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The Kecksburg Files - Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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Stig

The Kecksburg Files

UFO researcher's video explores several theories about 1965 crash in Westmoreland County

Wednesday, September 09, 1998

By David Templeton, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Since the uncertain events of Dec. 9, 1965, debate has raged, friendships have soured, rumors have waxed, theories have arisen and Internet stories have proliferated over what crash-landed that day in the rural village of Kecksburg, Westmoreland County.

(Image: "It's been almost 33 years and we still don't have an answer," says Stan Gordon, who has studied the Kecksburg crash since the day it happened. He's sitting in his "command center" in his Greensburg home. (Matt Freed, Post-Gazette)

The military insisted it was a meteorite that was never recovered.

UFO skeptics have held that, if not an outright hoax, it was surely something as explainable as the Soviet Venus probe, Kosmos 96, or an experimental American spacecraft that went flip-flop into Kecksburg's midsection only to be recovered by a quick and secretive military.

But UFO researchers, who say the Kecksburg incident is second only to the one at Roswell, N.M., in terms of drama and potential, have suggested with as much imagination as fact that it was alien visitors who chose Kecksburg as their Sea of Tranquility.

All of which has transformed the event that happened 33 years ago into one of America's most intriguing UFO mysteries.

(Image: Sketch by Charles Hanna represents an object that landed in Kecksburg on Dec. 9, 1965, thought by some to be a UFO. (Matt

Freed, Post-Gazette)=BF

The Kecksburg incident has served as fodder for episodes of "Unsolved Mysteries" and "Sightings" television broadcasts. The mock-up spacecraft built for the "Unsolved Mysteries" broadcast now sits atop the Kecksburg fire hall as the only lasting sign of the village's controversial claim to fame.

Now, Greensburg UFO researcher Stan Gordon, who has studied the Kecksburg crash since the day it happened, has produced a 92-minute documentary titled, "Kecksburg: The Untold Story," that provides eyewitness accounts and claims that surely will bolster debate.

As the cover says, "New Mexico has Roswell, but in Pennsylvania, it was Kecksburg,"

The most persistent Kecksburg researcher, Gordon has long kept an open mind as to what may have landed, but always has been intrigued by possibilities of an extraterrestrial visit. He now adds to the literature, legend and litany with his video that provides not only overwhelming evidence that something acorn-shaped landed in Kecksburg's lap that day, but also new accounts that what landed was extraterrestrial.

Written and narrated by Gordon, 48, the video provides numerous eyewitness testimonials from people who saw the fireball cruise at rather low speeds and altitudes across the southwestern Pennsylvania sky, maneuver, complete some turns and finally put down in Kecksburg's woods, about 7 miles southeast of Greensburg.

Others who went rummaging through the woods that early evening say they saw an acorn-shaped spacecraft half buried in a gully. Many others, including news reporters, saw Kecksburg crawling with military personnel from the Air Force, Army and NASA that evening, while others saw a Volkswagen Beetle-sized craft removed under a tarpaulin on the back of a military flatbed truck. Still others say they saw it being hauled to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

Swirling with eerie music, subplots, mysteries and theories, the video builds to a well-orchestrated climax of two men claiming evidence that it was an extraterrestrial spacecraft. One even claims to have seen what appeared to be a deceased, lizard-skinned creature partially covered by a sheet inside a Wright-Patterson Air Force Base hangar.

Gordon comes to no conclusions, except that something definitely landed in Kecksburg at 4:45 p.m. on that day. While entertaining the possibility that the craft was American or Soviet, Gordon provides reasons why those explanations are lacking. He leaves the viewer with the definite sense that his research points squarely at something more profound.

"It's an intriguing story," he said in a recent interview. "It's been almost 33 years and we still don't have an answer. A lot of key witnesses have passed away, are up in age, or not in the best of health. This was the best way to have them tell their story themselves about what they experienced."

His video provides detailed history of the Kecksburg incident along with a long string of witnesses who provide theories, surprises and intrigue, yet leave the viewer yearning for some conclusion. With that in mind, Gordon asks viewers to petition members of Congress to schedule hearings to collect testimony and help solve the lingering mystery.

For years, debate has been escalating.

A 1991 article in The Pittsburgh Press described generally what happened, based on various witnesses accounts that are included in greater detail in Gordon's video.

Dec. 9, 1965, was a dreary day in Westmoreland County - that is, until what was described as a roundish fireball appeared. It reportedly seared the gray sky at low altitude with a jet trail, then made S-turns and what appeared to be a controlled landing through the treetops into Kecksburg's woods.

The fireball was seen across the northeastern United States and

was the subject of numerous newscasts that day.

Local residents headed toward the landing site. James Romansky and others trailed the object into the woods by observing the arc-wielding flames and bluish sparklers evident through the trees after the landing.

The object was 12 feet long and 6 to 7 feet in diameter, and shaped like an acorn. It had a ring around the base, just like an acorn, that bore what Romansky described as backward letters, like a backward J or K. Some have described the lettering as resembling Egyptian hieroglyphics - lines, stars, circles and shapes. The craft had no doors or windows. The metal was seamless, with a dent, but bearing no rivets or welds.

The local men soon were chased away by U.S. military officials who announced that the landing site was off-limits to all civilians.

As the writer of the 1991 article, this reporter explored whether the spacecraft could have been the Soviet Venus probe known as Kosmos 96. The U.S. Space Command reported that Kosmos 96 crash-landed in Canada shortly after 3 a.m. - more than 12 hours before the Kecksburg crash at 4:45 p.m.

To this day, Kosmos 96 cannot be discounted as a possibility.

Kosmos 96 was shaped like an acorn and may have had the ability to maneuver to land on Venus. As a Venus probe, it also was equipped with state-of-the-art heat shield technology that could have allowed the craft to survive the long, heated ride through Earth's atmosphere before landing in Kecksburg.

But there are discrepancies. Eyewitnesses, including Romansky, insist the writing on the girth was not Russian. Others claim that while the right shape, it was not the right size, and did not bear the seams and rivets that characterized Soviet and U.S. spacecraft of that era.

In 1991, I obtained the ordinals from the Goddard Space Center for the flight of Kosmos 96. I had James Oberg, an expert on Soviet spacecraft who also is a UFO skeptic, review the ordinals to see if it could have been Kosmos 96. Oberg concluded that, based on the ordinals provided by the Goddard Space Center, it could not be Kosmos 96 - a point that, to Oberg's dismay, buoyed UFO advocates and has continued to be a hot topic on the Internet.

But Oberg amended his theories in an article published in September 1993 on the OMNI service on America On Line. There, he suggested that the Kosmos 96 theory could account for U.S. Space Command's conclusions that it landed in Canada and also in Kecksburg.

Oberg says the failed Soviet probe "whose booster had blown up in parking orbit, would have been a wonderful UFO."

Oberg acknowledges that the ordinals, which have been reviewed by a leading amateur satellite watcher who didn't want his name revealed, seemed to confirm the official Air Force account that Kosmos 96 crashed in Canada more than 12 hours earlier than the Kecksburg crash. But Oberg checked the data further. The released tracking data, he said, couldn't be positively identified with specific pieces of the failed probe.

"It could have been jettisoned rocket stage of a large piece of space junk," he wrote. "The probe itself could have headed off toward Kecksburg."

Oberg proceeds to explain why the U.S. military would lie, or at least decide not to divulge everything it knew about the Kecksburg crash.

"In the 1960s, U.S. military intelligence agencies interested in enemy technology were eagerly collecting all the Soviet missile and space debris they could find. International law required that debris be returned to the country of origin. But hardware from Kosmos 96, with its special missile-warhead shielding, would have been too valuable to give back."

After all, he concluded, what better camouflage than to let

people think the fallen object was not a Soviet probe, but a flying saucer?

"The Russians would never suspect, and the Air Force laboratories could examine the specimen at leisure. And if suspicion lingered, UFO buffs would be counted on to maintain the phony cover story, protecting the real truth."

For that reason, Oberg concluded, the Kecksburg scenario produced "delicious irony."

"A famous UFO case may actually involve a real U.S. government cover-up, but UFO buffs are on the wrong side. Instead of exposing the truth, they may be unwitting pawns in deception."

The other unexplored avenue to solve the Kecksburg mystery was to approach Soviet, now Russian, authorities to provide information on what truly happened to Kosmos 96. But in 1991, the Soviet Embassy would only speculate that anything that crash-landed in American turf was probably American technology that the U.S. was too embarrassed to acknowledge.

That's similar to the response that Gordon got from the Russian government when he posed the same question.

In May, during an interview of a Russian Cosmonaut Viktor P. Savinykh, who now serves as rector of Moscow State University of Geodesy and Cartography, I took the opportunity through an interpreter to ask him whether he could help solve the Kecksburg mystery. He, too, suggested rather emphatically, and with some laughter, that whatever plunged into Kecksburg surely was some faulty American technology.

But extraterrestrial claims cannot be entertained until the Kosmos 96 theory is put to rest.

In 1962, the United States and Soviet Union forged a gentleman's agreement that any spacecraft that landed within the other's borders would be returned. However, the United States had fast-acting military units that traveled the globe at moment's notice to recover American and Soviet space hardware wherever it fell.

The Kecksburg crash occurred in the middle of the Cold War and the space race, and America was especially interested in heat-shield technology. So, if Kosmos 96 had landed in Kecksburg, there's no doubt that the U.S. military would have been interested in finding it.

Gordon's video provides plenty of evidence that the military would not have responded so quickly, and declared what could only be described as martial law in Kecksburg, if it was responding only to a meteorite.

Whether you adhere to theories of a hoax, Kosmos 96 or extraterrestrial spacecraft, Gordon's video provides a thorough account of the crash-landing, and the many explanations of what happened.

To obtain a copy of "Kecksburg: The Untold Story" call 888-UFO-VIEW (888-836-8439). The video costs \$29.95 plus \$5.95 for shipping and handling and state sales tax.

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