

UFO

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debris from a weather balloon.

But rumors about a crashed flying saucer persisted. In the late 1970s, UFO researchers began interviewing people who had been involved in the incident. Many agreed that whatever had crashed near Roswell wasn't a weather balloon.

Those interviewed said they had handled, or knew people who had handled, the wreckage. They described a foil-like substance that was extremely thin but extremely tough — it couldn't be cut or torn. They also described woodlike beams that bore indecipherable writing.

And some said they understood that small, humanlike aliens also had been found and taken to a secret location for study.

UFO researcher William L. Moore collaborated with Charles Berlitz on a book about the crashed-saucer story, "The Roswell Incident," published in 1980.

Berlitz went on to other things. But Moore stayed on the trail of the crashed saucer, issuing periodic "progress reports" at conventions of UFO enthusiasts.

In December 1984, according to Moore, came the big break. A plain brown wrapper was delivered to the home of Jaime Shandera, an associate of Moore. Inside was a roll of undeveloped 35mm film.

The film, when developed, showed the six-page Majestic-12 document.

The document is dated Nov. 18, 1952, and marked "EYES ONLY" for President-elect Dwight Eisenhower. It describes Operation Majestic-12, which supposedly was initiated by President Harry Truman in September 1947.

The document refers to UFO sightings in the summer of 1947, then says: "Little of substance was learned about the objects until a local rancher reported that one had crashed in a remote region of New Mexico located approximately seventy-five miles northwest of Roswell Army Air Base (now

Walker Field)."

The document continues: "On 07 July, 1947, a secret operation was begun to assure recovery of the wreckage of this object for scientific study. During the course of this operation, aerial reconnaissance discovered that four small human-like beings had apparently ejected from the craft at some point before it exploded ... All four were dead and badly decomposed ... A special scientific team took charge of removing these bodies for study."

The document goes on to say that "although these creatures are human-like in appearance, the biological and evolutionary processes responsible for their development has apparently been quite different from those observed or postulated in homo sapiens ... Since it is virtually certain that these craft do not originate in any country on earth, considerable speculation has centered around what their point of origin might be and how they get here."

The document says the craft's propulsion unit apparently was destroyed by the explosion that caused it to crash.

As for the crash site, it says that "civilian and military witnesses in the area were debriefed, and news reporters were given the effective cover story that the object had been a misguided weather research balloon."

Operation Majestic-12 allegedly was directed by an elite 12-member panel. According to the document, the members included Adm. Roscoe Hillenkoetter, the first director of the CIA; James Forrestal, Truman's secretary of defense; Sidney Souers, the first executive secretary of the National Security Council; and Dr. Donald Menzel, an astrophysicist and noted UFO debunker of the 1950s.

All 12 members have since died.

Citing national security and the need to prevent a public panic, the document concludes: "The Majestic-12 Group remains of the unanimous opinion that imposition of the strictest precautions should continue without interruption into the new administration."

Although Moore and others have speculated that the Roswell saucer crashed July 2 and that the wreckage and bodies eventually

were taken to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, the Majestic-12 document offers no confirmation on those points.

Moore, who lives in Burbank, Calif., told the Daily News in a telephone interview that he and fellow researchers studied the document — names, dates, writing style, typefaces — for 2½ years before making it public in April.

Now, he said, it's time for others to try their hand at checking the document's authenticity. "We felt we had gone about as far on it as we could on our own," he said. "Nobody is very well funded."

He acknowledged that he has found no undeniable proof that the document is genuine. But neither, he said, has he found anything that indicates it's a hoax.

Moore noted that if he had wanted to make a fast buck, he could've kept the document to himself and written a book.

The Majestic-12 document was, understandably, a major topic at the Mutual UFO Network's 18th annual International Symposium on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena held June 27-28 in Washington, D.C.

Fort Walton Beach's Ware — who is not to be confused with another Don Ware, an Okaloosa County commissioner — was among the 450 people who attended the event.

"That was the most exciting thing that happened at the symposium," Ware said of discussion surrounding the Majestic-12 document. "It's the most important piece of paper received from a government source, if in fact it came from a government source."

The 35mm film with photos of the document had been mailed anonymously, Moore said. He refused to disclose the postmark on the wrapper.

Ware, who retired from the Air Force after spending 26 years as a teacher, staff scientist and fighter pilot, believes the Majestic-12 document indeed came from a government source.

And he believes Moore wouldn't have released it if he had known it was bogus. "I don't think he would do that," Ware said.

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TOMORROW: The skeptics speak out.