

# Philip Corso's Roswellmania

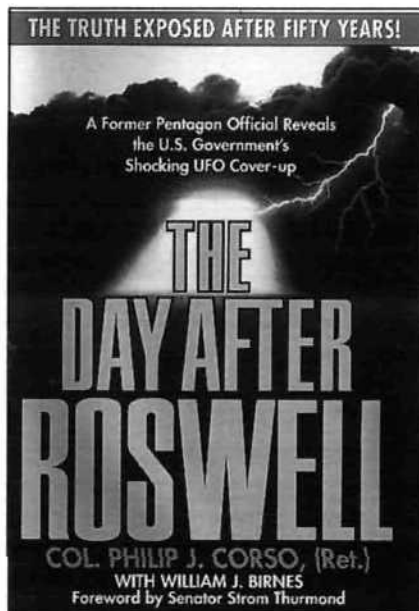
BRAD SPARKS

*The Day After Roswell.* By Col. Philip J. Corso (Ret.) with William J. Birnes.  
Pocket Books/Simon & Schuster. 1997. ISBN 0-671-00461-1. 341 pp. Hardcover, \$24.

The only thing extraterrestrial in Philip Corso's book *The Day After Roswell* is the height of his tall tales, certainly the tallest Roswell tales to date. For those of you blessed with not having heard it before, his thesis is that many of our high-tech advances such as the transistor, microcircuits, lasers, fiber optics, microwave ovens, Star Wars SDI weapons, and so on, all actually came from "reverse engineering" the alien technology purportedly found in the UFO that crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947—a feat largely made possible by Corso himself when he allegedly divvied up the alien goodies while working at Army R&D in the early 1960s. But in his haste to cash in on the fiftieth-anniversary Roswellmania, he has made some fantastic blunders of history that expose him in the most embarrassing way. These are not mere errors or inaccuracies, as his coauthor William Birnes claims (Microsoft Network online chat interview, December 9, 1997; <http://forums.msn.com/UFO>). They are *impossibilities*.

Corso cannot resist putting himself

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at the center stage of great events of history, courted by big names such as Robert Kennedy and his "old friend" J. Edgar Hoover (pp. 2, 37, 84, 156, 191, 206–209, 255; page references throughout are to the edition of Corso's book minus the now withdrawn foreword by Sen. Strom Thurmond). In fact, Corso's "other book" is called *I Walked with Giants*.

Corso is ever the powerful hero, but he trips on his way up the stairs to the stage. Corso has apparently made a cynical calculation that he will be able to make his bundle and retreat before anyone can develop a sufficient publicity base to expose him, so he saw no need to

research his lines to get them perfect. The only thing he has carefully avoided is getting trapped into endorsing a particular Roswell crash site or time line from the multitude now being promoted. He cannot clarify the confusion for us because he claims not to remember too clearly the elementary details of the date and location of what he claims is the single most important event in human history (pp. 5ff)—to say nothing of his military career—even though he states he had two years to pore over the top-secret Roswell files while at Army R&D headquarters. Instead, all he really knows is what happened the "day after" Roswell, starting from when the alien material was transported, hence the title of the book (p. 55). How convenient.

Corso tells how he personally intimidated the CIA director of covert operations to stop having CIA agents follow him around. This is part of Corso's story of how he got the job of exploiting alien technology as head of the Foreign Technology desk of Army R&D in "early 1961" (pp. 50, 63–64, 177). The alien microchips and other technology had been recovered from Roswell decades earlier but gathered dust in one filing cabinet, together with extensive files and documents on the case, until Corso came along and figured out what to do with them. A "couple of days" before he was officially expected to begin at the Pentagon (p. 37), he was led through backdoor means to meet his new boss

and old friend, Lt. Gen. Arthur Trudeau, head of Army R&D. (His military records indicate he arrived at Army R&D Headquarters in the Pentagon from Baltimore on May 5, 1961.) This was supposedly done so that no one would know officially that Corso was inside the Pentagon yet and so he would not be followed. Corso asked why he couldn't go through the "front door." Trudeau allegedly replied, "Because they're already watching you, Phil." Thus Corso learned he was being tailed by CIA personnel (pp. 37, 44, 87, 107, 174, 185), but he was determined to not play along.

Corso claims he marched right past a startled secretary and into the office of the CIA director of covert operations, Frank "Wiesner" (it's "Wisner"), at CIA headquarters in "Langley, Virginia" (also wrong, but more on this later) and told him off (p. 87). This must have been shortly after the initial meeting with Gen. Trudeau, in early May 1961. Corso claims he warned "Wiesner" that he would start carrying a gun and if he ever found a CIA man following him again, the agent would be found with bullet holes in his head. Later in 1961, claims Corso (p. 87), "Wiesner" himself was found dead by hanging in a London hotel room, the victim of suicide.

The problem is that Frank G. Wisner had been hospitalized and replaced as top CIA covert operator nearly three years earlier, in August 1958, first by acting covert operations director Richard M. Helms and then by Wisner's permanent replacement, Richard M. Bissell, on January 1, 1959. Thus Bissell was the actual CIA Chief of the Clandestine Service (or Deputy Director for Plans) serving in 1961, not Wisner.

Bissell is famous in history as the leader of the U-2 and the Corona spy satellite projects at the CIA, as well as the architect of the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion that had dominated the headlines for the few weeks before Corso arrived at the Pentagon in 1961. So it is surprising that the supposed intelligence expert Corso has such a poor grasp of intelligence history as to not know these

well-known facts. Bissell's name was repeatedly cited as the chief planner of the Bays of Pigs operation in front-page news stories at the time (*New York Times*, April 21, May 3, 1961; also July 17, 1961, p. 13). Corso also should have known who Bissell was since he claims that he took over the Corona spy satellite program in 1961 (pp. 131, 136)—and that was Bissell's project. I interviewed Bissell almost twenty years ago about his UFO involvement and Project Corona, and naturally he never mentioned Corso or Roswell.

Worse still, Wisner was not even in the United States in 1961 but was in London. Wisner had been sent overseas to take the less demanding post of CIA Chief of Station in London on August 6, 1959, but was recalled from London in the spring of 1962 and resigned from the CIA entirely in August 1962. So Corso could not have driven to Wisner's office in 1961 and barged in, let alone slipped through CIA Security so easily to threaten the top spook in the Agency.

Furthermore, the new CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, was not yet open for business in May 1961, when Corso's confrontation with the top CIA spook supposedly took place there. The new building did not receive its first CIA employees until September 1961. (See *New York Times*, May 3, May 21 [*New York Times Magazine*], Sept. 28, Oct. 8, Nov. 6, 1961.)

Worst of all, Frank Wisner did not "hang himself" in a "London hotel" in 1961. He killed himself with a shotgun on his family farm in Galena, Maryland, on October 29, 1965—years after Corso claims the suicide occurred, and on the wrong side of the Atlantic. There's no need to add to the Wisner family's tragedy with preposterous stories linking him to extraterrestrial investigations, distorting the sad details of his demise, and even falsely accusing him of being "one of the best friends" the Soviets ever had (p. 87). Wisner had been depressed since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which he helped inspire as the top CIA clandestine official, only to see it brutally

suppressed. Wisner never recovered from his personal anguish over the tragedy.

Coauthor Birnes defends the story Corso told him about Wisner, but the impossibilities remain unexplained.

Corso again imaginatively inserts himself into history by alleging that, as the Army Foreign Technology czar in charge of Roswell, he helped President Kennedy decide to send a man to the moon. Corso alleges that he worked on a moon-base plan called Project Horizon to help keep the ETs at bay, a plan he urged on Attorney General Robert Kennedy in a personal meeting in May 1962 (pp. 2, 37, 156, 191, 206, 255). Soon after this meeting, says Corso, JFK announced the Apollo program goal to land a man on the moon by the end of the decade, and Corso claims credit (p. 156). There is no proof of any of this, so he pads his book with fifty-plus pages of irrelevant Project Horizon technical documentation, none of which mentions ETs or UFOs or Roswell (pp. 275–332).

The only difficulty is that JFK made the famous Apollo project announcement on May 25, 1961, a year earlier than Corso's story indicates. He is tightly locked into his 1962 date for his involvement in inspiring JFK's Apollo plan (pp. 155, 255), and there is no way out.

Birnes defends the 1962 date, saying the meeting was "more concerned with the CIA, and the KGB's penetration of it, than the space race." If so, then Corso must retract his impossible claim of helping JFK's 1961 Apollo decision in 1962, as that would require time travel.

Corso states in one place that only "five to six of us" in all three military services were privy to the Roswell secrets in the 1960s (p. 85). Yet he tells how the Roswell "package" spread out further and further among the services over the years following 1947 with little or no coordination until he came along (pp. 51–62, 71, 73, 78, 82–84). Plus he says that several military members of the committee in control of the Roswell coverup (pp. 62, 69, 71, 74, 82) had spies stationed at the Pentagon (p. 175); that a number of

military pathologists at Walter Reed, Bethesda, and Roswell air base performed autopsies on the alien bodies (pp. 91–92, 96–99, 190); that “military intelligence personnel” developed cattle mutilation surgical methods (p. 181); that many military technicians were involved in test flights of the Roswell craft at Norton, Edwards, and Nellis AFBs (pp. 99–100, 107, 218); and that military personnel served as administrators of an Air Force–CIA “alien technology museum, the final resting place of the Roswell spacecraft” (p. 100). In fact, Corso admits there were a “large number of people who really know the truth” about Roswell by 1961–1963 such as “top-ranking military officers” (p. 100). Corso wants to be the hero in charge of rescuing a huge project involving many people and agencies sharing the Roswell secret. But this contradicts the notion that he was one of a privileged elite, just five or six after fifteen years. If that few were in charge of the Roswell craft after so long, how many were there at the start, zero? Maybe that is the real truth; it started with zero because it never happened.

Birnes’s response to this contradiction is to confuse the dates and quibble over whether the pathologists involved were actually in the military (they were military officers).

Another alleged Corso achievement already mentioned is his purported takeover of Project Corona, the pioneer U.S. spy satellite program. Corso has done a poor job of reading up on space

history, since he could not have actually worked on the real classified Corona program and gotten things so wrong. He does not even know that Corona was CIA! He imagines a ludicrous plot in which one agency has to hide spy satellite payloads aboard another agency’s satellites, all necessitated by NASA’s supposedly assuming control of “all satellite launchings,” including the military’s, from 1958 until the 1970s (pp. 126, 128–129, 138, 144–147, 155–157). But NASA never had control of military launchings. The existence of an Air Force launch pad completely separate from NASA’s Cape Canaveral should settle it. Who does he think has launched satellites from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California from 1959 to the present day? Santa Claus and his elves?

Corso is also the hero of the Cuban missile crisis (pp. 253–258, 269), Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (pp. 4–5, 78, 115, 243, 249–250, 268, 273), the Korean War POW revelations (pp. 2, 37–38, 87), the exposure of KGB moles inside the CIA and elsewhere (pp. 2, 37, 139, 141, 189), and the JFK assassination (pp. 2, 87, 206, 208), which he intimates was due to JFK’s finding out the truth about the CIA. Corso plans a new book, *The Day After Dallas*.

And, of course, Corso is the hero of Earth’s desperate but successful “war” against the ETs (or EBEs, Extraterrestrial Biological Entities, a term he borrowed from the fraudulent MJ-12 documents) (pp. 5, 142, 249–250, 260, 269).

According to Corso, we had negotiated a “surrender” treaty with the aliens until we were able to reverse-engineer enough Roswell weapons to fight back (pp. 268ff). Incidentally, this war against UFOs led to the meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev that ended the Cold War (pp. 262–263, 266, 268).

As Corso modestly boasts, “Sometimes, once in a very long while, you get the chance to save your country, your planet, and even your species at the same time” (p. 273). Corso gives whole new meaning to the term *delusions of grandeur*.

Corso’s notion that many of our high-tech innovations were really back-engineered from extraterrestrials is a new twist on the Ancient Astronauts theory. Instead of saying humans were too stupid to invent pyramids or the wheel on their own and had to get the ideas from space visitors, Corso has updated the concept, saying we got the microwave oven (p. 178) and laptop computers (pp. 170–173) from aliens.

Having established the impossible nature of Corso’s stories involving himself inside CIA headquarters and the Justice Department, I see no need to go into the rest of his claims about his heroic role in getting U.S. industry to reverse-engineer microchips and lasers from his make-believe Roswell spacecraft. The dramatic stories that are easiest to check against historical fact are enough proof of the lack of credibility of Corso’s whole thesis.

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## NEW BOOKS

*Listing here does not preclude future review:*

**But Is It Science?** Edited by Michael Ruse. Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Dr., Amherst, NY 14228-2197. 1996. ISBN 1-57392-087-8. 406 pp. Softcover, \$22.95. Trade paperback edition of valuable anthology on the creation/evolution controversy. Ruse, a philosopher, focuses the book on a theme he finds fascinating and important: What precisely is the status of the various knowledge claims that are being forwarded,

supported, and criticized in the debate? Divided into four sections: The Nineteenth Century Background, Evolution Today, The Creationist Challenge, and The Philosophical Aftermath. Authors include Ruse, Francisco Ayala, Karl Popper, Stephen Jay Gould, John Maynard Smith, Richard Dawkins, Ronald Numbers, Duane Gish, Larry Laudan, and Philip Quine. Also includes excerpts from Charles Darwin and T. H. Huxley, plus Judge William R. Overton’s eloquent opinion in *McLean v. Arkansas*, the 1981 case in which the federal

district judge overturned an Arkansas law requiring “balanced” classroom treatment for evolution and “creation science.”

**The Loch Ness Monster.** Stuart Campbell. Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY. 1997. ISBN 1-57392-178-5. 128 pp. Softcover, \$14.95. A revised, U.S. edition of a book originally published in the U.K. in 1991. Campbell critically examines the facts and fictions regarding the supposed Loch Ness creature. He carefully deals with evidence and claims from, in order, eyewitnesses,