

# CRASH FROM OUTER SPACE

UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF **FLYING SAUCERS,**  
**ALIEN BEINGS, AND ROSWELL**

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## What's That in the Sky?

**O**n the evening of June 13, 1947, William “Mack” Brazel sat on the porch of his tiny ranch house near Roswell, New Mexico. After a long, hot day of hard work, the cool stillness of the desert night was a welcome relief. Relaxing, Brazel looked out across the vast expanse of the sky.

On the horizon, a storm brewed. Bolts of jagged lightning flashed and flashed again, illuminating a mass of thick, swirling clouds. Brazel leaned forward. In his thirty years as a sheep rancher, he'd seen plenty of New Mexico storms. But he'd never seen anything like this. The storm clouds had turned

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Mack Brazel in 1947.

blood red, and lightning kept striking the same spot over and over. The thunderclaps sounded like explosions.

The sky ignited!

Like fireworks, rays of orange and red spread out across the sky. For a moment, the flat terrain of the desert came into stark relief. Brazel could

see the sagebrush and cacti as clearly as if it were daytime. Then it was dark again. And a single, fiery object—seemingly from outer space—came whirling and twisting, plummeting to Earth. Seconds later there was a burst of brilliant light. Something had crashed out there. But what?

Brazel dismissed the idea of it being a meteorite. The object had been too big. Instead, he suspected that a military plane had gone down. Or maybe, some sort of secret weapon was being tested out

there. Lots of strange things had been seen in New Mexico's skies over the past few years. Brazel, like most folks around Roswell, figured they were part of the US military's "hush-hush" experiments.

New Mexico, with its scrubby, largely empty acres, was a hotbed for the creation of top secret military weapons. At the south end of Roswell stood the Roswell Army Air Field, where the fighting 509th Bomb Wing—the world's only combat unit trained to drop nuclear bombs—practiced. About 100 miles west of Roswell at Alamogordo, the first atomic bomb explosion had shot up its mushroom cloud just two years earlier. Then, of course, there was the Los Alamos Laboratory just three hours north. This was where scientists had developed the first atomic bomb, and where they now worked on nuclear weapons with the potential for a thousand times more explosive power. What's more, outside Albuquerque, at Sandia Base, the military was working on creating atomic bombs the size of hand grenades. And although secrecy shrouded the activities at White Sands Proving Ground and

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Missile Range—a two-hour drive from Roswell—it was common knowledge that many of the nation’s classified weapons were housed there.

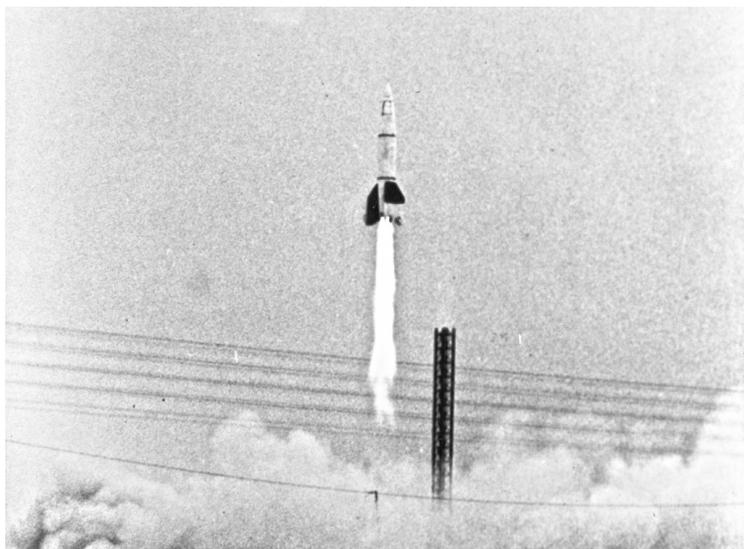
The military’s obsession with nuclear weapons stemmed from World War II. A nightmarish conflict that had ended just two years earlier, it had pitted the Allies led by America, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union (now Russia) against the main partners in the Axis alliance—Germany, Italy, and Japan. Fighting had occurred all over the globe, and had left sixty million people dead. Even after peace was proclaimed, the world’s nations remained tense. The worst friction, however, was between the United States and the Soviet Union. During the war, they had been partners. But now they were competitors, each vying to be *the* superpower in the world. By 1947, a “cold war” existed between them, as each feared the other would start World War III. And that conflict, US military leaders believed, would be fought with nuclear bombs.

So far, the United States alone possessed this fearsome weapon. America had dropped atomic



The United States government perfected its atomic weapons after World War II in the vast emptiness of the American Southwest. Here, in 1951, members of the 11th Airborne Division kneel on the ground to watch a mushroom cloud from a nearby atomic bomb test.

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V-2 rockets are launched at White Sands Proving Ground and Missile Range in 1947 as part of the government's classified-weapons program.

bombs—more powerful than anything previously made by humankind—on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The bombs had essentially vaporized both cities, and killed a quarter of a million people. American military leaders knew it would not be long before the Soviet Union developed their own nuclear weapons. How best to face down this new enemy? The answer seemed obvious: America needed even more

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advanced technologies to fight future wars. And that meant science had to be on the frontline. Experimenting. Innovating. Creating.

More bombs.

More missiles.

More secret weapons that would sow terror in the hearts of Soviet leaders.

Mack Brazel watched the pulsing red glow on the horizon until it faded to black. What had just crashed out there? He'd find out tomorrow.



The 509th Bomb Wing's insignia includes a mushroom cloud, a reminder that it is the only unit trained to drop nuclear bombs.