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Korff on Roswell (1)

From: **Greg Sandow** <gsandow@prodigy.net>
Date: Sat, 24 May 1997 19:01:04 -0400
Fwd Date: Mon, 26 May 1997 02:40:33 -0400
Subject: Korff on Roswell (1)

I've read parts of Kal Korff's book about Roswell, and I have a few comments.

In case anyone thinks it's not fair to comment after reading only part of the book, let me say that the parts I've read are self-contained, and that I've looked up all references in the index to the witnesses they talk about. Because the index turns out to be inaccurate - most of the pages cited for Pappy Henderson, for instance, have no mention of him - I can't guarantee that I haven't missed something. Still, I think my comments are justified, as you'll all be able to see in this and two following messages.

Three points before I start.

(1) It's crucial to have independent studies of the extraordinary claims made about Roswell. Kal has done us all a service.

(2) One of Kal's criticisms is correct, and important. He notes that many witnesses cited in the pro-Roswell books were never interviewed, and that information about what they supposedly did, saw, or said comes second-hand, from people who knew them. Nevertheless, the books refer to things these people said as if they were direct quotes. "Melvin Brown said," we'll read, when the correct statement would be "According to his daughter Beverly Bean, Melvin Brown said?" Good catch, Kal.

(3) In nothing I'm about to say am I trying to settle the larger question of what crashed at Roswell. Maybe it was a Mogul balloon, maybe it was a UFO, maybe it was a dinnerplate thrown by an angry wife from another planet (to cite a theory put forth in a science fiction story published in the '50s, by a writer who thought it would be fun to take the notion of "flying saucers" literally"). I'm not taking a stand on any of this, and I won't be drawn into arguments about it.

That said, it's time for business.

I'll begin with Kal's comments about Pappy Henderson, the pilot who allegedly flew the UFO wreckage to Wright-Patterson air force base. Though Kal mentions Henderson elsewhere in the book, he principally discusses him on pp. 94-95. There we read first that Henderson "cannot be considered [a witness] for one simple reason: Pappy Henderson was never interviewed about his purported involvement by UFO investigators." (Kal's emphasis.)

True enough, Henderson was never interviewed, but I wonder why Kal emphasizes this so strongly. No UFO researcher claims to have talked to Henderson, and while I've granted Kal's point about the free and easy way that researchers sometimes cite second-hand testimony, here

he sounds overly legalistic.

Is Henderson, strictly speaking, a "witness"? Who cares? That's a semantic question. What matters is whether we can give him any weight at all when we sum up the Roswell evidence. Elsewhere, Kal notes the source for Henderson's supposed remarks -- reports from his wife and one of his friends. Is this admissible testimony? Of course it is. Note that I'm not asking whether the statements by family and friends are true. I'm asking whether it's fair to cite them. And the answer, very clearly, is yes, if you look at what's done outside the UFO field. Testimony about what other people said is allowed in court. It's frequent in magazine and newspaper journalism. It's common in biographies. It's expected in historical research. Why shouldn't it be allowed about Roswell? (Assuming, of course, that it's put forth as such, and given no more weight than it seems to deserve.) How can Kal banish Henderson from any discussion of the case?

But Kal's reason becomes clear in the next paragraph. He writes: "Unfortunately, the only 'proof' that Henderson was even involved in the Roswell recovery comes from rumors and scuttlebutt courtesy of some of the surviving members of his family and a few acquaintances." And here I cry foul. "Rumors and scuttlebutt"? Those words would describe what we'd have if, let's say, Henderson's second cousin thought she remembered an aunt saying that Henderson's wife had talked about her husband flying alien debris -- something vague, impossible to verify, and several steps removed from the person we really care about.

But that's not the situation at all. The key witness is Henderson's wife, Sappho. As I read in Kevin Randle's notes of his interview with her, she remembers that Henderson read a Roswell story in a tabloid (probably the National Enquirer, in the days when it covered UFOs). As she remembers, "He said, well, I been wanting to tell you this for years, but I guess now it's not a top secret if they're putting it in the paper. And he said, 'I'm the guy who flew the wreckage of the space vehicle to Dayton, Ohio.'"

Stanton Friedman and Don Berliner, in their Roswell book "Crash at Corona," quote a much lengthier statement, saying exactly the same thing. And, Friedman and Berliner say, Sappho Henderson's recollections were confirmed by her son and daughter, by one of Henderson's cousins, by his friend John Kromschroeder, and by an unnamed member of Henderson's air division, who heard Henderson talk about Roswell at a reunion in 1982, and after some initial skepticism, ended up believing him.

All these people say they heard Pappy Henderson say more or less exactly what his wife says she heard him say. Whether we choose to believe them all (and, assuming we trust them, whether we believe that Henderson was telling the truth) is yet another story. But this isn't "rumors and scuttlebutt." Suppose we were reading one of Kitty Kelley's biographies. Suppose she reported a second-hand story about Frank Sinatra or Nancy Reagan, which she'd heard from six different people, who said they were there. Wouldn't we take it seriously? Why then does something very similar, but this time about an alleged Roswell participant, get dismissed as "rumors and scuttlebutt"?

Kal can think anything he wants about Pappy Henderson. But here he misstated the facts.

Greg Sandow

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