

THE KECKSBURG CHRONICLES

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It fell from Outer Space 50 years ago today.
It has been written about ever since.

I visited Kecksburg last August 9, and saw the approximate replica of the Kecksburg object as made by members of the local Fire Department who saw it and described it on that long ago day. I also visited Kecksburg again this morning. I favor James Oberg's hypothesis that it was part of the Russian spacecraft Kosmos 96, as I will explain at the end.



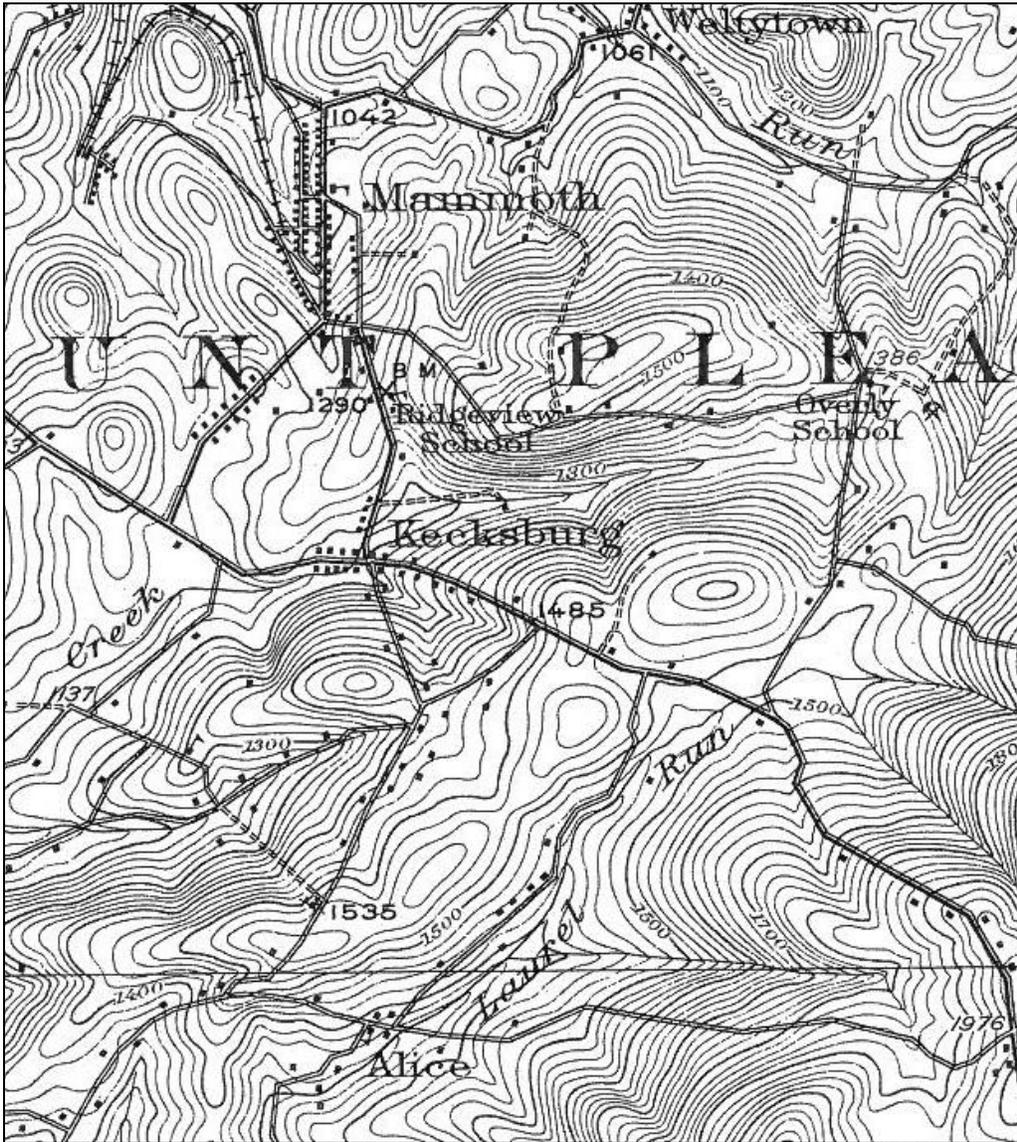
The author and the replica of the Kecksburg object at the Volunteer Fire Department

The Incident

The following is an account by Kim Opatka, published in *The Latrobe Bulletin*, May 6, 1989:

The object was first seen streaking across the sky, with thousands from Michigan to New York witnessing a brilliant ball of fire which left a smoke trail, visible for about 20 minutes after it passed.

Many, including pilots who observed it, thought it was an aircraft which was on fire. Reports of debris from the object were made in many states, and an Ohio fire department was called to extinguish 10 small fires in an area where witnesses said they saw flaming fragments falling from the sky.



Kecksburg before 1965. It still is a very small town. USGS Map.

Shock waves were reported by pilots, and a seismograph near

Detroit recorded a shock, wrote investigator Stan Gordon, of Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained (PASU) in a recent journal article. The crash has been a pet project of the Greensburg man "since the night it happened," he said, noting he is still trying to obtain information on the incident.

Although the military eventually labeled the object a meteor, as did the Associated Press account published in *The Bulletin* the day after the crash, Gordon says recent evidence, including the discovery of a man who saw the object, supports the idea that the object was a true UFO.

"I was a teen-ager then," said John (not his real name). "It was in the early part of December and there was a little snow and a little rain, and mud."

He was called to the scene after the 4:44 p.m. crash as a fireman from the Latrobe area, to search for the crashed object.

"I had seen a fiery object in the sky. I can't say exactly which direction but it was coming from the north. It was not too much longer and the fire whistle went off," he said. "I answered the call and was told they needed a search team because at the time they believed it was a downed aircraft. And I thought, 'My God, this is what I have just seen'."

When firemen arrived at the Kecksburg Fire Hall, maps were reviewed and groups were given sections to search.

"It was getting semi-dusk and we had flashlights. We were taken in the back of a truck and dropped off and told to go 'this way' which we did. I was not on the initial contact team. Another team found the object.

"It was definitely, unequivocally, positively, absolutely no aircraft, plane, helicopter or rocket, at least not to my knowledge. It was in an area that was part field and part woods and we went down to investigate," he said.

"We found the object had crashed at a 30 to 40 degree angle, and had broken off numerous tree branches in its impact path. My initial reaction was 'This is no airplane.' I observed no shrapnel, no breaking up of the fuselage. It was one solid piece, no doors, no windows.

"Preliminary searches found no bodies or casualties. It was shaped like an acorn, laying on its side, like the acorn nut is in its shell when it's on a tree," he explained. "I've been a machinist for 24 years and I've worked with a tremendous amount of different metals, and I have never seen any type of metal that looked even close to that."

John said the object was not broken, "not even cracked, just dented a bit. It did not give off smoke, steam or vapors, at least none that we could see."

Reports from neighbors in the area said it had given off a faint trail of blue smoke, which disappeared after the crash.

He described the portion visible as between eight and 10 feet long, six and seven feet across, and said a man of average height would probably have had little trouble standing up inside it. The crater it plowed into the ground was "rectangular in shape."

John said the state police were there and the area was soon quarantined.

"They drove us out. It was late at night when we finally got back to the fire hall and it had been completely taken over by the military. They were carrying in large pieces of equipment, radios and such, and they had armed guards posted outside so nobody could get in or out. The firemen were thrown out. We weren't even allowed in to use the bathroom.

"The military had control of the whole operation," John recalled. "After a while we saw a flat bed truck come by with some other military equipment, a crane or something.

"It was not too much longer, an hour, an hour and a half, when the trucks came back and there was a large object on the back of the flat bed, covered by a tarp, with military escorts front and back. I got the feeling that if you had stepped on the road you were dead meat. They weren't stopping for anything."

Although the object was later said to be a meteorite, John doesn't buy that explanation.

"It had writing on it, not like your average writing, but more like ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. It had sort of a bumper on it, like a ribbon about six to 10 inches wide, and it stood out. It was elliptical the whole way around and the writing was on this bumper. It's nothing like I've ever seen, and I'm an avid reader. I read a lot of books on Egypt, the Incas, Peruvians, Russians and I've never to this day come across anything that looked like that."

John notes that later it was denied that the object was even a meteorite, and the military "denied they were even in the area. But I know there were Air Force and Army personnel involved. It was like they just came out of the woodwork."

Gordon's research has revealed that one of the military groups involved was most likely to be the 662nd Radar Squadron, based at the

Oakdale Armory, located near Greater Pittsburgh International Airport.

The squadron was found to be under the control of the Aerospace Defense Command, and attempts to get information on the Kecksburg crash, through the Freedom of Information Act, have not provided much to go on.

One response said there had been no record of the squadron being activated on that date, Gordon said, wondering how so much equipment and personnel could be activated while the monthly report showed no entry on Dec. 9.

Through his research, Gordon says he knows the Air Force was still investigating UFO cases at the public level then, and that it was apparently the Project Blue Book staff which contacted the 662nd squadron. Subsequent reports have led him to theorize that even the Project Blue Book staff was not made aware of objects which could "affect national security," and that some intelligence teams investigated crashes of "foreign space vehicles."

Another strange occurrence that night, Gordon said, was reports by some civilians that radiation was released. He explained that some children playing in the area had reportedly been told by military personnel that that was a possibility, and men in decontamination suits were allegedly seen at the site later the next day.

Although he has considered the possibility that the object could have been space debris or a test device, Gordon says documents and evidence obtained in the last few years lead more in the direction of it being a "true UFO."

John concurs.

"It was definitely not of this planet. At the time I was a skeptical teen, but when you see something like that you don't forget it. When you get called out like that from the fire department you think you're going out looking for an aircraft of some sort, not a UFO.

"I'll never forget it. I still want to know what the hell it was."

The UFO Hypothesis Gels

The object was investigated by investigators as a UFO or extraterrestrial spacecraft, since the US military, which obtained the craft, did not divulge any specifics except to term it a "meteorite".

Dale Farmer, a UFO investigator in Cincinnati, summarized what was done in this line of investigation. A great deal of it was performed by Stan Gordon of Irwin. Dale summarized this in 1994:

My name is Dale and I belong to a local group of UFO researchers in the Cincinnati, Ohio area. Besides going out into the field we produce a tv program. This program is aired on Warner Cable's public access in Cincinnati. Along with the TV program we have a newsletter that reflects the program but also provides information on the UFO phenomenon.

I hope this is of interest to you all.

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Premiere Issue

Welcome to UFO Update newsletter. This publication is not simply a companion piece for the UFO Update cable access program, but an informative and -- hopefully -- thought provoking forum on the UFO phenomenon.

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Kecksburg

In the late afternoon hours of December 9, 1965, something fell from the sky and landed in a wooded ravine just west of Kecksburg, Pennsylvania. There was concern that it might be a small airplane, and the fire department responded to the scene. Four teams of rescuers combed the area and eventually something was found. It wasn't an airplane, it just may have been something not of this world.

Shortly after the firefighters made their find, a detail from the Air Force's 662nd Radar Squadron, based near Pittsburgh, arrived to seal off the area. More troops and a flatbed truck soon arrived and the object was removed from the ravine and spirited away. Stan Gordon, MUFON state director for Pittsburgh who has studied the case for over ten years, has gathered government documents that indicate that as many as 212 military personnel were on the scene that night.

According to eyewitnesses the object appeared bell- or acorn-shaped and measured ten feet long by eight feet wide. It was bronze colored and adorned with a collar near its rounder end. On the collar were etched strange figures that resembled no earthly language.

The original, official explanation was that the Kecksburg object was a meteorite. Clearly, the eye-witness descriptions eliminate this rationale.

A more recent identification has been offered by NASA scientist, James Oberg. Although there is no record of such an event, he contends that the object was a Russian payload. The Air Force arrived to take it away so that its heat shield could be analyzed. One would also hope they studied what made it shatterproof, too! After all, an accidental re-entry is a high velocity event, and any manmade object would either burn-up in transit or disintegrate upon impact with the earth.

Both the meteorite and Russian satellite theories are ruled out by another interesting point: the object flew no faster than a small airplane and made no fewer than four sharp course changes before touching down in Kecksburg. The descent was powered and controlled. If it had been a manned Soviet capsule, we would have been accused of somehow shooting it down to steal Russian space science secrets! Sorry, Dr. Oberg, try again.

So, what did become of the Kecksburg UFO? Most likely it was shipped to Wright-Patterson where the Foreign Technologies Division would try to take it apart. There is, in fact some testimony that might bear that out.

Kecksburg Connection

On September 19, 1990, NBC's UNSOLVED MYSTERIES aired a re-enactment of the Kecksburg incident. It was an evenhanded treatment that featured comments from eyewitnesses and Stan Gordon. Soon after the broadcast, Gordon was overwhelmed with calls from viewers who thought they might add some information to the case. One of the callers was an Ohio man who claimed to have seen the acorn shaped object a few days after the Kecksburg event while delivering bricks to property adjacent to Wright-Patterson.

Gordon passed this story on to a local investigator Len Stringfield. Stringfield, assisted by researcher Brian Thompson, pursued the case and interviewed the witness. At the time, the source preferred to go by his first name: Myron.

The following is a summary of his testimony:

Myron and his cousin, "JS", delivered a large inventory of

special glazed bricks to Wright-Patterson just a few days after the Kecksburg event. Curiously, the order came through the Navy. The bricks were to be used to construct a double-thick, lead lined structure 50 x 80 feet in size, inside an already existing red brick building.

After following a jeep bearing an officer (possibly a general) and a driver to the site, they were left to unload the bricks. Myron noticed that there were several men dressed in what resembled decontamination suits scurrying about. He also recognized the Navy officer who had selected and ordered the special brick. After some time, Myron took a break from his labors. His curiosity got the best of him, so he decided to have a look at what was so important. The security officers had apparently grown used to Myron's presence and failed to check his approach soon enough.

Although his glimpse was brief before being hustled back to the brick delivery by a guard, Myron claimed to have seen plenty. There, inside the building and supported by metal scaffolding was a bell-shaped object about ten feet tall.

Although Myron describes the object as bell-shaped, it was his viewing of the UNSOLVED MYSTERIES program that caused him to contact Stan Gordan. In fact, when asked by Stringfield if "acorn-shaped" was a suitable description, Myron agreed it was.

Myron's story is supported by his cousin, JS, who was able to add his own observation.

The day before he worked with Myron, JS had made a solo run to Wright-Patterson with the first load of bricks. He recalled seeing a flatbed trailer near the red brick building. Its cargo, although covered with a tarp, was "liberty bell" shaped and stood eight to ten feet tall.

Clearly, there is a strong indication that Myron and JS witnessed the arrival and initial analysis of the Kecksburg object at Wright-Patterson. But there are some questions that must be asked:

- Why were the bricks ordered through the Navy?
- If the Navy was the investigative body, why wasn't the object taken to a naval base?
- Was this action directed by the Joint Chief of Staff?

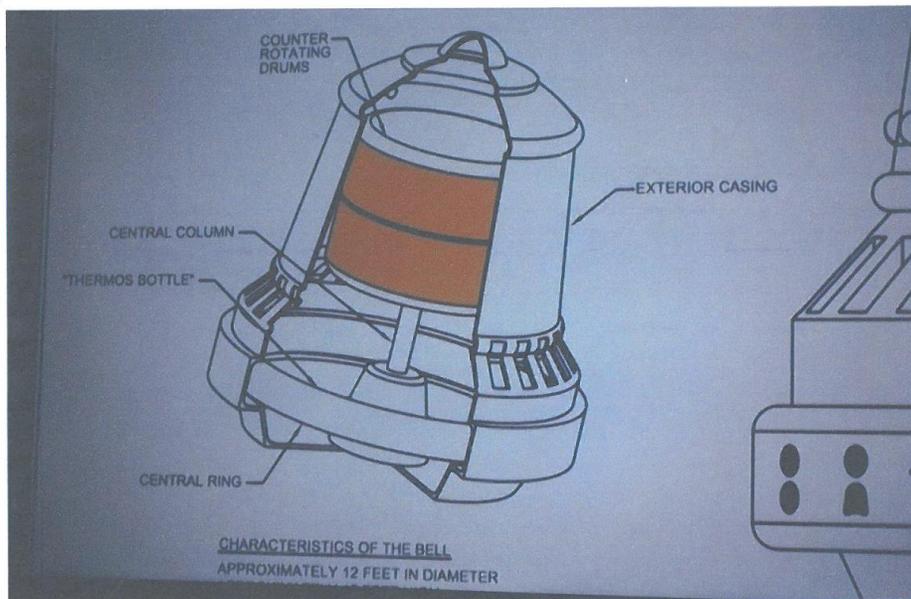
The implications are astounding and suggest that the Kecksburg object was considered by the U.S. military as a violator of American air space.

For an in-depth examination of the Kecksburg episode, the

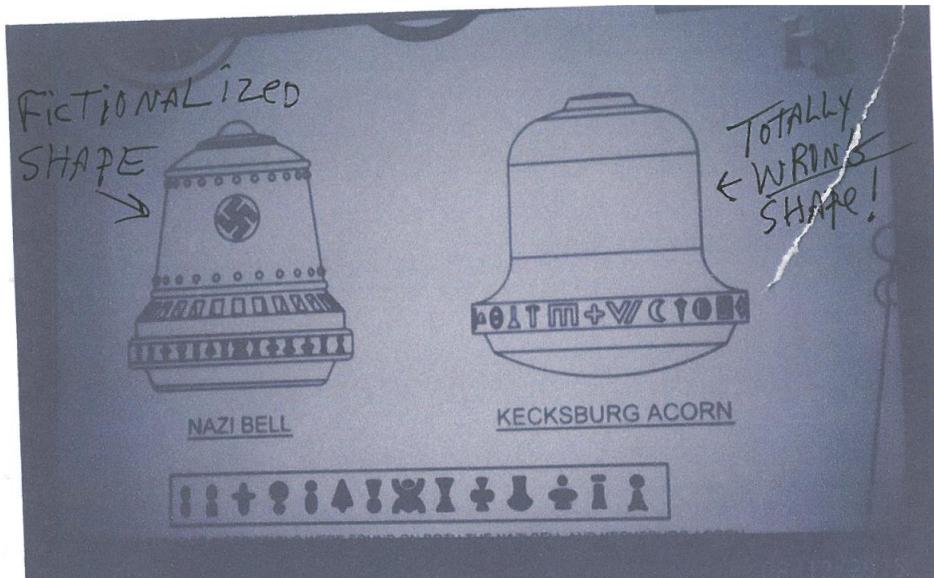
reader is encouraged to consult UFO CRASH/RETRIEVALS: THE INNER SANCTUM by Leonard Stringfield. THE ROSWELL INCIDENT, UFO CRASH AT ROSWELL, and CRASH AT CORONA are all still available through local bookstores.

A Nazi Time Machine?

Some UFO authors, stretching waayyy too far, have noted the resemblance of the object (roughly) to the Nazi Bell, a strange craft purported to exist in the last days of the Third Reich. The Nazi Bell, whatever it was, has not a great deal of evidence about its purpose or even its existence.



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Photos comparing the unsubstantiated Nazi Bell with Kecksburg. Supplied from an Unknown Source by Joseph Peklicz. This is wild speculation, with probably no basis in reality.

In my opinion, this “connection” is merely wild speculation. The notation is by Joseph Peklicz, who is a student of UFOs.

The Likely Correct Hypothesis: Kosmos 96

A Funny Thing happened on the way to Venus.

On December 9, 1965, the Russian spacecraft Kosmos 96, a prototype of a Venus probe, probably intended for a Venus mission, did not break Earth orbit and instead entered the Earth’s atmosphere. This much is known. This may be the Kecksburg object. This hypothesis, advanced by James Oberg, seems to be the correct one, but we are not sure. Only the re-entry probe would have made it to Kecksburg. It is not as large as the Kecksburg object replica at the Volunteer Fire Department.

Below, a Russian picture of the Venus probe Kosmos 96—its resemblance to the Kecksburg object is uncanny.

The “alien writing” noticed by some probably was Cyrillic (Russian) letters.



The United States at the time was extremely interested in recovery of Soviet space debris of any type, since it would be a clue to the technology of re-entry heat shields employed by the USSR not only in their space probes, but also in their nuclear warhead re-entry casings. Thus the Kecksburg object would have been of great value and obtained by special operations troops operating under the name "Operation Moon Dust", and Operation "Blue Fly", which was organized to recover many spacecraft parts. At first, the operations were denied to have ever existed, but in 1994 the Air Force, in response to a Senate inquiry, acknowledged the operations existed but reported that all files were destroyed, except two, currently classified.

Additional documents were found by a House investigation after 1997. According to Leslie Kean, they showed:

- In 1965, a three-man team was sent to recover an object of unknown origin reported downed in Kecksburg, PA. (Witnesses state an object was recovered; the Air Force says nothing was found.)
- In August 1967, an object described as a satellite crashed and was recovered in the Sudan under Moon Dust. (The description on the DIA document released by the State Department does not fit that of a satellite.)
- In 1968, Project Moon Dust recovered four unknown objects in Nepal.
- Also in 1968, a "dome-shaped object" with no identification marks was retrieved underwater off Cape Town, South Africa. The metal object had been subjected to extreme heat and showed no signs of corrosion. NASA determined it was made of "almost pure aluminum" and stated that the NASA analysis of the sample and photographs "does not otherwise provide a clue as to its origin or function although it is possible it is a space object of US origin."
- In 1970, Moon Dust investigated a metal sphere that fell "with three loud explosions and then burned for five days" in South America. It had "ports" which had been melted closed.
- A May 1970 State Department document describes a fallen, unidentified object in Bolivia, depicted in the newspapers as metal and egg-shaped. The Department expresses a desire to assist the Bolivian Air Force in the investigation. "The general region had more than its share of reports of UFOs this past week," the document notes.

It says that Panama and Paraguay checked with appropriate government agencies and "no direct correlation with known space objects that may have reentered the earth's atmosphere near May 6 can be made."

No information exists as to the results of these investigations and no information exists as to the whereabouts of the Kecksburg object or any other debris collected anywhere else.

The Kosmos 96 hypothesis remains the best one, but both the U.S. Air Force and a NASA spokesperson deny that the Kecksburg object was Kosmos 96. Although it re-entered December 9, 1965, it hit the ground hours earlier, according to the Air Force in a report in 1991. It struck in Canada at 3:18 AM, 13 hours before Kecksburg at 4:45 pm.

Nicholas L. Johnson, the NASA Chief Scientist for Orbital Debris stated in 2003:

“I can tell you categorically, that there is no way that any debris from Kosmos 96 could have landed in Pennsylvania anywhere around 4:45 p.m....That’s an absolute. Orbital mechanics is very strict.”

Not quite true . There is indeed room for disagreement. Parts of Kosmos 96 may well have re-entered, but if it separated from its booster and possible solar panels, the higher density capsule might well have completed about 8 ½ more orbits before coming down in Kecksburg, especially if the spacecraft had an automatic active rocket thruster control system.

It cannot be ruled out. It very strongly depends on when Kosmos 96 broke apart, and if the breakup was done by atmospheric re-entry or if it was an automated or command function, and what sort of control function existed on the spacecraft. This is not known. We cannot therefore rule out Kosmos 96.



Kecksburg Fire Hall, home of the first responders in history to first respond to a spacecraft crash.

Thus, Kecksburg object remains a genuine mystery. A craft from an extraterrestrial civilization absolutely cannot be ruled out, and this hypothesis must remain. But more likely it was Kosmos 96. But the case is not closed, the fact collection is not over, unless the collected material is destroyed together with the files. We hope not. Now that 50 years have elapsed, there is pressure from a Presidential Directive to release information 50 years old formerly classified.