

Reflections (continued)

By James Bond Johnson



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The sudden announcement a short time after the photo session by General Ramey-upon orders from his bosses in Washington, DC -that this debris was but a "weather balloon and radar target" certainly makes good sense. And the fact that no other member of the media or public ever has been permitted to examine or even view the debris also is understandable. It undoubtedly was only through a fluke that I got to see, arrange, and photograph the wreckage-and pose the military brass while examining it.

It was sheer luck that as military reporter for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, then the South's largest newspaper, and a veteran of the Army Air Corps in World War II, I was available and in close proximity to Fort Worth Army Air Base on the afternoon of July 8, 1947.

For weeks the whole world had been watching for flying saucers as reports of sightings were being received daily from many parts of the country. And now, finally, the Air Corps announced that it had "captured" one of the objects and was flying it to Fort Worth for personal examination by General Ramey.

I was given the wire service "flash" announcement of this rapidly developing story by my city editor and I headed for the air base. Upon arrival at Ramey's office, I learned that the general was out but expected to return momentarily. The debris, transported from Roswell in a series of "meat wrapper" paper covered packages, had been deposited on the carpet in the general's office. Just one package was opened partially. Some packages, still sealed, were scattered around the office.

While Colonel DuBose went out to look for the general, I was left alone in the general's rather spacious office. This gave me an opportunity to

further unpack and to "pose" some of the pieces of wreckage. I well recall how frustrated I was at the burned and smelly debris and how little opportunity this would permit for a good news photograph.

When the General entered the room I handed him the "flash" announcement printed from the news wires. He read it with interest. I then took a couple of shots of him, still wearing his hat in his office, examining the debris with the "flash" announcement held in his hand.

Then I asked his chief of staff, Colonel DuBose, to join him for a couple of more poses. I was desperate to get that "good shot" that every photographer dreams of but could think of no very dramatic way to portray a crashed "flying saucer." I remember wondering if my single peanut flash would even show sufficient detail in shooting the darkened material. But there was no time to set up a "slave" flash, which would have enhanced the lighting.

While shooting the general I asked him what all this material was. He shrugged and answered something like: "Damned if I know." But there was no effort by anyone to avoid posing with the debris.

Then I grabbed a couple of shots of Major Marcel, who had gathered up the UFO wreckage pieces at the crash site near Roswell and then had first brought them to his commanding officer at the Roswell air base and then on direct orders of the general couriered them on to Fort Worth.

I was off to the Star-Telegram to develop and print the shots. But before time permitted transmitting the photos by wirephoto to the waiting world, General Ramey went on the radio to announce that the earlier official announcement was in error and that this was only a "weather balloon and target device."

It is suddenly no longer a mystery why Ramey would have issued the so-called "cover up" announcement soon after I left his office. If at the time of the photo shoot it already had been determined that this was for certain a "far out" craft, the general would dare not have tried to pass off such a ruse since I could well have noticed the strange "writings" and anomalous materials and confronted him with them. So, only after my departure and after the debris was now safely hidden from all the world could such an announcement have been made with safety.

With a half century of speculation and folklore preceding this stunning revelation, I now believe that I was just lucky. I was ahead of the story. The general and his staff simply had not had sufficient time to examine and evaluate the wreckage. As DuBose later told a reporter, at that time "we just didn't know what we had."

Perhaps these most unlikely events that permitted a 21-year-old news reporter to take a few pictures with his brand-new Speed Graphic camera in 1947 may finally help to unlock the secrets of the Roswell UFO mystery.



New super enlargements were available for viewing at the Main Library of the University of Texas at Arlington on June 1.

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