in a bar about his collection and lost it to the military who visited him the next day.

The Army intelligence officer in charge of recovering the wreckage at the site was Maj. Jesse Marcel of Roswell Army Air Field. Before he died last year he had discussed the incident in a documentary for a Home Box Office program.

"It was not a weather balloon, nor an aircraft, nor a missile. It was something else," he said.

Marcel, who later became a lieutenant colonel, described debris flung over an area about three-quarters of a mile long and several hundred feet wide.

He said the metallic substances were extremely thin and light, "like the tinfoil in a pack of cigarette paper." But the metal was durable and could not be creased, he said.

Some fragments were described as looking like tough parchment. Some I-shaped pieces displayed hicroglyptic-type writing, witnesses said.

Military personnel at the scene loaded several vehicles and transported material back to Roswell. Marcel told some of the wreckage in the back seat and trunk of his car, and showed it later to his family.

His son, J.A. Marcel, now a doctor in Helena, Mont., was 12 years old then.

"Almost to this day I can visualize it," the younger Marcel said. "It was an incredible thing."

He described patterns of lavender color imbedded in I-beam-like material.

The son also recalled that 40 years ago his father had said a weather balloon story was a deception to appease the public.

"Dad would have been familiar with radar detection equipment," J.A. Marcel said. "He was trained in radio and electronics. He would have known."

Haut, who still lives in Roswell, never saw any of the remains, but "very honestly, I think there was a big cover-up all the way through on this."

At Corona, Proctor said he doesn't believe "anybody ever bought the weather balloon story. A lot of people wondered whether it was something that was an Air Force experiment, or whether it could have been something from outer space."

The Roswell UFO story is challenged by a nationally known UFO skeptic, Philip Klass of Washington, who asked, "Do you want to believe in the tooth fairy?"

Klass, formerly a senior editor for Aviation Week and Space Technology magazine, said the descriptions of the remains are consistent with the weather balloon explanation. The original UFO announcement may have been due to living disc hysteria at the time, he said.

Forty years later, the remote area where the wreckage fell yields no clues, unless the grass and vegetation perhaps hid an overlooked fragment washed up by spring rains.

"I would say that a saucer crash is probably a very, very, very rare incident," said Clifford Stone of Roswell, who has investigated the incident extensively. "And right here, history was made."