

Richard Doty and the UFO Disinformation Controversy

^[1]Kirtland Air Force Base (New Mexico) – where Richard Doty served as a special agent – became ground zero for an infamous UFO-related disinformation episode in the 1980s (*Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row*).

Richard Doty is a former U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) agent best known for his controversial role in disseminating false UFO information. During his tenure at Kirtland AFB in the early 1980s, Doty was allegedly involved in a deliberate campaign to mislead UFO researchers and eyewitnesses. **One pivotal case was that of Paul Bennewitz**, an Albuquerque businessman and electronics specialist who, in 1979-1980, began observing strange lights and intercepting unusual radio signals near Kirtland. Believing he had uncovered evidence of extraterrestrials, Bennewitz dutifully reported his findings to the Air Force. In response, AFOSI (with Doty as the point man) **engaged with Bennewitz but fed him fabricated evidence and UFO lore**^{[2][3]}. Doty has since *admitted* that he provided Bennewitz with **hoaxed documents, phony computer data, and even staged props** – all intended to convince him that an alien invasion was imminent^{[4][3]}. According to Doty, this deception was not a personal prank but an **assigned operation**: Bennewitz’s “UFOs” were actually classified military projects, and the Air Force wanted to **divert his attention by discrediting him with alien conspiracy tales**^[4]^[5]. In Doty’s telling, his superiors ordered him to make Bennewitz believe a fantastical story so that *no one would take the real observations seriously*^[5].

The Bennewitz Affair quickly spiraled into one of ufology’s most tragic sagas. With Doty’s encouragement, Bennewitz became convinced of ever more elaborate horrors – he came to believe aliens were mutilating cattle, that they had a secret underground base in the Archuleta Mesa near Dulce, New Mexico, and that a full-scale invasion was looming^{[6][7]}. Doty even **took Bennewitz on flyovers** of the alleged Dulce base site, reinforcing the myths (Doty later claimed the AF even planted “props” on the mesa as fake evidence)^{[2][8]}. Over several years, Bennewitz descended into paranoia and anxiety. By **1988, he was in a mental health facility**, having suffered a breakdown from the induced delusions^[9]. It appears that AFOSI’s disinformation “**succeeded**” in **neutralizing Bennewitz**, but at tremendous personal cost to him. Doty, however, maintains that *he was just following orders* in an official (if highly unorthodox) counterintelligence gambit^{[9][10]}. The Air Force has *never officially confirmed* or denied sanctioning Doty’s actions. When journalist Alejandro Rojas pressed AFOSI for comment in 2013, the agency refused to clarify whether Doty truly acted “at the behest of his superiors” or as a rogue agent^[11]^[12]. This unresolved question – was the Bennewitz disinformation campaign a sanctioned operation or an off-book improvisation? – remains central to Doty’s contested credibility.

Assessing Doty’s credibility requires untangling a web of primary sources, witness testimonies, and government records – many of which conflict. On one hand, we have Doty’s own admissions. In later interviews and affidavits, Doty has candidly (even proudly) described how he *hoaxed major UFO mythology* while at AFOSI^{[11][13]}. For example, he claims to have **forged official-looking documents** on Air Force letterhead, snuck into Bennewitz’s home to plant evidence, and lied outright to U.S. Senators who inquired about the case^{[14][15]}. (Notably, Senators Harrison Schmitt and Pete Domenici had contacted Kirtland AFB on Bennewitz’s behalf; **Doty told both men that the AF had no ongoing UFO investigation**, even as he privately led Bennewitz to believe the opposite^{[16][15]}.) FOIA-released AFOSI files corroborate that Doty was the point of contact with the senators and that the official stance was *no investigation*, even while Doty covertly strung Bennewitz along^{[16][17]}. These documents lend credence to **the core facts**: Doty did supply spurious materials to Bennewitz and did so while serving as an AFOSI agent. However, Doty’s *own narrative* of being just a loyal soldier “following orders” is harder to verify. No declassified Air Force directive explicitly instructs him to conduct a disinformation campaign. **Skeptics point out** that if Doty acted on orders, it implies a sanctioned program to deceive civilians – a serious charge for which we have only Doty’s word. If he acted without approval, then he not only deceived a UFO enthusiast but also *committed fraud and burglary* in the process, potentially violating military law^{[18][19]}. AFOSI has never prosecuted or publicly reprimanded Doty (he left the Air Force in the late 1980s and even went on to a career in state law enforcement), but they also decline to defend him. This ambiguity has led some researchers to suspect a tacit cover-up: **as one investigative summary notes**, the FBI and Air Force declared the bogus UFO documents “completely bogus” in the late ‘80s yet showed little interest in hunting down the forgers, hinting that the hoax might have been “*government sponsored, or at least tolerated*”^{[20][21]}. In short, **Doty is a paradoxical whistleblower** – part self-confessed hoaxer, part claimant of insider knowledge. The **reliability of his testimony** is extremely low unless independently corroborated, given that by his own admission *he spent years lying as part of his job*. As Rojas observes, Doty’s story has also “**changed over the years,**” with **conflicting details** in different retellings^[22], further muddying the waters.

Beyond the Bennewitz case, Doty’s fingerprints appear on several other ufological mysteries of the 1980s. He became entangled with prominent UFO researchers and media figures of the time, often acting as a shadowy source of tantalizing *but dubious* revelations. **One notorious example is the “MJ-12” affair**. In 1984, a few ufologists (including William Moore and Jaime Shandera) received anonymous rolls of film in the mail that, when developed, revealed purported Top-Secret documents about a secret committee (Majestic-12) overseeing crashed UFO recovery^{[23][24]}. These “**MJ-12 documents**” named high-ranking officials and detailed a cover-up dating back to Roswell. The papers were explosive – but also rife with red flags (format anomalies, signatures copied from archival memos, etc.). Later investigation by the FBI and skeptical researchers like Philip Klass concluded the MJ-12 papers were **forgeries**^{[25][20]}. Suspicion soon fell on the same circle of insiders: Moore, who had quietly cooperated with Doty, was *accused of hoaxing* the documents (Klass even discovered that a unique date format in MJ-12 matched Moore’s personal typing habits)^[25]. In 1989, Moore stunned a MUFON conference by **confessing that he had worked with AFOSI (including Doty) to feed disinformation to Bennewitz**^[26]. This admission validated what many had begun to suspect – that some UFO researchers themselves had been co-opted by intelligence operatives. Moore denied outright forging MJ-12, but **evidence strongly suggests** that the *Eisenhower Briefing Document* and related MJ-12 memos were linked to the disinformation campaign he and Doty ran^{[25][27]}. Indeed, **skeptics widely assert** that the MJ-12 saga was simply an outgrowth of Doty’s fabrications: a grander hoax built on the groundwork laid with Bennewitz^[27]. Doty’s name comes up repeatedly in this context. For

instance, in 1983 he met with filmmaker **Linda Moulton Howe**, who was investigating cattle mutilations. Posing as a helpful insider, Doty **told Howe that the MJ-12 story was true** and showed her supposed briefing documents about UFO crashes and alien beings from Zeta Reticuli^[28]. He even *promised* to supply film footage of UFOs and an interview with a live ET – sensational evidence for Howe’s planned HBO documentary – but he never delivered on these promises^{[28][29]}. Howe eventually realized she’d been strung along. The pattern was familiar: Doty would mix just enough genuine-sounding detail (real people’s names, bits of known UFO lore, etc.) into the fakery to hook researchers, then lead them down a rabbit hole. By **the late 1980s, the ufology community was fiercely divided** over these suspicious documents and leaks. Some, like Moore, had played along hoping to glean *real* secrets; others, like Klass and other debunkers, accused them of perpetrating a fraud. Doty himself slipped into the shadows around this time – he left the Air Force and, for a while, had no public profile. But the **legacy of his actions was already cemented** in ufology: he had injected memes like “secret underground bases,” “government alien alliances,” and ultra-secret MJ-12 cabals into the discourse, where they flourished. As one analysis put it, by the end of the 1980s **“distrust and suspicion” plagued the UFO community**, with researchers accusing each other of being disinformation agents^[30]. In many ways, Doty’s intervention *splintered* the community – some continued to chase the wild alien invasion scenarios he’d planted, while more cautious investigators became convinced that *nothing* coming from “insider sources” could be trusted.

From a **skeptical perspective**, Doty is a textbook example of an unreliable narrator. His known forgeries and lies undermine any later claims he has made about UFO secrets. For instance, in more recent interviews Doty has asserted truly outlandish things – such as witnessing an actual alien at Area 51 and even involvement in a supposed program to *abduct civilians* to fake alien kidnappings^[31]. There is no evidence beyond his words for these stories, and given his track record, most researchers (even many pro-UFO ones) treat them with extreme doubt or dismiss them outright. A **CIA-linked report** on UFO misinformation bluntly dubbed Doty a “*professional hoaxer*” who created “fraudulent documents” and spread “bogus information” within the UFO community^[32]. In the eyes of these critics, Doty was not a whistleblower exposing truth – he was an operative exploiting UFO belief to ensure the real aerospace projects he was guarding stayed hidden. Classic hallmarks of his known deceptions include **misspellings and errors** in fake docs (Doty is notoriously a poor speller, a quirk which helped analysts trace certain hoaxes back to him)^[33]. The **forged “Aquarius” Teletype** and the fictitious “Project Snowbird” report (both fed to ufologists in the ‘80s) are often cited as examples of Doty’s handiwork – chock full of sensational claims, and *also* conveniently full of typos and format mistakes that gave them away^[33]. Even the majestic MJ-12 papers, as noted, had telltale flaws that no real classified briefing would contain^[25]. All this leads skeptics to conclude that *none* of Doty’s sensational UFO tales can be taken at face value. As science writer *Mark Pilkington* argues, the real story behind Doty is not alien cover-ups at all but a **concerted effort by the military/intelligence apparatus to manufacture UFO folklore**. In his book *Mirage Men*, Pilkington documents how Doty and others **“fabricated UFO mythology to deflect attention from classified military projects”**^[34]. Rather than hiding evidence of extraterrestrials, Pilkington suggests, Doty’s disinformation *created* the extraterrestrial narrative as a convenient cover story. This thesis – that **the UFO conspiracy is the cover-up** – is supported by the Bennewitz case: Bennewitz *did* stumble on something real (likely secret communications or flight tests), and the response was to drown him in alien lore so that his real findings would be discredited^{[3][5]}. Even prominent UFO researchers have come to accept this sobering possibility. Historian Greg Bishop, after exhaustive research, concluded that the government’s campaign (with Doty as its field agent) **“launched a many-headed Hydra”** of UFO disinformation that *“drove Bennewitz” to mental collapse and “created a schism” in UFO circles for decades*^{[35][36]}. From this vantage point, Doty’s value lies not in any truth he revealed, but as a cautionary tale of **how easily belief can be manipulated**. It’s noteworthy that even officialdom now acknowledges this episode: In a 2023 Congressional hearing on UAP, an expert witness cited the Bennewitz/Doty affair as a historical fact, noting that *“the US Air Force allegedly used disinformation against a UFO buff to cover up a weapons program”*^[37]. In other words, it’s increasingly accepted (even in government studies) that yes, this did happen – a civilian was deceived with fake UFO stories for national security reasons.

That said, **believers in UFO phenomena are not ready to discard Doty entirely**. A fair evaluation should note that some ufologists still wonder if Doty’s lies carried kernels of truth. For instance, **Linda Moulton Howe**, while acknowledging she was shown bogus documents, has suggested that the very premise of those documents (that the U.S. government knew about alien beings) *might* be true – essentially, that Doty was *mixing truth with lies*^[28]. This view holds that disinformation often contains *“mirrors of reality”* to be effective. Could it be that Doty’s fantastic claims about secret committees and alien technology were partly based on real programs (perhaps misinterpreted)? A few of Doty’s stories have indeed proven oddly resilient. The **Dulce Base myth** he fed to Bennewitz, for example, took on a life of its own: other “whistleblowers” later came forward with similar Dulce tales (e.g. Phil Schneider’s lurid claims of underground battles with aliens). While mainstream researchers consider these accounts baseless, the Dulce narrative persists in UFO lore and even local legend. Similarly, the idea of **MJ-12** remains popular in conspiracy circles – despite the FBI’s debunking, countless books, TV shows, and video games have incorporated MJ-12 as if it were real history^{[38][39]}. Ironically, this means that *Richard Doty has shaped public perception of the UFO topic in a lasting way*. His fabrications became the *fuel of popular culture*. For instance, Doty has claimed he served as a consultant for **“The X-Files”** in the 1990s^[38]. This is plausible – the show’s mythology about a secret government UFO cover-up strongly echoes motifs that Doty helped introduce (like secret MJ-12-style groups and alien colonization plans). The 2013 documentary **“Mirage Men”** even features Doty as a central character, essentially casting him as a real-life “Man in Black” who blurred fact and fiction. Reviews noted that seeing Doty admit how he “muddied the waters” for UFO researchers was *“scary”* and *“profound food for thought”*^{[40][41]}. In short, his impact has been two-fold: **he enriched UFO mythology** with new conspiratorial elements, *and* he provided a case study that makes serious people more skeptical of sensational UFO claims. Any time a new alleged insider or whistleblower emerges, experienced ufologists now ask: “Could this be another Doty scenario?” – a fabricated narrative seeded by intelligence operatives. This question has taken on renewed relevance with recent UAP whistleblowers; commentators explicitly cite Doty’s hoaxes as a reason to remain cautious and demand evidence^[37].

In evaluating Richard Doty’s role, it’s clear we must **balance two perspectives**. From the *government/security* side, if Doty’s account is true, then disinformation was an active tool used in UFO cases – a deeply controversial tactic, but one aimed at protecting legitimate national secrets (e.g. stealth technology or Cold War programs). From the *ufologist/public* side, Doty’s actions sowed decades of confusion, false leads, and conspiracy paranoia that have arguably *obscured* the genuine search for truth about UFOs. He demonstrated how easily a determined agent with official backing can manipulate civilian investigators. Yet, some ufologists argue that the very existence of such an operation implies *“where there’s smoke, there’s fire”* – i.e., *why bother running UFO disinfo unless there’s something real (whether advanced human tech or alien) to hide?* In the end, virtually everyone agrees on one point: **Doty’s own credibility is shot**. As one UFO researcher

quipped, “*he was trained to lie... He had no reason to tell the truth, even now*”^{[3][42]}. Thus, any information flowing from Doty – past or present – must be treated as contaminated unless verified by independent evidence. This is a rare point of consensus between skeptics and believers.

Key gaps in evidence remain, however, and they invite further research. Firstly, the lack of official acknowledgment means we **do not have primary AFOSI documents** detailing the intent behind the Bennewitz deception. Researchers could pursue additional FOIA requests or search military archives for clues of a formal program. Perhaps internal memos or personnel evaluations might reference Doty’s activities (for example, Doty mentioned he was *demoted* at one point, possibly due to the Bennewitz affair, but FOIA’d records did not clarify this^[19]). Uncovering any **paper trail of authorization or reprimand** would greatly illuminate whether Doty was a lone wolf or following a chain of command. Secondly, **Bennewitz’s own data** deserves re-analysis with hindsight. Modern researchers might try to determine exactly what signals or flights he detected near Kirtland. Some evidence suggests he was picking up tests related to classified satellite communications or experimental aircraft^{[43][44]}. Identifying those projects (many of which may now be declassified) could confirm the *rational basis* that spurred the cover story – strengthening the case that this was a calculated “security by obscurity” measure. Thirdly, further investigation into **related disinformation episodes** could be fruitful. Doty was not the only source of spurious UFO claims in intelligence circles; for instance, in the 1970s, CIA counterintelligence chief James Angleton was rumored to have floated UFO tales as traps for leakers^{[45][46]}. Exploring those historical anecdotes might reveal a pattern or methodology (the mention of “*Project Aquarius*” in Doty’s saga hints at possible broader efforts to catalog and control UFO information^[47]). Another area for follow-up is the bizarre **Project Serpo** story from 2005, a fanciful tale of a secret exchange program with aliens that was fed to online UFO forums. Investigators eventually traced Serpo’s source to anonymous insiders, one of whom was alleged to be Doty, *still plying his trade in the internet age*^[48]. Scrutinizing Serpo and similar 21st-century hoaxes could tell us whether the “*Doty method*” survived beyond the Cold War – and whether any agencies might still consider using UFO fiction as a psychological tool. Finally, interviewing other **first-hand witnesses** to the 1980s events could fill gaps. Gabe Valdez (the New Mexico State Police officer who worked with Bennewitz on cattle mutilation cases) passed away, but he gave interviews confirming he witnessed Doty’s manipulations (e.g. the Dulce base helicopter trip)^[2]. Perhaps transcripts of those interviews or correspondence between AFOSI and the FBI (who investigated the bogus MJ-12 papers) might yield new details on the extent of the coordination. Likewise, Linda Moulton Howe’s papers or Bill Moore’s private notes could shed light on exactly what Doty presented to them. These are primary sources that historians of the UFO subject are still combing through to piece together a definitive narrative.

In conclusion, **Richard Doty’s legacy in ufology is a sobering one**. The historical record – as assembled from FOIA files, eyewitness testimony, and Doty’s own admissions – indicates that he **deliberately injected false UFO narratives** into the community during the 1980s, primarily to derail a civilian who stumbled on sensitive military secrets^{[2][4]}. The credibility of any extraordinary UFO claim tied to Doty is therefore virtually nil; researchers cite his exploits as *case studies in disinformation*. Yet, his influence endures: much of the UFO mythology that captivates the public today (from alien government cover-ups to secret bases) can be traced back to the seeds he sowed^[10]. We have, essentially, been living in the mythos Doty helped create. Fairness demands we acknowledge both sides of the debate – those who feel Doty’s lies were justified by Cold War security, and those who feel the UFO field was irresponsibly manipulated. **Both believers and skeptics have learned lessons from the Doty affair**. Believers are warier of accepting insider stories without proof, and skeptics concede that sometimes *the cover-up is real but it covers something prosaic*. Going forward, the Doty saga underscores the need for **transparency**. If similar situations arise – where military or intelligence agencies encounter civilians digging into black projects – one would hope for more ethical and legal means of engagement than deceiving and destroying a person’s sanity. To close the remaining gaps, researchers should continue to seek declassification of any files on these events and push for officials to comment on the record. As one Guardian journalist mused, “*If there really is a UFO conspiracy, it’s surely the worst-kept secret in history... But perhaps the real conspiracy has been persuading us to believe in aliens*”^[40]. Richard Doty’s story may ultimately reveal less about extraterrestrials and more about ourselves – our susceptibility to suggestion, the lengths to which governments will go to guard secrets, and the cautionary truth that in the realm of UFOs, **extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence** (and a healthy amount of skepticism toward convenient “leaks”).

Footnotes

1. [Photos](#)
2. [Open letter to the U.S. Air Force regarding allegations of UFO disinformation - Openminds.tv](#)
3. ["Dulce Base" Mysteries Decoded - Heather Taddy](#)
4. [Ex-Air Force Law Enforcement Agent Says He Hoaxed Major UFO Mythologies | HuffPost Weird News](#)
5. ["Dulce Base" Mysteries Decoded - Heather Taddy](#)
6. [Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row](#)
7. ["Dulce Base" Mysteries Decoded - Heather Taddy](#)
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18. [Open letter to the U.S. Air Force regarding allegations of UFO disinformation - Openminds.tv](#)
19. [Open letter to the U.S. Air Force regarding allegations of UFO disinformation - Openminds.tv](#)
20. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
21. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
22. [Ex-Air Force Law Enforcement Agent Says He Hoaxed Major UFO Mythologies | HuffPost Weird News](#)
23. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
24. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
25. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
26. [Paul Bennewitz - Wikipedia](#)
27. [Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row](#)
28. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
29. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
30. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
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33. [Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row](#)
34. [Mirage Men - Wikipedia](#)
35. [Project Beta: The Story of Paul Bennewitz, National Security, and the Creation of a Modern UFO Myth by Greg Bishop | Goodreads](#)
36. [Project Beta: The Story of Paul Bennewitz, National Security, and the Creation of a Modern UFO Myth by Greg Bishop | Goodreads](#)
37. <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Written-Testimony-Shellenberger.pdf#:~:text=17%20Mark%20Pilkington%2C%20Mirage%20Men%2C,Pentagon%E2%80%99s%20former%20UFO%20hunter%3F%E2%80%9D%20T>
38. [Ex-Air Force Law Enforcement Agent Says He Hoaxed Major UFO Mythologies | HuffPost Weird News](#)
39. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)
40. [Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row](#)
41. [Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row](#)
42. ["Dulce Base" Mysteries Decoded - Heather Taddy](#)
43. ["Dulce Base" Mysteries Decoded - Heather Taddy](#)
44. ["Dulce Base" Mysteries Decoded - Heather Taddy](#)
45. [Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row](#)
46. [Secret Things From Space – Marilyn From The 22nd Row](#)
47. [Society of the Psyop, Part 1: UFOs and the Future of Media - e-flux](#)
48. [Majestic 12 - Wikipedia](#)