

40-year-old UFO 'facts' prove to be recent fakes

By Robert C. Cowen

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① YOU may have read it in a newspaper, heard it on radio, or seen it on TV. Declassified documents surfaced this spring to confirm that the United States government recovered debris of a crashed "flying saucer" and four alien bodies near Roswell, New Mexico, 40 years ago. Sorry folks! It's just another UFO hoax. 2

Philip J. Klass of the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), has performed a useful public service in exposing it. But why did professional news people pay attention to the silly claim in the first place? 3

The Roswell incident is one of the oldest canards in UFO history. Variety columnist Frank Scully first made the claim in a 1950 book. He relied on the word of two men (who were later convicted of an oil-finding equipment fraud). 4

Even leading UFOlogists rejected this nonsense at the time. Charles Berlitz, who publicized the ship-swallowing Bermuda Triangle and William L. Moore revived it in their 1980 book "The Roswell Incident." 5

⑥ Last May, Moore, Stanton T. Friedman, and Jamie Shandera released copies of what appear to be official documents proving that President Truman had established a top-secret group of 12 leading scientists called "Majestic 12" (MJ-12) to study the Roswell remains. Moore explained that the documents appeared on an undeveloped roll of 35mm film that Shandera received in December 1984 from an anonymous source. Moore says the researchers then spent more than two years trying to authenticate the documents before publicizing them. 6

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They needn't have taken so long. It took Klass only several weeks of investigation to turn up "hard evidence" of a hoax. 7

A key document purports to be a carbon copy of a July 14, 1964, memorandum from presidential assistant Robert Cutler to USAF chief of staff Gen. Nathan Twining concerning a MJ-12 briefing for President Eisenhower. According to the National Archives, the document "poses problems." It is not a carbon but was typed directly on onionskin paper. It carries a security classification not used during the Eisenhower administration and has other faults indicating forgery. Klass also notes that Cutler was out of town when the purported memo was written. 8

⑨ Another key document - a letter from President Truman to Defense Secretary James Forrestal - also appears to be forged. 9

Neither Klass or CSICOP accuses Moore and his associates themselves of the forgeries, only of being deceived by a hoax. Such naiveté is understandable for UFOlogists eager to believe in alien visitations. But professional newsmen have been stung often enough to make any sensational flying-saucer claim suspect. The MJ-12 papers are one more fabrication that makes this point. 10

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A Tuesday column, Robert C. Cowen is the Monitor's natural science editor.

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