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Is Case Finally Closed on 1965 Pennsylvania 'UFO Mystery'?

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By [Leonard David](#)

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Mockup of the Kecksburg UFO made for the Unsolved Mysteries TV program in 1990. The object is displayed at the Kecksburg Volunteer Fire Department in Pennsylvania. (Image credit: Stan Gordon)

In the chronicles of UFO oddness, there's been a long-standing oddity ? some say folklore, others deem it reality. This saga, now over four decades old, centers on a reported out-of-the-sky incident involving the small town of Kecksburg, Pennsylvania.

The date is Dec. 9, 1965: Residents see a ball of fire shooting through the darkening evening sky and then, seemingly, the object ? purportedly shaped like a jumbo-sized acorn after impact ? makes some sort of controlled crash into the woods. From there, the strangeness factor escalates with purported military personnel isolating the area from curious onlookers and toting something out of the locale on a flatbed truck.

A meteorite? A wayward classified aircraft? Reentering space hardware of Earthly origin? An alien craft from afar?

You pick.

Up against NASA

Whatever took place in Kecksburg, a dutiful look into the episode escalated to a lawsuit against NASA for access to information on the incident.

A central figure in the weirdness is New York-based investigative journalist, Leslie Kean. Working with the Coalition for Freedom of Information, she was on the receiving end of loads of documents ? an outcome of winning the lawsuit.

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This stage of the saga began in 2002, when Kean was asked to spearhead a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) initiative sponsored by the Sci Fi Channel ? an effort to acquire government documents on the Kecksburg case. The following year, she ended up as the plaintiff in a federal, FOIA lawsuit filed against NASA in Washington, DC.

?After previously promising to conduct an expedited search for files related to the 1965 Kecksburg UFO crash case, NASA had stonewalled and was withholding documents, leaving no recourse but this one,? Kean explained in a just-issued report. ?A settlement four years later, in October 2007, required NASA to provide hundreds of new documents and pay my attorney?s legal fees.??

No smoking gun

NASA?s resulting search, monitored by the court, was completed in August 2009. The outcome of the investigation is available in Kean?s paper, which was posted online this month to the coalition?s Web site.

The report, flatly titled, ?The Conclusion of the NASA Lawsuit - Concerning the Kecksburg, PA UFO case of 1965,? explains how the process worked and the results of the search after the 2007 settlement in federal court.

The bottomline: No smoking gun documents were released, Kean notes, but many provocative questions and unresolved contradictions were raised by what was received, as well as by the fact that many files were missing or destroyed.

One open-ended aspect of Kean?s reportage is the role of ?Project Moondust? ? a U.S. government-run activity involved in examining non-U.S. space objects, or objects of unknown origin. Indeed, various State Department documents show that NASA played a role in the recovery and examination of space object debris.

Cold trail, hot caveats

After months of studying the material received, Kean reports that the trail is cold ?but with caveats.

?I am convinced that something came down and landed in Kecksburg,? Kean told SPACE.com.

Kean thinks that a UFO connection of the extra-Earth type ?is a possibility that has to be considered. It can?t be ruled out,? she said.

Other potentials, Kean added, ?include a very secret U.S. project or another nation?s hardware. But both of these explanations are unlikely.?

Kean?s research indicates that it appears doubtful that the object in question was either Russian or from any other country on our planet ? backed up by NASA orbital debris elucidation. Also, data from the U.S. Space Command and the Russian Space Agency fortifies the fact that whatever came down that day was not a Russian satellite or space probe, she stated.

?So I would rule that out, and say it's either a UFO or a secret American device of some sort," Kean said. "If it was our own," she added, "why couldn't they tell us about this 40 years later?"

Therefore, that's why the UFO possibility has to be kept in the running, as hard as it may be to accept," Kean said. "Possibly it was some kind of secretive U.S. government project or program or the testing of something. Maybe it was highly radioactive so they don't want anybody to know about it."

However, a central take home message from Kean has no connection with alien visitation -- more a governmental encounter of the lack-of-transparency kind.

The effort highlights the problems inherent to the use of the Freedom of Information Act in our democracy, Kean explained.

"It has been a long, long process," she said. "The important thing about this has nothing to do with UFOs. It just points out the problems with the Freedom of Information Act as it stands today."

A case worth investigating

The NASA lawsuit was made possible because of the support of a major television network, Kean said. Also added to the investigation, John Podesta -- President Clinton's former Chief of Staff -- an archival research group, a lawyer, and a public relations firm in Washington, D.C.

Larry Landsman, then Director of Special Projects at the Sci Fi Channel (now Syfy), launched the UFO advocacy initiative, with the Kecksburg lawsuit as one component of that larger undertaking. He is now an independent television producer working on various specials and miniseries.

"In early 2002, a group of us began to seriously explore what initiative could be launched that would be appropriate to the spirit of the network," Landsman told SPACE.com. "After much brainstorming, I proposed a campaign that pushed for the truth behind all of the many reports of UFOs and other unexplained phenomena. We were the first -- and so far, only -- company ever to pursue such an initiative and we attacked the issue on a number of fronts both on air and off air," he said.

As for Kecksburg, Landsman continued, "we felt it was a case worth investigating," supporting Kean's Freedom of Information pursuit of the full and uncensored reports about the incident.

"There were too many lives that were upended from this event and American citizens had -- and have -- the right to know the truth. Clearly many things are going on in our world that cannot be easily explained," Landsman said. "Polls show that a majority of Americans believe the government is covering up information on UFOs. The truth should not be kept in the hands of only a relative few at various government agencies and military departments."

Keep an open mind

For Stan Gordon, a steadfast on-scene investigator of what took place in Kecksburg those many years ago, the case is far from closed.

"My feelings today in regards to the Kecksburg incident are unchanged. I remain convinced that an object of still undetermined origin fell from the sky into a wooded area near Kecksburg," said Gordon.

Gordon told SPACE.com that multiple independent witnesses described the object traversing the sky. As it turned and neared Kecksburg, the object was described as moving and descending slowly, as if making a controlled landing.

"This semi-buried metallic acorn shaped object was observed on the ground by a number of independent eyewitnesses. Whatever that object was, it was important enough for the military to quickly arrive on the scene and recover the object in question," Gordon said.

One plausible theory, Gordon suggested, is that the object was an advanced secretive human-made space device with re-entry control capabilities which apparently failed. Another is that this could have been an extra-terrestrial spacecraft, he noted.

"Until definitive evidence is found that will conclusively explain the object, I will continue to keep an open mind concerning all theories as to the origin of the object," Gordon concluded.

For Kean, even after years of work trying to unravel the Kecksburg incident, "what took place there is an unanswered question."

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Leonard David has been reporting on the space industry for more than five decades. He is past editor-in-chief of the

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Leonard David is an award-winning space journalist who has been reporting on space activities for more than 50 years. Currently writing as Space.com's Space Insider Columnist among his other projects, Leonard has authored numerous books on space exploration, Mars missions and more, with his latest being "Moon Rush: The New Space Race" published in 2019 by National Geographic. He also wrote "Mars: Our Future on the Red Planet" released in 2016 by National Geographic. Leonard has served as a correspondent for SpaceNews, Scientific American and Aerospace America for the AIAA. He has received many awards, including the first Ordway Award for Sustained Excellence in Spaceflight History in 2015 at the AAS Wernher von Braun Memorial Symposium. You can find out Leonard's latest project at his website and on Twitter.



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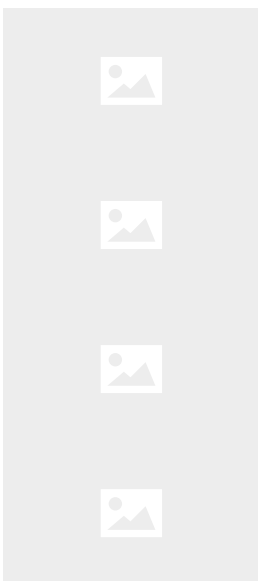
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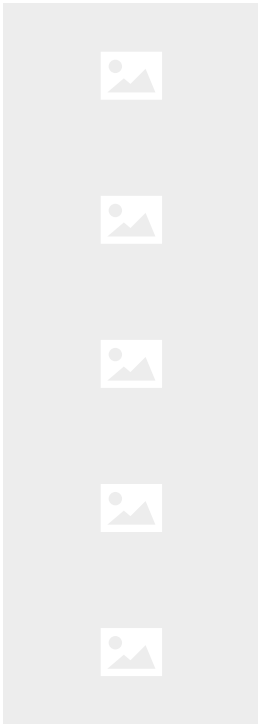


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