

The Upcoming Pentagon UFO Report Isn't the Place to Look for the Truth

By Eric Mack
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The truth is out there, but it's almost certainly not going to be in the upcoming US Pentagon report to Congress on American military encounters with unidentified aerial phenomena, or UAP. They're the phenomenon previously referred to as UFOs. The landmark report is expected by Friday, June 25.

In case you've missed the latest chapter of the decades-long flying saucers space opera, some 21st century footage and eyewitness accounts from US Navy pilots support stories of objects making seemingly physics-defying maneuvers in the air (and into the ocean, in at least one case). The Navy has confirmed the veracity of the footage, much media attention has been dedicated to the topic and now a mandatory report to Congress from intelligence agencies on "advanced aerial threats" is due by June 25.

Early indications suggest the report will confirm that UAP are real, but that there's no reason to blame aliens or any other extraterrestrial influences for the weird things pilots and other military types are seeing.

For about three-quarters of a century now, since at least 1947 and the infamous Roswell crash, there has been significant suspicion that the government is withholding secret intelligence about UFOs. (The incident actually involved a government coverup of a program to detect Soviet atomic tests, not aliens.)

So is the long-awaited revelation of all the government knows finally at hand? Maybe. Probably not. But even if yes, it's bound to be a letdown.

The Truth Is in the Data

If UAP truly are mysterious and unidentified (there's at least one reason to doubt this key adjective truly applies; more on that later) in the eyes of the military, I would argue that the intelligence establishment is the wrong institution to solve the mystery.

While agencies like the CIA, the National Reconnaissance Office and the National Security Agency, especially when taken together with the rest of the intelligence establishment, are often perceived as all-seeing, all-hearing and all-knowing,

to take action. He hand-delivered a box of accumulated debris, which he’d gathered with the help of his wife and two children, to Sheriff George Wilcox of Roswell, according to *Smithsonian Magazine*.

By now there was talk of a reward for anyone who recovered one of these unidentified flying objects. In the *Roswell Daily Chronicle*, Brazel is stated to have “whispered kinda confidential-like” that his find may be one of the flying disks, so an equally intrigued Wilcox contacted Colonel William Blanchard, the commanding officer of the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF), who sent agents to the site to gather the remaining material.

What happened next would cement the idea that the debris was the remnants of an alien spacecraft. According to David Clarke’s book *The UFO Files: The Inside Story of Real-Life Sightings*, published by Bloomsbury in 2012, the RAAF’s public information officer Walter Haut issued a press release on July 8: “The many rumors regarding the flying disc became a reality yesterday when the intelligence office of the 509th Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force, Roswell Army Air Field, was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disk through the cooperation of one of the local ranchers and the sheriff’s office of Chaves County”.

**Failure to provide physical evidence
means anecdotal accounts have spread
misinformation.**

This was reported in the *Roswell Daily Record* along with the news that Major Jesse A. Marcel was the group intelligence officer dispatched to the scene. He’d gone with Counter Intelligence Corps officer Sheridan Cavitt, but on his way back took a detour to his own home, whipped out a couple of boxes of debris that he’d popped into the boot of his car and showed it to his 10-year-old son, Jesse Jr. One of the objects was said to have hieroglyphic-like markings, something that stuck in the mind of the young boy, according to a report in *The Guardian*.

But just as quickly as excitement of the find gathered pace, the Army took swift action in debunking the story. The very next day, shortly after government scientists began to arrive at the scene, it was claimed that the debris was actually from a crashed weather balloon, and Marcel was asked to be pictured at a press conference with the debris allegedly found. And that was that, case closed—or so everyone thought.

But interest began to grow again. In 1978, nuclear physicist, author and UFO researcher Stanton Friedman interviewed Marcel, who said that the discovery made 31 years earlier was not from this world, and that the government had ordered him to keep quiet. Friedman revisited the incident and sought other witnesses, and his work inspired Charles Berlitz and William Moore to write *The Roswell Incident*, published in 1980. Their conclusion was simple: there had been a huge cover-up.

The Flying Saucer Conspiracy Begins

Other things were happening in the world at the time. Notably, the sci-fi films *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* had just been released, and—as

Declassified: The CIA's Secret History of Area 51

By J. Dana Stuster

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Area 51 is a touchstone of America's cultural mythology. It rose to notoriety in 1989, when a Las Vegas man claimed he had worked at the secret facility to discover the secrets of crashed alien hardware, spawning two decades of conspiracy theories and speculation about little green men. But the facility's history—and the history of the strange, secret aircraft that were developed there—extends back to 1955. Since its inception, the government has obliquely acknowledged its existence only a handful of times, and even the CIA's 1996 declassified history of the OXCART program—the development of the SR-71 Blackbird at the secret site—refers only to tests conducted in “the Nevada desert.” The government has never publicly discussed the specific facility ... until now.

On Thursday, the National Security Archive reported that it had gotten its hands on a newly declassified CIA history of the development of the U-2 spy plane. The report, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, contains the CIA's secret record of how Area 51 came to be.

In 1955, CIA Special Assistant for Planning and Coordination Richard Bissell, Col. Osmund Ritland, an Air Force officer working on the U-2 project, and Lockheed aircraft designer Kelly Johnson began looking for a location in California or Nevada to test the U-2 prototype. The location had to be remote—far from the view of the public (or potential Soviet spies). On April 12, 1955, they were scouting locations from the air with the help of Lockheed test pilot Tony LeVier. While flying over the Groom Lake salt flat, they noticed an airstrip that had been abandoned after being used by the Army Air Corps during World War II. The CIA history describes their first encounter with the site:

After debating about landing on the old airstrip, LeVier set the plan down on the lakebed, and all four walked over to examine the strip.... From the air the strip appeared to be paved, but on closer inspection it turned out to have originally been fashioned from compacted earth that had turned into ankle-deep dust after more than a decade of disuse. If LeVier had attempted to land on the airstrip, the plane would probably have nosed over when the wheels sank into the loose soil, killing or injuring all of the key figures in the U-2 project.

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extraordinary, physics-defying UFO reports spanning the mid-1940s to the late 1960s has remarkable parallels to more recent incidents.

Unsurprisingly, McDonald's painstaking research turned him from skeptic to outspoken advocate of serious academic study of UFOs. But as an exasperated McDonald told Congress, the scientific community "has been casually ignoring as nonsense a matter of extraordinary scientific importance."

Testifying alongside McDonald at that 1968 hearing on UFOs was J. Allen Hynek, chair of the astronomy department at Northwestern University. Hynek, like McDonald, began his academic career a fierce UFO skeptic. But after two decades as a consultant to a U.S. Air Force project cataloguing UFO sightings, Hynek had seen enough compelling data to implore Congress and the scientific community to initiate a robust, fiercely independent academic inquiry into such encounters.

Today, scientists are generally dismissive of UFO reports. While most contemporary academics are unfamiliar with Hynek and McDonald's meticulous research, any scientist or skeptic would do themselves a service by reading Hynek's concise reflections on a 20-year career investigating the UFO phenomenon.

Hynek and McDonald were particularly struck by the sincerity, good judgment and professional caliber of hundreds of often-reluctant witnesses who had nothing to gain—and much to lose—by reporting UFO sightings. Moreover, McDonald and Hynek found that radar and other technical data corroborated credible eyewitness accounts in many of the most remarkable incidents. As Hynek observed, skepticism of the UFO topic is largely due to scientists' lack of exposure to such "really challenging UFO data."

Moreover, much of the aversion to serious investigation of these phenomena is rooted in the conclusions of a massive 1969 report funded by the U.S. Air Force. Billed as the final say on UFOs, the 1,000-page report's summary claimed that "extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby."

But this conclusion, written by physicist Edward Condon and reported by major media outlets at the time, did not reflect important scientific analysis in the report. In stark contrast to Condon's recommendation against academic study of UFOs, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics' scientific consensus held that "a phenomenon with such a high ratio of unexplained cases (about 30% in the Report itself) should arouse sufficient curiosity to continue its study."

McDonald, Hynek and several other experts also made abundantly clear that much of the so-called Condon Report was unforgivably flawed. It was biased from the outset, omitted important cases and critical context, relied on shoddy or non-existent witness interviews and frequently ascribed absurd, unscientific explanations to extraordinary events.

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The Mystery of Alien Abduction

The idea of visiting aliens abducting humans or animals for experimental (or other) purposes has become a common and familiar aspect of UFO lore and fiction. From science fiction classics like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) to children's films like *Flight of the Navigator* (1986) to psychological dramas like *Fire in the Sky* (1993), alien abduction has become a key subgenre in the field of speculative extraterrestrial fiction. Some may be drawn to the idea of alien abduction out of curiosity about the unknown and a desire to experience otherworldly phenomena but, in many cases, the alien abduction trope appears to express the similar kinds of fears of the unknown that also motivate interest in ghosts and supernatural creatures.

While alien abductions make for an interesting theme in fantasy fiction, there are many Americans who believe that alien abductions actually occur. A 2017 20th Century Fox survey found that around 18 to 20 percent of Americans believe that aliens have abducted humans at some point in the past. This was out of a total of 39 percent of respondents who believed that aliens had visited Earth before (with a full 47 percent believing that aliens exist at all).¹ Belief in actual alien abduction has been fueled by first-person accounts from people who claim either to have been abducted themselves or to have witnessed an abduction. Reports from those who claim to have been abductees tend to share certain themes and even more specific depictions of alien features and technology that has been interpreted, by believers, as evidence that aliens really are taking people, for still unknown purposes.

Anatomy of a Myth

No one knows when the idea of extraterrestrial visitors first arose or when the first person claimed to have been abducted, but abduction stories didn't really become a common part of the alien genre until the 1960s, when an unassuming couple named Betty and Barney Hill became victims of the first famous abduction event in American history.

In 1961, the Hills were driving through New Hampshire's White Mountains while on vacation when they claimed they realized they were being followed by a brightly glowing flying object. Neither remembered what happened next, but several hours later they seemed to awaken with dirty and slightly damaged clothes, evidence of some minor physical trauma, watches that had mysteriously stopped working, and no memory of the previous two hours.

After months of sleeplessness and strange dreams, the couple sought help and, under the influence of hypnosis, a strange picture began to emerge. Betty and Barney described having been pursued by a strange, disc-shaped ship that eventually landed in front of them. The ship opened and a group of short gray aliens emerged. The aliens appeared friendly and guided the two back into the ship where they were

When the two sets of measurements were compared, the results were striking. Abductees showed surprisingly strong physiological reactions to the tapes of their alien encounters. Their reactions were as great or greater than those of individuals who cannot shake memories of combat, sexual abuse, and other punishing events.

McNally announced these findings on Feb. 16 at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Denver. “The results underscore the power of emotional belief,” he noted. “People who sincerely believe they have been abducted by aliens show patterns of emotional and physiological response to these ‘memories’ that are strikingly similar to those of people who have been genuinely traumatized by combat or similar events.”

Dreaming with Their Eyes Wide Open

Neither McNally nor the other Harvard researchers ever considered the possibility that people in the study, or anybody else, was ever abducted by space aliens. But, if not, what produced their lasting vivid memories?

The researchers tie such abduction stories to a phenomenon they call “dreaming with your eyes wide open.” The episodes occur just as people awaken from a dream. Dreams include full-body paralysis, a nice adaptation that prevents people from jumping out of bed to escape their demons, or otherwise making moves in a dream that could injure them in reality. The sleeper awakens from a dream before the paralysis goes away, and experiences hallucinations like seeing flashing lights and some kinds of living things lurking around the bed.

Sleep paralysis is common and no more indicative of mental illness than a hiccup, the researchers point out. But when the hallucination and paralysis occur together, many people find the combination frightening, and they attempt to find a meaning in it.

Some individuals consult psychiatrists or psychologists who hypnotize them to recover presumably repressed memories that lie behind the strange

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events. During such sessions, a person may recover false memories of being transported up into spacecraft where they were subjected to medical and sexual experiments.

Psychological interviews and tests conducted on the abductees reveal little evidence of mental illness, but they enjoy a rich fantasy life. When they listen to music or watch movies they often imagine they are somewhere else or part of the movie plot. The typical abductee, notes McNally, “has a longstanding interest in ‘New Age’ practices and beliefs such as reincarnation, astral projection, mental telepathy, alternative healing practices, energy therapies, and astrology.”

He and his colleagues conclude, “a combination of pre-existing New Age beliefs, episodes of sleep paralysis, accompanied by hallucinations and hypnotic memory