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MAJOR JESSE MARCEL: FOLK HERO OR MYTHOMANIAC?

By Robert G. Todd

The grossly overblown Roswell incident would have remained buried in yellowed newspaper clippings without the "testimony" of Major Jesse A. Marcel, the intelligence officer at Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF) who took the telephone call from Chaves County Sheriff George Wilcox on that fateful Monday, July 7, 1947. Although certain crashed-saucer promoters have attempted to change the date Marcel first heard about the incident in order to accommodate the ever-changing "conventional wisdom," or to accommodate the flawed (or manufactured) "memories" of new "witnesses" as they surface, the fact remains that Marcel himself claimed he got the call on Monday, July 7, 1947.

Sheriff Wilcox presumably informed Marcel that W.W. "Mack" Brazel had ambled into his office with his story of finding strange debris on the ranch he operated in Lincoln County, well outside Sheriff Wilcox's jurisdiction. According to Marcel, he and a Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) agent accompanied Brazel back to the ranch and saw "Wreckage . . . scattered over an area about three quarters of a mile long and several hundred feet wide." Marcel said the object -- whatever it was -- hadn't actually struck the ground, but appeared to have exploded in the air and fell to the ground. One has to wonder why Marcel never mentioned seeing the long gouge the object allegedly made in the earth when it supposedly touched down and shed a large quantity of debris, but apparently not enough debris to prevent it from skipping off again only to crash at a second site miles away. The crashed-saucer promoters have yet to explain this obvious discrepancy.

The debris described by Marcel -- both back in 1947 and decades later -- bears an uncanny resemblance to the debris one would expect to find from a train of weather balloons and radar targets. He described "small beams about three eighths or a half inch square with some sort of hieroglyphics on them that nobody could read." These "beams" looked like balsa wood, but, of course, they weren't balsa wood at all, according to Major Marcel. He said the beams couldn't be broken or burned, and he attributed similarly indestructible qualities to the other bits of debris he saw. The tinfoil (which, of course, wasn't tinfoil at all) was as thin as the foil in a pack of cigarettes, yet it couldn't be bent or even dented. Marcel claimed that "one of the boys" (never identified by name) went to him and told him that he had tried to dent the tinfoil with a sixteen pound sledgehammer, but it wouldn't dent, a claim Marcel apparently accepted without question, even though he hadn't witnessed the attempt himself. Major Marcel said "It was possible to flex this stuff [the tinfoil] back and forth, even to wrinkle it, but you could not put a crease in it that would stay, nor could you dent it at all."

To hear the crashed-saucer promoters tell it, Marcel's credibility is unquestioned. After all, he was the intelligence officer for the only atomic bomb unit then in existence in the entire world, an "elite" unit of hand-picked men who were chosen for their expertise. But just how reliable was he? To find out, I obtained a copy of his military personnel file, which consists of nearly two hundred pages of material relating to his career in the Air Force.

In his interviews with various Roswell "investigators," Marcel made certain claims about his military service. One of those claims was that he had served in the National Guard both in Louisiana and Texas. Marcel's personnel file confirms that he served as an enlisted man in an infantry company with the Louisiana National Guard from June 1926 to June 1929, and that he was honorably discharged as a sergeant. The file also confirms that he served as an enlisted man in an artillery unit with the

Texas National Guard from July 1936 to June 1939, and that he was honorably discharged with the rank of private. The file also shows that, in January 1942, while still employed with the Shell Oil Company in Houston, Texas, Marcel applied for an appointment as a second lieutenant in the "Officers' Reserve Corps," and requested assignment to the Air Force Combat Command (AFCC). According to the records, in February 1942, Marcel was recommended for appointment to second lieutenant in the Army of the United States (AUS), "for duty with the Army Air Forces". He accepted the appointment and entered active duty in April 1942, just as he had claimed to Roswell investigators. But the personnel file becomes far more interesting when compared against Marcel's more impressive claims about his military service.

For example, Marcel claimed he was an aide to General Hap Arnold, and that it had been Arnold who decided he should go to intelligence school. This claim is false. As already noted, when Marcel applied for an appointment as a second lieutenant, he was still working for the Shell Oil Company in Houston, Texas. When Marcel accepted the appointment and entered active duty, his very first assignment was as a student at the Army Air Forces Intelligence School (AAFIS) in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The decision to send him to intelligence school had been made by the Air Force even before Marcel accepted the appointment and before he served even one day in the Army Air Forces. Not only was the decision to send Marcel to intelligence school made before Marcel even entered the service, but it was also decided that, after completing intelligence school, Marcel would be assigned to a combat unit as a "Photo Interpretation Officer," both decisions undoubtedly based on Marcel's employment at Shell Oil where he made maps from aerial photographs. Marcel's claim was a blatant falsehood. Moreover, the nature of his claim does not lend itself to an innocent explanation, except perhaps for delusions of grandeur.

Marcel also claimed he had "flying experience" prior to going into the Air Force, and that he had been a "private pilot" who had started flying in 1928. He said he had accumulated 3,000 hours of flight time as a pilot, and 8,000 hours of total flying time. His personnel file, however, does not support these claims. Nowhere on his application for appointment (completed and signed by Marcel in January 1942), or the "Classification Questionnaire for Reserve Officers" (completed and signed by Marcel in February 1942), did he mention any experience as a pilot. He didn't even mention that he had flown in aircraft as a passenger, although he did reveal important pieces of information such as his hobbies of amateur photography and amateur radio, and that he had acted in school and community plays, and had sung in a quartet over radio and at parties. His participation in volleyball, baseball, and tennis was noted in other official records as well, but the closest he came to indicating any civilian involvement with anything airborne was his description of his work for Shell Oil Company, where he made maps from aerial photographs. If indeed he had a private pilot's certificate in civilian life, he never hinted at it in any of the many official forms and other documents he was required to complete or verify throughout his military career. It doesn't seem likely that modesty prevented him from revealing this information to the air arm of the military services.

Among Marcel's other claims was that he flew in combat as a waist gunner, a bombardier, and as a pilot. While his personnel file indicates he flew on combat missions, it does not support his more impressive claims. Since Marcel's primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) was "Intelligence Staff Officer (Combat)," we may reasonably assume he flew on combat missions to assess bomb damage, and/or to identify possible

future targets or targets of opportunity. The records show that, throughout his entire Air Force career, he had no aeronautical rating whatsoever, not as a bombardier, nor in any other crew position. Bombardiers required extensive training, and nowhere in his file does it show he received such training, or that he was even considered for such training. Pilots also required extensive training, and, again, the file shows Marcel did not receive that training, nor was he even considered for such training. His "Reserve Officer Career Brief," dated 20 November 1947, lists his flying experience as "NONE." In another document in the file, dated 19 August 1948, General Ramey specifically stated that Marcel was NOT a rated pilot, a fact Ramey noted would limit Marcel's career in the Air Force.

Nevertheless, it appears that many World War II bomber pilots allowed each member of the crew (including enlisted personnel) an opportunity to fly the aircraft at least once, so they would be more familiar with the controls should the pilot and copilot become incapacitated. It seems this practice was credited for saving more than one ship and its crew. If Marcel piloted any aircraft during the war, it surely was when the pilot let him fly the plane to familiarize him with the controls. Had the pilot and copilot actually become incapacitated and had Marcel been called upon to save the ship, you can be certain we would have heard about it. That is the only set of circumstances under which Marcel would have been allowed to pilot an aircraft in combat.

As for his claim that he flew as a waist gunner, the records show he had no training for that position either. According to the file, Marcel was scored for his proficiency in the use of firearms, and scored an unimpressive 44% with a pistol. The records also show he fired 25 rounds from a Thompson submachine gun, 40 rounds from a carbine, and 20 rounds from a 22-caliber rifle. According to his service record, that was the full extent of his hands-on exposure to firearms. Furthermore, the position of waist gunner was an enlisted man's position, not an officer's position. Even so, bombardiers and navigators also had training as gunners -- but intelligence officers did not. Nowhere does Marcel's service record show he had any training as a gunner.

Given the above facts, it might seem downright incredible that Marcel actually claimed he had been awarded five Air Medals because he shot down five enemy planes while manning the waist gun of a B-24 bomber. The official records, however, show otherwise. These records -- some signed by Marcel himself -- clearly show he was awarded only two Air Medals (one Air Medal and an oak leaf cluster for a subsequent award of the same medal). Moreover, the citations giving the reasons for the awards make absolutely no mention of Marcel's having shot down even one enemy aircraft. In fact, the citations make it clear the medals were awarded because Marcel had flown on enough combat missions for enough hours to qualify for the awards.

While commendable, two Air Medals are not five. In terms of numbers, Marcel claimed he received 150% more Air Medals than he actually received, a significant exaggeration by any reasonable standard. He also grossly misrepresented the circumstances under which the medals were awarded. And, once again, there is no innocent explanation for this rather glaring discrepancy.

There may be a grain of truth to his claims of manning a waist gun, to the extent he was allowed to squeeze off a few rounds to see what it was like, but the claim he shot down five enemy aircraft and was awarded five Air Medals as a result is a blatant lie. Five confirmed "kills" (officially called "victories") would have made Marcel an "ace," and his achievement would have been noted in his service record in no uncertain terms. It is not.

Marcel also contributed to a misunderstanding regarding his rank. The military ranking system has changed significantly over the years, becoming less complicated in the process. The crashed-saucer promoters never fail to mention that Marcel attained the rank of lieutenant colonel, as if this automatically bestows credibility on anything he had to say. What they don't say (probably because they don't know it) is that Marcel's active-duty rank never rose above major. When he left active duty in September 1950, the highest rank he had attained while on

active duty was still major. Marcel told receptive (if not eager) Roswell "investigators" that he was promoted to lieutenant colonel in December 1947, but that -- incredibly -- he didn't find out about the promotion until he left the service (presumably meaning when he left active duty), because "They kept me so busy I never even looked at my personal files."

The official records show that Marcel was indeed promoted to lieutenant colonel in December 1947 -- in the Air Force Reserve. Despite his reserve rank, his active-duty rank was still major. Nobody walked around saluting him and calling him "Colonel."

As for his claim that he didn't find out about the promotion until after he left the service, it was an outright lie. Not only did he know about the promotion, but he had specifically requested it in a 29 October 1947 letter to the commanding officer of the 509th Bomb Group. By letter dated 20 November 1947, Marcel was informed he had been appointed a lieutenant colonel "in the Officers Reserve Corps," and was further advised that the appointment would be cancelled if he did not accept it by signing the oath of office "within a reasonable time." Marcel signed the oath on 1 December 1947, thereby accepting the appointment officially. Marcel claimed they had kept him so busy that he didn't find out about the promotion until he left active duty in September 1950, *almost three years later!*

It appears Marcel fed the faithful other lies about his background. He told Roswell "investigators" that he had a bachelor's degree in Physics from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Marcel had been stationed in Washington during part of his assignment with the Strategic Air Command (SAC), from 16 August to 9 November 1948; and during his assignment with the Air Force organization responsible for detecting foreign atomic explosions, from 26 December 1948 to September 1950. He also claimed he attended the University of Wisconsin, Ohio State University, New York University, and Louisiana State University (LSU).

The forms Marcel filled out himself prior to entering active duty show that he claimed he attended LSU for one year. On one form he said he had been a "special student," while on another he said he had taken non-credit courses in Mathematics, English, and Physics. On records dated later, the one year at LSU grew to one and a half years, with no obvious explanation for the discrepancy, aside from the fact that the information had to have come from Marcel himself. There are no records in the file that show the Air Force made any attempt to verify his attendance at LSU. When I wrote to LSU to verify Marcel's claim, they informed me they could find no record of him, although they did find the records for his son. A second search produced the same results.

Marcel claimed he completed work on his bachelor's degree at The George Washington University, and that he had in fact received a degree. Yet, when I wrote to the University, they informed me they could find no record of Marcel. And, once again, a second search produced the same results.

No attempt was made to contact the other universities he claimed he attended, although there is no indication he ever lived in Wisconsin, Ohio, or New York where he would have had the opportunity to attend these universities in person. When he left active duty in September 1950, he apparently returned to Louisiana where he was self-employed as a television repairman. None of the records in Marcel's personnel file with the records dating as late as June 1958 when he was discharged from the Air Force Reserve, long after he left Washington, D.C. and returned to Louisiana -- show he attended any college, except for that one and a half years at LSU which Marcel himself had characterized as non-credit.

During a December 1979 interview with Bob Pratt, then a reporter with the *National Enquirer*, Marcel was asked how long he stayed at Roswell following the Roswell incident. He said he was transferred to Washington, D.C., the "latter part of 1947," where he said he was given a lengthy title of some kind. But, according to the official records, Marcel was assigned to the 509th Bombardment Wing at Walker Air Force Base (AFB), Roswell, New Mexico, until 16 August 1948, when he was transferred to SAC headquarters at Andrews AFB, Washington, D.C. That was more than a year after the Roswell incident had taken place. We'll never know for sure whether Marcel was lying, or

just badly confused. Whatever the cause, the crashed-saucer promoters use Marcel's erroneous statement to suggest that, contrary to what they might have expected if Marcel had really goofed on the Roswell incident, his superiors immediately promoted him and transferred him to a position of even greater responsibility. It sounds good, but the timing is off by about a year.

At SAC, Marcel was given the title of "Chief, Technical Trends & Developments, Alien Capabilities Section, Intelligence Division, Headquarters, presumably the lengthy title he had alluded to during the interview with Bob Pratt. Marcel remained at Andrews AFB until 9 November 1948, when he transferred -- along with SAC headquarters -- to Offutt AFB, Nebraska, where he held the same title. On 26 December 1948, he was again transferred, from SAC to the 1009th Special Weapons Squadron (part of Headquarters Command) in Washington, D.C., where he was made the officer in charge of the "War Room, Intelligence Branch, Operations Division, AFOAT-1." AFOAT-1 (1009th Special Weapons Squadron) was responsible for operating the Long Range Detection Program (LRDP), which was intended to alert the United States to atomic explosions that occurred anywhere in the world, especially in the Soviet Union.

Marcel furnished Pratt (and others) with details of his assignment at AFOAT-1. In fact, he made the rather astonishing (and equally impressive) claim that, when AFOAT-1 detected the first Soviet atomic explosion in 1949, Marcel himself had to write a report on it. "In fact," he claimed, "I wrote the very report President Truman read on the air declaring that Russia had exploded an atomic device." Curiously, President Truman never went on the air to announce the Soviet A-bomb explosion. Instead, the White House issued a written statement, so Marcel's claim is false right from the start. In addition, no documentation has surfaced to support Marcel's claim to fame, while records have surfaced that suggest Marcel inflated his role. Among the records on the Soviet A-bomb explosion that have surfaced are formerly top secret records from AFOAT 1 that found their way into President Truman's files. Not surprisingly, Marcel's name does not appear anywhere in these records, including records of the advisory group convened to evaluate AFOAT-1's data and conclusions. The group consisted of Dr. Vannevar Bush, Dr. Robert Bacher (former AEC commissioner), Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, and Admiral W.S. Parsons. With AFOAT-1's technical director, Doyle Northrup, and various generals, colonels and lieutenant colonels in the chain of command between Marcel and the President, it isn't terribly likely Marcel was telling the truth. But what has also surfaced is a copy of the White House statement itself, complete with corrections. **Nothing** about the typed, one page statement suggests Marcel had anything whatever to do with it. Given his lies about other aspects of his background, there is little reason to give Marcel's claim any credence whatsoever.

Although the debris recovered from the Foster Ranch was identified officially as debris from a weather balloon that carried aluminum radar targets, Marcel claimed this explanation was only a "cover story" intended to get the press off General Ramey's back. According to Marcel, he "was acquainted with virtually every type of weather-observation or radar tracking device being used by either the civilians or the military. It was definitely not a weather or tracking device . . ." he said.

In *The Roswell Incident*, written by Charles Berlitz and William Moore and published in 1980, the authors lead the reader to believe that radar targets of the kind found by Brazel were in widespread use throughout the United States around the time of the Roswell incident. Nearly every Roswell "researcher" since then has repeated this myth, which is usually accompanied by a quote attributed to Mack Brazel to the effect that he had found weather balloons on the ranch on two prior occasions, but that what he found in June (**not** July) did not resemble the previous balloons. Although Brazel made no mention of finding weather balloons with the unusual radar targets, the crashed-saucer promoters find it extremely convenient to **assume** this is what Brazel meant. Since they assume Brazel found radar targets before, obviously he would have been able to recognize the one he found on June 14th, if indeed that had been what it was. Likewise, since Marcel claimed he was acquainted with virtually every type of weather-observation or radar tracking

device, surely he would have recognized the Roswell debris for what it was, had it been a radar target.

As reported in the first issue of *The Cowflop Quarterly*, radar targets were **not** in widespread use that the time of the Roswell incident, and, wishful thinking aside, there is no good reason to believe Brazel ever recovered one prior to June 14, 1947. Nor is there any good reason to believe Marcel was acquainted with radar targets. Marcel was an intelligence officer, **not** a weather officer. Radar targets were not in widespread use either by civilians or the military. And, while not a highly sophisticated piece of equipment, radar targets were a highly **specialized** piece of equipment unknown to most people except the relative handful of people who used them.

The myth that radar targets were in widespread use allows the crashed-saucer promoters to claim a "common, ordinary" radar target was substituted for the "real" Roswell debris that was spirited away to some high-security facility. But since these radar targets weren't in widespread use, and weren't available either at Roswell Army Air Field or at Fort Worth Army Air Field, there was no convenient stock from which such a target could be drawn for employment in the mind-boggling cover-up. Those Roswell "investigators" who are interested in protecting the Roswell myth (and their reputations, such as they are), just ignore these facts and blithely go about their business of claiming Brazel and Marcel both would have been able to identify a radar target when they saw one. If they ignore the facts, they don't have to explain why it is they've been promoting their fallacious contentions for up to fifteen years.

Some crashed-saucer promoters (one in particular) point to the fact that Major Marcel attended radar intelligence school, and they try to convince us that he would have known all about radar targets for that reason. But their argument is utter nonsense. According to Marcel's personnel file, he attended the "Radar Intelligence Officers Course" from 13 August to 8 September 1945. The certificate of completion lists the subjects taught in that course, which were Basic Radar AN/APS-15A; Scope Interpretation; Radar Navigation; Radar Bombing; Target Study; Mission Planning; Aircraft Recognition; Radar Countermeasures; and Scope Photography. **None** of these subjects suggests Marcel had even an introduction to the use of radar targets for measuring the direction and speed of winds aloft, which was the usual province of weather officers. The course obviously was designed to help officers gather intelligence data, not weather data.

Marcel's dubious claims aside, there is no good reason to believe he even knew radar targets existed, much less what they looked like. Given the frenzy of flying saucer reports around the time of the Roswell incident, is it really any wonder Marcel's identification of the debris defaulted to "flying disc" when he was shown mangled metallic debris from a piece of highly specialized equipment he had never seen before? Yet some Roswell cheerleaders feign incredulity whenever somebody suggests Marcel was caught up in the moment and simply made a stupid mistake. Add to the mix his embarrassment at being made to look like a fool when the debris was **finally** shown to a weather officer who identified it correctly. No doubt it was humiliation that motivated Marcel to chase Irving Newton around General Ramey's office trying to convince him the debris really had come from an alien spaceship. And we can reasonably suppose that fear of further humiliation motivated Marcel to embellish details of his military service, and to concoct his claim that the Roswell debris wasn't from weather balloons and radar targets -- even though that's exactly what it looked like -- because the debris was virtually indestructible (except to the extent that it apparently had a problem with "common, ordinary" lightning, if you believe the mythology).

One of the more imaginative of the Roswell promoters, Kevin "Wrong Way" Randle, has concocted an embarrassingly ridiculous rationalization to delude himself into believing Marcel knew all about radar targets, and that there was indeed a source of radar targets available to the 509th Bomb Group. It seems Randle corresponded with Irving Newton and Newton revealed the fact that weather balloons with radar targets had been used during the atomic bomb tests. "Wrong Way" observed how the 509th Bomb Group had participated in the A-bomb tests during Operation Crossroads. From that one observation, "Wrong

