

# ALIENS

By RUDGER HILLIS PAGES 10+11

As we approach the year 2000, the UFO phenomenon is beginning to be taken more seriously than in previous decades. The Information Age has yielded a new breed who are taking a "just the facts, ma'am" approach to the age old question "are we alone?"

Computer hackers now have a place to discuss their beliefs with experts as well as novices on the internet. Camcorder-wielding private citizens get to air their clips on nationally popular television shows such as "Sightings" and "Unsolved Mysteries." In fact, after a mass UFO sighting in Mexico City in 1991, the Mexican version of "60 Minutes" invited viewers to send in their home videos and was deluged with dozens, some taken by professional news cameramen.

Americans have wondered whether their government has a real life "X-Files" ever since July of 1947, when the infamous "Roswell Incident" took place. On July 8 of that year, the Associated Press aired a U.S. Air Force press release stating that a "crashed flying disc had been found and was in the possession of the military."

The disc had supposedly crashed near an airbase in Roswell, NM. Within minutes, countries around the world were flooding the American military with phone calls demanding to see the debris. The Air Force quickly prepared a new press release explaining that it was all a big mistake, that a "weather balloon had fallen."

In the years since, the story has gained mythological status among UFOlogists and entire books have been written on the incident. Dozens of witnesses have asserted that there were indeed extraterrestrial occupants in this craft, that autopsies were performed, and that the government undertook a massive cover-up.

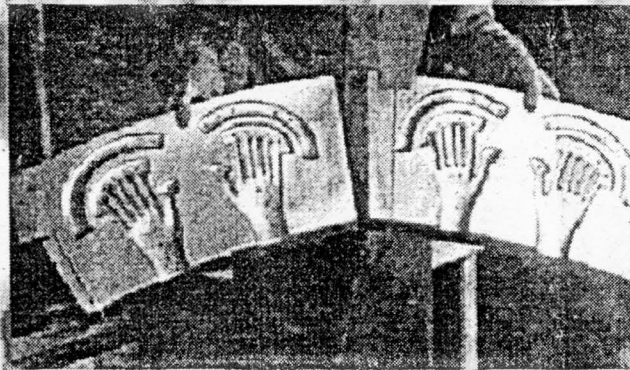
In 1993, Rep. Steven Schiff (R-NM) entered the fray at the request of his constituents. In trying to obtain records regarding the Roswell incident, Schiff was given the run-

around by the Dept. of Defense; he called upon the General Accounting Office to "force their hand" so to speak. On Sept. 8, 1994 the Air Force coincidentally issued a press release that made the front page of the *New York Times*, admitting that they had lied to the public in 1947. It wasn't a weather balloon that had crashed in Roswell, it was a spy satellite balloon intended to detect Soviet nuclear testing in the hemisphere. The G.A.O. continued its investigation, requesting records from the FBI, CIA, Dept. of Defense, Dept. of Energy, and White House Office of Science and Technology. On July 28, 1995, the G.A.O.'s final report was released, with the findings that "all Roswell administrative records and outgoing messages from the years 1946-1949 had been destroyed without traceable authorization."

On Aug. 28, 1995 a television documentary debuted on Fox television in America and various networks worldwide entitled "Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction?" The program depicted a graphic autopsy on a being supposedly yanked from the Roswell wreckage. The story goes that an elderly retired Air Force photographer held onto several canisters of the film after shooting it in 1947, and sold it to filmmaker Ray Santilli, who had been scouring the country looking for obscure Elvis Presley footage for a documentary.

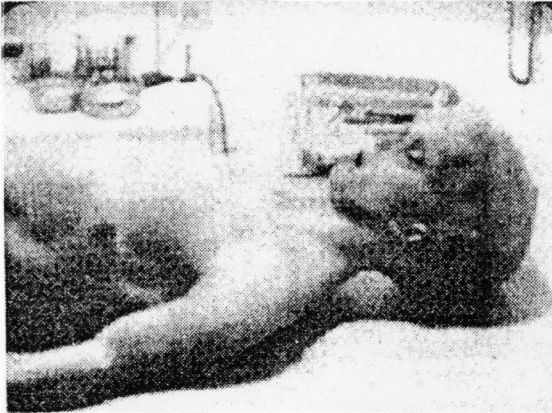
Santilli says he bought the footage for \$100,000, sold it to Fox for \$250,000, and home videos are now available for \$60 a pop.

(Above and below) scenes from the Roswell autopsy. (Center) Alien control panel retrieved from the wreckage.



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The grainy, gruesome autopsy footage has been the cause of debate among many pathologists and anatomists, as well as Hollywood special effects artists. Walter Andrus is the international director of the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), the world's largest such research organization with 5,300 members and chapters in each state. "I've been to screenings of the film in England and Mexico and seen it on television, and I still have more questions than answers," says Andrus. "In MUFON, we deal strictly with scientific evidence. There still isn't definitive proof as to the age of the film stock. Nobody's been able to track down the supposed cameraman. He's been identified as Jack Barnett, but we don't believe that's his real name. I have a feeling the film's not from Roswell."



One person who definitely believes that the film is not from Roswell is Joe Nicol, senior research fellow at the *Skeptical Inquirer*, a nationally distributed magazine published by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. "The autopsy film? H-O-A-X. This whole affair has all the earmarks of a hoax," says Nicol, who helped debunk the Jack the Ripper diaries in 1993. "The surgeon isn't even holding the scissors the right way. I think we'll find out eventually that the film isn't from 1947. I mean, there are people who still believe in the shroud of Turin. Do you mean to tell me that couldn't have been done by artists? Humbug." Nicol believes that the entire Roswell

incident has been a modern myth since the get-go. "There are always going to be paranoid-conspiracy people who love to say, A-HA! There are people in flying saucerdom who think there's a secret government within the government that spreads disinformation. I just wish people would get a life. Our government's not competent enough to do all this."

While it is true that 90-percent of all UFO sightings turn out to have a plausible earthly explanation, there is a remaining 10-percent that baffles those who take the time to examine the evidence. The Freedom of Information Act has uncovered many hitherto unpublicized

## CLOSE ENCOUNTERS ABDUCTIONS COVERUPS SIGHTINGS

cases. Some well-documented ones have also eroded in public memory with the passing of time. Debunkers who ask, "Why don't aliens land on the White House lawn if they're real?" may be forgetting about the night of July 26, 1952 when several UFOs buzzed the Oval Office. The crafts were seen from the ground, from the air, photographed, and caught on radar. Two flights of air force interceptors were dispatched from New Castle, DE; the objects were chased away from the vicinity but outran our fighters.

### ALIEN ABDUCTIONS

Perhaps no aspect of the paranormal has gotten as much attention in the '90s as the phenomenon of alien abduction. Stories of people being spirited from their cars on deserted roads or from their bedrooms late at night with accompanying missing time and memory loss had been whispered about or scoffed at until well-known author Whitley Streiber "came out of the closet" so to speak with the release of his book "Communion" in 1987. Through hypnosis-regression therapy, he began to retrieve shocking memories of encounters with grey-skinned, large-eyed beings he referred to as "visitors." The book unexpectedly went to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list, selling millions worldwide. After a sequel, "Transformation," in 1989 and attacks from unbelieving critics, Streiber withdrew from the public arena until the recent publication of his book "Breakthrough: The Next Step." In this book, he chronicles experiences of his that he says have a dozen different eyewitnesses that would "convince a court of law;" he's also submitted to various polygraph tests and medical and mental evaluations in trying to prove his stability. Streiber has reluctantly become a spokesperson for the abductees, and claims to have received over 140,000 letters from his readers, many wishing to share their experiences



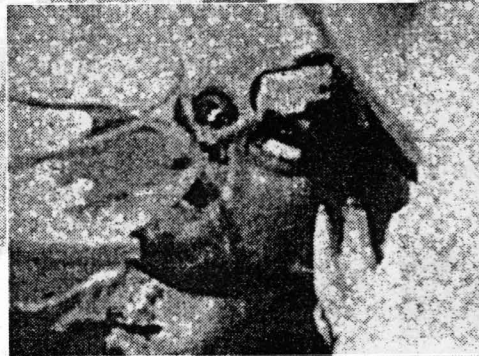
More scenes from the

with a sympathetic ear. Estimates as to the number of American abductees vary from a few hundred thousand to three million, while a Roper poll indicated that 15 million people have had some type of UFO sighting or experience. Numbers like these have drawn reputable researchers into the phenomenon, like Dr. David Jacobs, Associate Professor of History at Temple University, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning Dr. John Mack, a tenured professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School. The latter has drawn considerable press of late since the publication of his book "Abducted: Human Encounters with Aliens." Some of Mack's colleagues at Harvard were none too thrilled about his involvement in such a controversial subject; a committee drew up a critical report to present to the dean of the school. That decision divided the academic community; the final report amounted to a slap on the wrist. MUFON's Walter Andrus says "John is one of our members and this situation has cost him a lot of time and money. But I think if the committee had forced him out, they'd have been criticized for being narrow-minded."

The ever-skeptical Joe Nicol says, "I've met Mack. I think he's a sincere but misguided person. I think these mass abduction claims are a type of 'social contagion' or 'psychic contagion.'" And I think Streiber is a classic case of waking dream syndrome."

Indeed, there are many alternative explanations being bandied about. Mass dreams, mass hallucinations, temporal-lobe epilepsy — the theories are many. Only one thing is certain — the consistency between reports and descriptions from abductees around the country is uncanny.

Dr. Barbara Pomar is a certified hypnotherapist and regression specialist with offices in Wilmington, DE and Salisbury, MD. She has several patients who are abductees. "People say these are fantasies? If they are, they're very vivid ones," said Dr. Pomar. "Scientifically, the probability is that we're not alone. To me, the contact experience is another event that happens on this planet. It's scary that we have no control over it. I try to help people to overcome the fear they have. During the process, I try to eliminate all other possibilities. I have had patients who thought they were abducted who were not... For people who have been abducted, I try to help them understand that there's a lot of people going through this."



To this end, support groups have sprung up around the country, whereby those who have had a close encounter can get together and meet others like them. Locally, as many as 60 people come together on the third Thursday of each month for the E.T. Contact Support Group meetings held at 7:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Newark, DE on 420 Willia Road.

Some groups gather at each other's homes. Forty-year-old Lee Townsend of Cumberland, MD attends such smaller meetings in nearby West Friendship. He had an experience at age 18 and now spends most of his weekends studying the phenomenon.

Says Townsend, "Unquestionably there is something going on. Are these beings extraterrestrial? Possibly. Are they from another dimension or alternate reality? Possibly. I don't know. At some point with this you have to take a leap of faith, like with the concept of God. I think we've been so conditioned over the last 400 years that we've become close-minded. We've grown so quickly technologically, yet so slowly mentally. As for the government, who knows? Maybe they have a valid reason for keeping things quiet."

Barbara Pomar concurs. "I'd be extremely surprised if the government wasn't investigating this."

Which brings us back to square one; the idea that if there is "another intelligence" out there, the old Firesign Theatre quote may have been on the money — "everything you know is wrong."