



## The GAO Roswell Report and Congressman Schiff

PHILIP J. KLASS

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An 18-month search completed last summer of United States government documents—including once highly classified minutes of meetings of the National Security Council—conducted by the General Accounting Office at the request of Representative Steven Schiff of New Mexico, failed to find anything to indicate that the government recovered a crashed flying saucer north of Roswell, New Mexico, in mid-1947. The investigation was conducted by GAO's National Security and International Affairs Division, which has access to the most highly classified information.

The GAO investigators discovered *nothing* to challenge the conclusions of a 1994 report by the United States Air Force, based on its own extensive investigation. The Air Force concluded that the unusual material recovered from a ranch north of Roswell was debris from a train of balloons, radar tracking targets, and other devices associated with a then top secret Project Mogul. [*SI*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January-February 1995.]

But you could get a vastly different impression from the news release issued by Schiff on July 28, 1995, which formed the basis of many news media stories, including one filed by the Associated Press. Schiff's two-page news release carried the headline:

"SCHIFF RECEIVES, RELEASES ROSWELL REPORT (missing documents leave unanswered questions)."

The release began: "Congressman Steve Schiff today released the General Accounting Office (GAO) report detailing the results of a records audit relating to events surrounding a crash in 1947, near Roswell, N.M., and the military response. The 20-page report is the result of constituent information requests to Congressman Schiff and the difficulty he had getting answers from the Department of Defense in the now 48-year-old controversy.

"Schiff said important documents, which may have shed more light on what happened at Roswell, are missing. 'The GAO report states that the *outgoing* messages from Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF) *for this period of time* were destroyed without proper authority.' [Emphasis added.] Schiff pointed out that these messages would have shown how military officials in Roswell were explaining to their superiors exactly what happened."

Based on the wording of Schiff's news release, one might conclude that the "missing" outgoing RAAF teletype messages were only for a brief period in early July of 1947. But the GAO reports its auditors were unable to locate any outgoing RAAF messages for a *three-year period* extending from

October 1946 through December 1949.

During an interview with Schiff in his Washington office on July 29, 1995, I noted that Pentagon officials first learned from news wire service reports—rather than official channels—that the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF) had announced recovery of one of the then mysterious "flying disks." Because the flying disks might have been Soviet spy vehicles, I asked the Congressman if it would not have been more logical for Pentagon officials to have called the RAAF base commander on the telephone rather than take time to compose and transmit a teletype inquiry. Schiff replied: "I think they would have done it by both."

Schiff's news release failed to mention that when the GAO examined once highly classified minutes of meetings of the National Security Council for 1947 and 1948, it found no mention of the Roswell incident. I asked Schiff: "If the U.S. government had recovered an alien spacecraft in New Mexico in July of 1947, do you not believe that that extraordinary event would have been discussed at National Security Council meetings?"

Schiff responded: "I would have to say, but let me say first, my endeavor has *never* been to look for UFOs or aliens as such. My endeavor has been

to look to see what was in the government records insofar as they could be reconstructed at this point, which after 50 years is problematic. And I went to the GAO because the Department of Defense would not be cooperative in that regard—in fact, I believe, gave me the run-around when I requested the information.”

When I pressed Schiff to answer my question, he responded: “It would be such an unusual event...that I’m not sure how it would be handled and even if it were presented to the national leaders and National Security Council, I’m not sure I would necessarily say that you could say how they would handle the minutes of such a meeting.” In other words, Schiff is uncertain whether recovery of an alien spacecraft—which could be the precursor of an attack on Earth—would be reported to and discussed by the president and National Security Council. And even if discussed, Schiff is unsure whether there would be any mention of the incident in any of the highly classified minutes of NSC meetings.

The GAO report included a copy of an outgoing teletype message from the Dallas bureau of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to FBI headquarters, sent at 6:17 p.m. on July 8, 1947, that read:

EIGHTH AIR FORCE, TELEPHONICALLY ADVISED THIS OFFICE THAT AN OBJECT PURPORTING TO BE A FLYING DISC WAS RECOVERED NEAR ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO, THIS DATE. THE DISC IS HEXAGONAL IN SHAPE AND WAS SUSPENDED FROM A BALLOON BY CABLE. . . . FURTHER ADVISED THAT THE OBJECT RESEMBLES A HIGH ALTITUDE WEATHER BALLOON WITH A RADAR REFLECTOR. . . .

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*Veteran Washington aerospace journalist Philip J. Klass is author of four books critically examining UFO claims and publisher of Skeptics UFO Newsletter. He is chairman of CSICOP's UFO Subcommittee.*



**Representative Steven Schiff of New Mexico.**

The GAO report also includes a copy of the “Combined History, 509th Bomb Group and Roswell Army Air Field, 1 July 1947 to 31 July 1947.” This once-classified document reports: “The Office of Public Information was kept quite busy during the month answering inquiries on the ‘flying disc’ which was reported to be in the possession of the 509th Bomb Group. The object turned out to be a radar tracking balloon.”

The Congressman’s news release briefly summarizes these documents but dismisses their importance in the following words: “Even though the weather balloon story has since been discredited by the US Air Force, Schiff

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suggested that the authors of those communications may have been repeating what they were told rather than consciously adding to what some believe is a ‘cover-up.’”

The Congressman was quoted as saying: “At least this effort caused the Air Force to acknowledge that the crashed vehicle was no weather balloon. That explanation never fit the fact of high military security used at the time.” Clearly, Schiff has not care-

fully studied the 1994 Air Force report and seemingly believes that RAAF’s action in issuing a news release saying it had recovered a flying disk can be characterized as “high military security.”

The original Air Force identification of the debris—discovered by rancher “Mac” Brazel—as the remnants of a weather balloon and radar tracking target, was made on July 8, 1947, in the office of Brigadier General Roger Ramey, Eighth Air Force commander at Fort Worth by Weather Officer Irving Newton. At the time, neither officer had the security clearance necessary to know about a then top secret experimental program, called Project Mogul, which was then under way at the Alamogordo Army Air Field in New Mexico. The project’s objective was to explore the feasibility of using high-altitude balloons outfitted with acoustic sensors to detect when the Soviets tested their first nuclear weapon.

On June 4, 1947, a cluster (“train”) of more than 20 weather balloons with multiple radar targets was launched from the Alamogordo Army Air Field and was tracked to within 17 miles of the Brazel ranch before radar contact was lost. Brazel discovered the unusual debris 10 days later. [See *SI*, Vol. 19, No. 4, July-August 1995, p. 15.] The

description of the debris given by rancher Brazel on July 8, 1947, in the offices of the *Roswell Daily Record*, and recent recollections of his daughter Bessie, who helped her father collect the debris, indicate that the debris came from this launch of a train of ordinary weather balloons and associated equipment.

The recent investigation by the Air Force into claims of a crashed flying saucer near Roswell was initiated in

early 1994 in response to a GAO request, and its report was released in September 1994. The Air Force investigation officially uncovered the link to Project Mogul, which had been discovered about two years earlier by UFO researcher Robert Todd, and more recently by UFO researcher Karl Pflock. (Pflock's wife, Mary Martinek, is Schiff's chief of staff and his liaison with the GAO for its Roswell investigation.) The 1994 Air Force report, p. 21, states that "the most likely source of the wreckage recovered from the Brazel Ranch was from one of the Project Mogul balloon trains." [Emphasis added.]

In December 1992, shortly after Pflock had launched his own personal investigation into the Roswell incident, he supplied Schiff with a 130-page briefing paper on the subject. Three months later, Schiff wrote to then Defense Secretary Les Aspin seeking a "definitive explanation of what transpired and why." Schiff's letter said that based on (alleged) witness testimony, "the balloon explanation was a cover story" and that "federal authorities sought to intimidate witnesses and their families into silence," according to an article in the January 14, 1994, *Albuquerque Journal*.

Since then, Pflock's several-year investigation has convinced him that "at least the great majority if not all" of the debris found by Brazel was wreckage from the cluster of balloons, radar targets and instruments launched from Alamogordo on June 4, 1947. In Pflock's invited talk to New Mexicans for Science and Reason in August, he said he thinks that "most reasonable people will agree" and that he believes that the evidence is "fairly conclusive."

When the *Albuquerque Journal* published an article by its Washington correspondent, Richard Parker, who interviewed Schiff about the GAO report, the article carried the headline: "Schiff: Roswell UFO a Balloon." This prompted Schiff to challenge the accuracy of Parker's article, in a letter published in the newspaper August 14,

1995.

Wrote Schiff: "With the sole exception of rejecting the original military explanation of a crashed 'weather balloon,' which the Air Force now disavows, I have never stated any conclusion about the Roswell crash. . . . Of course, the 1994 Air Force explanation is a possible answer. . . ." Schiff said that the GAO inquiry, which he generated, "has had some notable results in addition to forcing the Air Force to change its story."

Schiff's letter also said:

- "Two documents were uncovered which refer to a 'radar tracking device,' (which means weather balloon) though

Schiff's published letter concluded: "Yet, from this, Parker manages to conclude for me that the Air Force came clean. His inference is clearly out of this world."

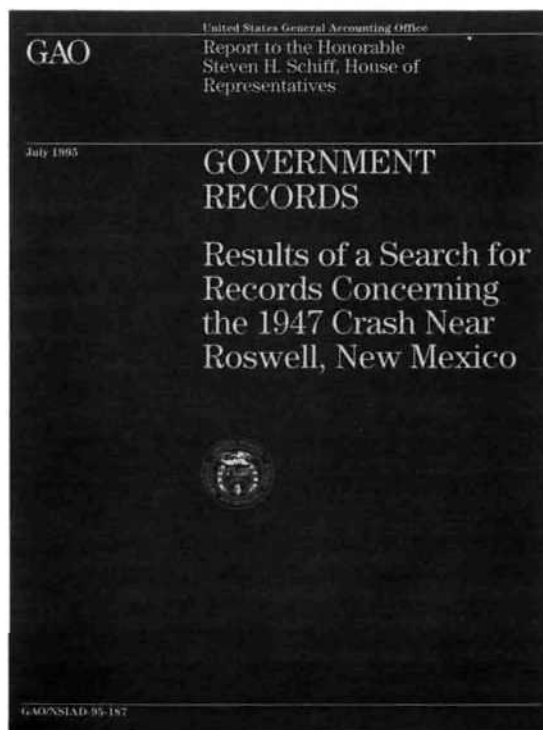
In early 1994, when it was first disclosed that Schiff had asked the GAO to investigate the Roswell incident and he was interviewed by the *Albuquerque Journal*, the newspaper reported that Schiff said "he doesn't believe a UFO was recovered at the ranch." The article quoted Schiff as saying: "If I had to guess, I would say some kind of military experiment."

Because Schiff's guess proved to be remarkably prescient, I asked him if the GAO report and the 1994 Air Force report had increased his earlier-stated belief that the debris discovered by rancher Brazel was *not* from a UFO. He responded: "I think you're centering too much on my beliefs in the matter," but he acknowledged that the Project Mogul explanation "could well be what actually happened."

Schiff predicted that "the GAO report will not change anybody's mind" about whether the government recovered a crashed flying saucer in 1947. "People can make their own conclusions and that was my goal all along and I have accomplished that goal," Schiff said.

Schiff has had extensive media exposure as a result of his Roswell activities, including appearances on numerous local and network television shows. He has twice appeared on Larry King's show (CNN) to discuss his Roswell efforts.

Schiff said he is convinced "that people have a right to information from their government on any subject—with the notable exception of [information affecting national] security." This prompted me to ask if Schiff planned to seek congressional hearings on the all-important but still unresolved issue of whether the United States government is involved in a UFO cover-up. Schiff said, "I have no intention of taking it further." □



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- "Agencies, including the CIA, stated for the first time that they do not have information on the Roswell incident.

- "Perhaps most significantly, documents most likely to contain helpful information, the military's outgoing messages, were not found. It was estimated they were destroyed over 40 years ago without proper authority. This means the military cannot explain who destroyed the records, or why."