FW FOCUS

The Monthly Newsletter

of the

Fair-Witness Project, inc.

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IKE & ALIENS?

A FEW FACTS ABOUT A PERSISTENT RUMOR

One of the first conclusions any impartial observer must make about the present state of civilian UFOlogy is that rumor and circumstance play far too great a role in what ought to be a more exacting quest for knowledge. It is undoubtedly just such an observation which once led Dr. Carl Sagan to comment dryly that UFOs "are more a matter for religion and superstition than they are for science." While this dismissal is perhaps unscientific in its own right, the point is well taken. Attend any gathering of "UFO people" that you want, and simply listen. Rumors abound.

Perhaps worse, however, is that some of these rumors manage to circulate for years (even decades) without anyone making even a reasonable effort to get to the bottom of them.

One of the most persistent of these rumors is a story that President Eisenhower, in the early part of 1954, visited Edwards Air Force Base (then known as Muroc) in California and either viewed the bodies of dead aliens and the wreckage of their crashed craft, or met with live aliens on some sort of diplomatic mission to earth. The story takes many forms, with the common thread being that the president mysteriously disappeared one evening while on a vacation to Palm Springs, California, and that he was spirited up to Muroc to view (or meet) aliens. It is said that he was returned to Palm Springs by dawn and that shortly thereafter he ordered absolute secrecy about anything having to do with the subject of UFOs. The story is even repeated, with considerable variation, in the forthcoming Disney movie "My Science Project" (Touchstone Films).

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While it has not yet been possible to get to the bottom of this particular rumor, FWP has managed to make some progress. From research conducted both at Palm Springs and at the Eisenhower Memorial Library in Abilene, Kansas, the following facts have emerged:

(1) President Eisenhower did indeed make a trip to Palm Springs between February 17th and 24th, 1954, and on the evening of Saturday, February 20th, he did disappear. Several members of the press caught wind of the fact that the president was not where he should be and rumors ran rampant that he had either died or was seriously ill. The story even managed to get onto Associated Press' New York state wire before being killed moments later. To quell the fuss, White House Press Secretary James Haggerty called a late evening press conference at the Mirador Hotel to announce "solemnly" that the president had been enjoying fried chicken earlier that evening, had knocked a cap off a tooth, and had been taken to a local dentist for treatment. The president turned up for church early the next morning, casting aside whatever lingering doubts there may have been about the affair. According to Haggerty's personal diary for Feb. 20, 1954:

> "At Palm Springs - Pres broke cap off tooth - had it fixed at local dentist - Dr. C.A. Purcell - AP, from Syracuse, flashed 'Pres. Eisenhower died tonight of a heart attack at Palm Springs' - someone fooling around with teletype - moved on open state wire - caused some hell but AP killed it 2 minutes later - Called AP New York offices for explanation and to demand a full report."

(2) Although the Palm Springs trip was billed as a vacation for the president, the trip appears to have come up rather suddenly. In addition, it is a matter of record that Ike had returned from a quail-shooting vacation in Georgia less than a week before leaving for Palm Springs.

(3) While the incidence of a local dentist being called upon to treat the President of the United States is unusual enough that it should constitute a rather memorable event for those involved, Dr. Purcell's widow (during a June, 1979 interview with Moore) was curiously unable to recall any specifics relating to her husband's alleged treatment of the president. In response to simple questions relating to the time of day, the nature of the president's problem, the number of times her husband had treated the president, or even whether the president had been brought to her husband's office or her husband had been taken to the president's rooms at Smoke Tree Ranch, she could only reply that she was "unable to recall". Yet her memory appeared flawless when asked to relate details of her and her husband's attendance (by presidential invitation) at an outdoor steak fry the following evening, where her husband was introduced to the press and others as "the dentist who had treated the president". This would appear to suggest a cover story, the details of which would have easily been repeated at the time, but quite naturally forgotten a quarter century later.

(4) Research at the Eisenhower Library has uncovered two other facts which are inconsistent with the dentist story. The first

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is that while the library maintains an extensive index of records relating to the president's health, there is no record of any ntal work having been performed at all in bruary of 1954. A file on "Dentists" in the esident's Personal File also contains nothing any visit to Dr. Purcell either. Secondly, ere is a large file at the library containing pies of all sorts of acknowledgements and ank-you notes which were sent by the White use to people who had something to do with e Palm Springs trip. (A few of these were ndwritten by the president himself.) There e letters, for example, to people who sent owers, people who met the airplane, people o had offered to play golf (or even chess) th the president, etc., etc. There is even thank-you letter to the minister who pre- ded over the Sunday service attended by the esident. Yet there is no record of any sort thank-you or acknowledgement having been nt to the "dentist who treated the presi- nt". If the matter were as routine as Hag- rty attempts to make it appear, then the sence of these records seems curiously in- nsistent.

(5) The rumor of the president and his leged visit to Muroc is not a new one. Its ginnings can be traced to UFO contactee- inge literature which appeared less than months after Ike's Palm Springs trip. ad Layne, Desmond Leslie and George Hunt lliamson all wrote about it. So did a str- ge fellow named Gerald Light, who, in a tter to Layne dated April 16th, 1954, act- ually claimed to have been at Muroc in the company of several dignitaries and to have seen the saucers and the aliens himself. Light's letter has been controversial for years and has turned up in all sorts of places (including The Roswell Incident, in which see pp. 116-118 for the complete text). Investigation into Mr. Light's background, however, turns up the fact that he was an elderly psychic and mystic known in such circles as "Dr. Kappa", and that he believed psychic out-of-body experiences (OBEs) were a logical extension of the reality of life and should be treated as such. Light's alleged visit to Muroc was just such an experience.

And so the investigation comes to a dead end. Clearly something occurred involving President Eisenhower on the evening of February 20, 1954. Whether it was a trip to the dentist, a trip to Muroc, or something altogether different and unrelated, remains a matter of conjecture.

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-- NEWS BYTES --

-FOCUS editor and FWP Vice-President Evan Hayworth has resigned from both positions effective the end of May. Hayworth cited personal reasons for his resignation and has offered to remain with the Project as a field investigator. Meanwhile, FWP President will fill in as acting editor until a replacement can be arranged. Hayworth's resignation caused a delay in the publication of this issue.

-The FWP Executive Board has voted to grant Project Board Member and Atlantic Regional Director Stanton T. Friedman the sum of $200 to help offset the costs of his research efforts to uncover official Canadian and American historical documents relating to UFOs.

-Project Director Nic P. Magnuson is the proud father of a new baby boy, Patrick Jay, born on March 21, 1985. Congratulations, Nic!