

Jim Oberg on the “NASA lawsuit over Kecksburg UFO Documents”
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The October 26, 2007, Associated Press story on NASA searching its files for secret data on the ‘Kecksburg UFO crash’ of 1965 must have been written by a lazy reporter based on dictation from the filer of the lawsuit, with no attempts at background or balance. The story as written is seriously misleading. It is posted on msnbc at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21494221/>

NASA is unlikely to have any such documents, and the suing party knows it – the move is almost certainly a publicity stunt for the television documentary company she works with. Last time NASA was sued, it dug and dug and found a few copies of news clippings of the event, and also copies of letters from UFO buffs demanding NASA release all its secret files on the event. That was all.

There’s no reason NASA would ever have any other files on the event, anyway. Here’s why:

The Air Force explanation of “meteors” refers to the explanation of professional astronomers who observed, photographed, and analyzed the path of the real meteor that DID enter the atmosphere that day. There is nothing trumped-up or imaginary about the meteor, that was seen over a wide area, including western Pennsylvania. See link” <http://www.debunker.com/Kecksburg.html>. From the Kecksburg area, the meteor was low in the western sky and was reported to have hit the ground behind a tree-covered hill. It was actually hundreds of miles away. Eyewitness reports of distant meteors crashing ‘nearby’ are very common.

History background: The USAF had a program to recover space satellite debris after entry into the atmosphere, particularly Soviet satellite debris. In the 1970-2 period, I personally read such classified reports of recoveries when I was a young lieutenant serving at the AF Weapons Lab at Kirtland AFB, Albuquerque, New Mexico. One case I distinctly remember involved fragments of the heat shield of an off-course spy satellite that allowed analysts to assess the pressurized canister volume – that material was picked up by a missionary in southern Africa and mailed to a military intelligence contact he had.

In early December, 1965, a Soviet spacecraft of very high interest was about to fall out of orbit. It was the entry capsule of a Venus probe, whose engine had failed during launch, trapping it in low Earth orbit. That spacecraft would contain the very latest Soviet hardware for heat shielding, hi-G structural strength, guidance, navigation instrumentation, and computer/communications systems, since the same factories that built space probes also were involved in building military missile and warhead systems. Previous acquisitions of Soviet space probes (such as the ‘moon probe’ that was secretly ‘borrowed’ overnight from a touring exhibit in Mexico in 1959) had provided valuable information.

So it's entirely likely an alert message would have gone out to all military units to be on the lookout, in this period, for stuff falling out of the sky. This had paid off before.

There was an AF radar site in Ohio, with skeleton staffing. Apparently, when they read the papers (or heard radio accounts) about people in the Kecksburg area seeing a flaming object fall nearby, after other folks had seen a fireball crossing Lake Erie, it would have been worth sending a few enlisted men over to look around. For all I know, they identified themselves as 'NASA' – military personnel in mufti had done this regularly in the 1960's, especially overseas, for convenient cover – and found nothing. The paper trail of this trip would have been sparse, and short-lived.

The later stories of things crashing in the woods and being hauled away on flatbeds seem to have sprung from local competitive tall-tale-telling. The stories refer to different locations, and some are to locations you couldn't, then or now, even drive a vehicle into.

The acorn appearance of some descriptions – others describe a Hollywood-style winged space plane – intrigued me because that, in fact, is what the Venus entry probe DOES sort of look like. But then I learned that the description only originated some years later, when TV reporters and UFO buffs showed the witnesses photographs of the Venus probe – and some responded, "Yeah, THAT'S what I saw..." Sure.

'Kosmos-96', the Soviet cover name for the off-course Venus capsule, DID fall from orbit a few hours before the meteor was seen. The AF said it was over western Canada. Personally, I had wondered if the AF claim was a diversion to camouflage their recovery of the actual satellite. After all, it was against international law to recover and then retain objects launched by other nations – the 'originating state' had full legal ownership. Far better (I mused) to avoid a fuss by just never admitting possession – and far MORE valuable from an intelligence point of view if the 'other side' never realized that you had discovered some of its technical secrets.

But subsequent analysis of the Kosmos-96 orbit confirmed the authenticity of the AF tracking data, and confirmed that its path could not possibly be made to coincide with the path of the meteor observed in southern Ontario.

In the end, the same-day fall of the super-secret Soviet Venus capsule, and the bright meteor, must have been coincidences. That happens, too.

The Kecksburg local industry in its 'UFO crash' continues to thrive, although many key personnel from that area insist, as they have always insisted, that the tales of trucks and troops and mystery spaceships are all imaginary – THEY were there, in responsible emergency services jobs, and they say they saw nothing. For UFO believers, this is easy to explain – they have had their brains wiped by a memory ray, further evidence the crash was real.

For the genuinely curious, it's a fascinating case with a long history. There's been both sincerity and charlatanism in equal measures. The latest press stories, in my view, are based very strongly on the latter type of evidence.