

SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF: THE U.S. AIR FORCE AND ROSWELL

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Everyone has seen a movie or a play at some time or other in his or her life that has involved the invocation of that time-honored theatrical technique known as “suspension of disbelief” [hereinafter referred to as “SOD”] by which the audience is required to believe a premise that it would never accept in the real world – things that happen in the story, which no one would believe if they were presented in a newspaper as fact. In such instances, the audience makes a semi-conscious decision to put aside its disbelief and accepts the unbelievable premise as “real” for the duration of the story as long as the story maintains consistency with that premise within story parameters. In other words, the audience suspends its disbelief of what it is witnessing in order that the story can go forward. If it doesn’t, the story doesn’t work, and everyone goes home unhappy.

SOD lends itself most notably to comedies, fantasy and science fiction, action and, surprisingly, sports movies. You might remember in the 1990 film, *Ghost*, starring Patrick Swayze [as the ghost] and Demi Moore [as Swayze’s former love], although the story-line is completely different, the same SOD concept is similarly employed. Action movies sometimes push believability to the limit, and SOD in such instances must be employed with caution. Thus, the unbelievable antics of the intrepid, bigger-than-life, action-hero Indiana Jones were just barely rationalized by audiences as attempts to interject some humor into the action. Fortunately for the film’s producers, it worked. The success of SOD depends several key factors, most notably the context or milieu in which it is attempted, the degree and of disbelief involved and the predilections of the audience of the moment.

The U.S. Air Force’s use of SOD to explain away UFO sightings and close encounters over the course of the past sixty-odd years is legendary. Eyewitnesses who have signed sworn affidavits attesting to having seen something of an otherworldly nature have in-turn been insulted, demeaned and even threatened by the Air Force that they had witnessed nothing more than the planet Venus, balloons, flocks of geese cavorting aimlessly in the sky, plovers flying in a tight V-formation or marauding meteors and bouncy bolides. Apparent “nuts and bolts” extraterrestrial spaceships appearing in our atmosphere or on the ground are explained away as U-2 spy planes out of time, moon-landers out of place - hundreds of thousands of miles from their target destination, military flares suspended over a major U.S. city at night for no apparent reason, or “swamp gas” that has somehow coalesced into the shape of a domed-disk with antennae and portholes!

These “explanations” have generally sufficed with the main stream news media, academics, politicians and other “professionals,” all of whose livelihoods depend in large degree upon their public reputations. To these worthies, the subject of UFOs remains an anathema, and any statement tossed out there that explains away the latest big sighting as something mundane is good enough for them. This trusty template has its roots in the 1947 “Roswell Incident” and the U.S. Air Force’s response to it.

For those of you who were not around in 1947, or who were around but were too young to know anything, or were old enough but have simply forgotten, the Modern Age of UFOs [called *flying saucers* or *flying discs* back then] burst upon the

scene in late June of that year. For a period of two weeks, UFOs were front-page news in every newspaper throughout the nation. What were these mysterious objects flitting about our airspace with seeming impunity? Where were they from? And were they a threat? A nation anxiously wanted to know. Even though many eyewitnesses at the time seemed to be describing something that was beyond our known science and technical capabilities of the time, Gallop Polls taken during and shortly after this first known post-war, UFO “flap” consistently showed that most citizens believed them to have been of earthly origin – either ours, Russian or German devices left-over from the war. It was during this time – two weeks after Kenneth Arnold’s seminal sighting of nine *flying saucers* skipping along like the tail of a kite near Mt. Rainier in Washington state – that what has come to be known as the “Roswell Incident” occurred.

At first, the Air Force issued a local press release stating that it had recovered a *flying disc* that had “landed” on a ranch near the town of Roswell, NM. No details of the “instrument” were provided other than to state that it was discovered by a local rancher, and that its current custodian appeared to be a fellow by the name of Maj. Jesse A. Marcel, who was the intelligence officer from the 509th Bomb Group located at Roswell Army Air Field just south of the town. The release concluded by stating that the disc was, “... loaned Maj. Marcel to higher headquarters.” That would be 8th Air Force Headquarters located at Fort Worth Army Air Field.

The initial press release soon hit the news wires, and what was initially a local story soon became a national, if not international, sensation. An excited world was sorely disappointed the next day, however, when they were informed by the Air Force’s “higher headquarters” at Fort Worth that the *flying disc* was nothing more than a common “weather balloon” attached to a tinfoil radar “kite” framed by balsa wood struts – just like a regular kite. The boys of the 509th had simply made a mistake.

What the world did not know was that the men of the 509th Bomb Group at Roswell were part of the most elite military unit in the armed forces of the United States as the only nuclear equipped military organization in the world at the time. 509th B-29s ended World War II by dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in 1947 Roswell was the country’s first and only SAC base. To suggest that its intelligence officer, Maj. Jesse Marcel, would confuse ordinary rubber, tinfoil, balsa wood and twine [that any child of six would be able to identify] with the remains of an extraterrestrial spaceship is to stretch SOD beyond reasonable limits.

These facts were not generally known to people outside of the Roswell environs and, having just won World War II, the U.S. military was at the height of its national prestige and esteem throughout the country. Vietnam was still two decades in the future. So, when our military said something, people were still predisposed to listen. Consequently, the “Roswell Incident” was quickly “killed” as a news story and quietly passed from the scene for the next thirty years. It had all been just a mistake of incompetence.

But the Air Force had been “too cute by half” with its balloon explanation. Had the Air Force simply offered that an experimental jet aircraft had crashed or that a captured German V-2 rocket that we were testing at the time had veered off-course from its launch pad at White Sands, NM and crashed near Roswell, it probably would have been accepted, and we wouldn’t be writing about it today. But, it didn’t, and it got worse – for the Air Force, that is. Responding to an official probe into certain aspects of the Roswell Incident by the U.S. Government Accounting Office, which was conducted in 1993-1995, the Air Force publicly admitted that it had lied in 1947, as it came out with its third explanation for Roswell. It wasn’t a “weather balloon” that had crashed near Roswell, it was a bunch of weather balloons! - from a then Top Secret, high altitude, spy project known as “Project Mogul” that had fallen to earth!

Unknown to most people on the planet was the fact that, although “Project Mogul” was indeed Top Secret, its constituent parts were standard non-secret, rubber weather balloons, tinfoil radar “kites,” balsa wood and bailing twine, all of the identical type employed in the original lie. Further, by the time of this announcement [1994/95], *hundreds* of witnesses attesting to the extraterrestrial nature of the 1947 incident had been located and interviewed by civilian researchers. To “believe” this new Air Force “explanation,” SOD had to once again make its furtive appearance, this time by simply tossing these witnesses aside as if they didn’t exist!

The mainstream media – following the lead of the *New York Times* – did exactly that. The Air Force’s final public statement regarding the Roswell Incident came a few years later in 1997, which was the 50th Anniversary Year of the event. Hoping to drive the final nail into the Roswell “coffin” at the most propitious moment in the history of the case with its, *The Roswell Report - Case Closed*, all the Air Force succeeded in doing was to further embarrass itself. Realizing that its 1994/95 Roswell “explanation” did not address the reports of “little bodies” alleged to have been recovered along with the physical wreckage from the crash, the Air Force held a formal press conference concomitant with the release of *Case Closed* to offer-up its fourth explanation for Roswell. The people who reported having seen small, alien creatures out in the desert or at the Roswell base hospital in 1947, according to the Air Force, were simply mixed-up victims of a malady that afflicts old people known as “time-compression.”

What these unfortunates were “remembering” was tripping over downed anthropomorphic mannequins used by the Air Force instead of humans in high-altitude parachute drops that actually took place a decade later – *in the 1950s!* A double dose of SOD was required when it was revealed that the mannequins [aka “dummies from the sky”] were nothing less than six-foot tall with unmistakably male, Caucasian features! The Air Force had finally gone “a bridge too far” in its

Roswell explanations – even for the usually reliable, anti-Roswell, national press. Met with unexpected howls of derisive laughter, the shaken Air Force officer conducting the press conference quickly excused himself, never to be seen again. And therein lies Air Force’s case against Roswell today – balloons, tinfoil, dime-store mannequins and time-compression – never to be discussed again. Who would believe them?

