

GROOM LAKE REVISITED: A SPACE AGE ODYSSEY

By Michael D.

If there is an act more brazen or stupid than attempting to gain access to this country's most top secret military installation, it would have to be a real doozy, say on par with having Salman Rushdie autograph his next book in downtown Tehran; or swimming the Santa Monica Bay. But the heady rush of being only two hours drive from the vaunted Groom Lake/Dreamland/Area-51 installation, with nothing better to do on a Saturday afternoon in Sin City, provided the mindless charge myself and two compatriots needed to fill our sails.

So as throngs of greased-up Beautiful People went poolside, we threw caution to the wind and accepted a weighty mission: To seek out evidence of otherworldly craft, rumored to be docked at Groom Lake, America's most highly classified military base, stalking central Nevada's skies.

Deployed in a nondescript late-model four-wheeler, we headed for high country while deciding our nom de guerres, spymaster akas given only during apprehension and subsequent .45-against-your-temple-style interrogation. Agreeing upon Brick, Face and Larvae as our new identities, we then secured our provisions: pork rinds (Larvae's in training), gum and Gatorade.

Leaving the garish confines and cable porno of the Desert Inn, we ascended the Las Vegas Valley in a northerly course toward Lincoln County and Tikaboo Valley. Face knew little of the Groom saga, so Larvae and I briefed him en route; ever the Young Hollywood type (thus his appropriate alias) Face inquired as to whether his urban hiker attire was acceptable: "What do you wear to a top secret base?" he moaned.

With that opening salvo, Face launched two-hours worth of unrelenting sarcastic flak toward Larvae and myself. "I wanna see an alien; show me a UFO!" became his battle cry. "What's that coming at us?!" Partial to hookers, cigars and brandy, a bottom-line type of guy, I accepted Face's p.o.v. and wrote him off as our triad's weak link, the Third Column.

Undaunted by an onslaught of cynical barbs we powered on to reach our first objective sleepy Rachel, Nevada, and the Lil' Ale Inn bar-restaurant on State Route 375.

Because Rachel consists of little more than trailers, small livestock pens and a less-than defined grid of dirt roads, all life begins and ends at the Lil' Ale Inn. For once you exit this funky roadhouse, there ain't nothing out there but a sagebrush ocean and some serious mountains.

So it becomes a somewhat surreal experience for those unaccustomed with the Groom Lake phenomena to break up a long road trip across unflinching high desert by ambling into what appears-save for the strange moniker and alien images adorning the exterior-to be a typical Western bar & grill. Then find a plethora of spacey bric-a-brac, like grainy night shots of purported UFOs, more ET composites, and a slew of visuals depicting past and present cutting-edge Air Force craft (launched from Groom) that tested their wings in the deep, broad Tikaboo Valley surrounding this place.

After a quick once-over of the wall decorations, Larvae motioned me to an impromptu publication rack set-up on well worn wooden bookshelves and nightstands. This very collection of UFO magazines and small press hardcovers put Groom on the map: They all basically ascribe to some sort of underground alien presence and/or extraterrestrial military collusion at the nearby labyrinthine Groom Lake research and development facility.

(I should point out here that one of the nicknames for the Groom facility, Area 51, no longer applies. Recent Department of Energy dictum [secured through the Freedom of Information Act] relates that "the [38,400 acre] land once known as Area 51, withdrawn from public use by the Atomic Energy Commission [predecessor to the DOE] more than 25 years ago...has been used and administered as a national asset. Because DOE is no longer active there, Area 51 no longer

appears on maps of DOE's Nevada Test Site." And since the Air Force illegally seized a huge swath of public domain around Groom in 1984, this base has become a de facto part of the larger Nellis Range.)

The three of us then saddled up to the bar where owner/operator Joe Travis slings his own far-out concoctions, such as the Beam-Me-Up-Scotty and the Transporter. Now Travis is a big, bearded man of measured words and easy-going demeanor who looks as though he was born in a Stetson, flannel shirt and Lees. To hear him talk about alien ships etc., while his physical image is so stoically rock solid, struck me a little strange.

While a few locals sipped beers and a German couple perused the walls with wide eyes, Travis, prior to inviting us to accompany him and other Rachelites to the black mailbox later to watch UFOs, relates that a Marine Corps unit had just apprehended some folks who'd attempted to slip into Dreamland.

Now I was aware that both inner and outer security at Groom-where Air Force Black Projects are honed-was an extremely weighty matter which fell upon a number of different agencies, all with the green light to use necessary force, including the deadly variety, on trespassers. However, this was the first time anyone alluded to leathernecks penciled in amongst Groom Lake's defensive roster.

The first line of security at Groom is Wackenhut, a private outfit contracted to patrol defense and nuclear installations and cavaliere servente to the CIA.

UFO-seeking civilians are most likely to encounter these blue jumpsuit-clad guards on the bases' widespread fringe. Wackenhut personnel drive plain white, full-sized four-wheel drives, such as Ford Broncos. (They also maintain perimeter security at Nellis Air Force Bombing and Gunnery Range and the Nevada Nuclear Test Site-both of which encompass Groom.)

Yet don't assume these fellas are dunderall rent-a-cops-they are all business. For as a Vegas based fed who's visited Groom told me, "These [Wackenhut] people are high-speed low-drag types. And they will light you up! " Which is exactly what transpired about five years ago when-and the events remain sketchy-Wackenhut guards opened up with H&K assault weapons from a Messerschmidt BK-117 helicopter on some citizen whose fascination got the best of him.

In a nutshell, this guy drove one of the dirt roads leading into Groom (years before guard shacks were erected at the periphery) and allegedly carried a 30-30 rifle.

If there is anything frowned upon more than toting a camera around a top-secret military installation, it's having a weapon in tow. Wackenhut claim the would-be intruder shot at their German-built whirlybird; their response, immediate and unequivocal: "They turned him into about 190 lbs. of ground round," a Vegas-based special agent told me.

And Wackenhut are just the gatekeepers: Groom Lake's reception committee! Beyond Wackenhut are Air Force Security Police (SPs); bolstering the SPs are the ultimate keepers of the realm, the Department of Energy's Special Response Team, or DOE-SRT, a world-class, take no-prisoners SWAT unit. Security is so paramount at Dreamland that when a Nellis-based fighter pilot experienced mid-air malfunctions at Mach speed, performing a masterful job just to get his plane down at Groom (a totally restricted area-even to other military elements) in one piece, he thought those hard charging fellas circling his plane where there to congratulate him on a heroic piece of flying.

Imagine his surprise when Air Force SPs hauled him from his cockpit, handcuffed, blindfolded and dragged the airman into a security office for an aggressive debriefing, followed by his signing sworn affidavits that he saw nothing at Groom and would never admit to landing there.

Leaving Mr. Travis and the Inn with that very painful image of a Wackenhut-style welcome still firmly etched in my mind, we departed Rachel and headed southeast on Nevada 375. Nearly 19 miles from town stands the Black Mailbox-the spot where UFOies congregate, video and still cameras and binoculars pointed skyward, hoping to catch a glimpse of either IACs (identified alien craft) or H-PACs (human-piloted alien crafts).

And this was where Joe Travis and his gang will be tonight, reclining in their beach chairs, an extraterrestrial tailgate party in the middle of the Great Basin desert. Taking a detour from the blacktop, we cut across open country. From the

mailbox, the only man-made marker for miles, we drove south on rancher Steve Meddlin's dirt road, passing large numbers of range cattle, scattered Joshua Trees and Yucca, for 13 miles. Meddlin's road arcs around the formidable Groom Mountains, then joins another unmarked dirt road (from Hancock Summit) leading directly into Groom Dry Lake.

In the distance far ahead of us, moving east at a terrific clip is a white four-wheeler-probably a Wackenhut vehicle-kicking-up a huge plume of dust as it goes by. With field glasses we followed his pursuits, but he chose not to engage us and continued on the main Groom Lake road heading towards Hancock Summit and 375. Maybe luck and the extraterrestrials were smiling down at us.

At the juncture with Groom Lake Road, we headed west and the tension became palpable. We were close now. No more than four or five miles from the huge underground research facility and adjoining dry lake bed crisscrossed by a runway almost seven miles in length. Where the prototypes, even while poised on the runway's edge for takeoff, remain covered by huge, mobile hangars painted on top with silhouettes of other military aircraft to deceive spy satellites.

Inside a narrow canyon marked by at least three or four signs exclaiming: "No-Trespass," "Fine & Imprisonment," "Cameras or Film Subject to Confiscation," we stopped and began to hike. The road ahead and probably the one we stood on were rigged with seismic, magnetic and infra-red sensors, in addition to video surveillance and radar down to the ground. People had been messed with only a few feet from the black mailbox back by the highway, and here we were a good 14 miles in from that point!

Larvae and I climbed the Jumbled Hills south of the road in the hopes of gaining a vantage point while Face decided his contribution to this mission (and his motion picture career) would be better served by staying inside the vehicle. Our excitement and anticipation grew with each step. A strenuous, almost vertical hike across some of the most irradiated downwind landscape in the world-20 miles southwest of us lay Yucca Flat and Plutonium Valley, site of nearly 200 aboveground nuclear weapons detonations-put us high atop Tikaboo Valley.

Five thousand feet above sea level and totally out of breath, the previous night's voluminous tequila intake now churning, we finally reached the summit. Though immediately we stooped down because below us stood a white guard shack, road gate and another white four-wheeler, either Air Force SPs or Wackenhut .

A guard in blue fatigues peering through field glasses looked up in our direction; did he know we were there? I'd been warned beforehand they pick up the glint from trespasser's camera lens and binoculars, but there was little direct sunlight above the Jumbled Hills so Larvae and I stayed put. Yet from this position we could see little and to go any further we'd have to circumvent the shack down below.

It being daytime Saturday nothing extraordinary or otherworldly was airborne, plus we felt lucky enough to get as far in as we did without going home in a body bag, so back to Lost Wages we headed. Larvae and I laid out our plans for a future mountain bike trek around Groom while Face looked forward to more Desert Inn home-porno: "I just gotta see those two lezbos on the stairway again. That s my idea of a celestial body."

Note: This document was prepared from an uncorrected scan. Errors are possible.

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