Twitter Thread by Joshua Pruett #DADTL



Joshua Pruett #DADTL
@zombietardis

My grandad told me this wild story about the birth of the #NORAD #SantaTracker once. I didn't believe him but most of it checks out - you can look it up. I think I've got the dates right. Scared me a little when I was a kid. Just... weird stuff. Details... THREAD BEGINS 1/

My grandpa, Oliver, was born in Montrose, Colorado, 1934. Big into trucks & cars, dreams of being in the military but won't pass muster as he put it for his later phys eval - his interest in aircraft doesn't catch fire till Dec 24, 1948 w a strange article in the local paper
2/

Oliver's 14 now, thinking about his future, when he reads what's supposed to be an official United States Air Force "communique" that's tracking Santa's sleigh, eight reindeer, at 14k feet, the whole bit. It's kiddie stuff, he knows it, only, friends of his have seen things
3/

This is where it gets weird. Maybe someone at the USAF just thought it'd be fun to get a little press but the 14k sticks in Oliver's craw funny and won't let go. He looks at a map he's got, state parks, etc. 14. It hits him like a freight train - THE 14ers! He had to explain:
4/

Colorado's got 58 mtn peaks over 14k ft, most of any state. They're called the 14ers. Stick with me here...
Not much to do in Colorado as a teen except sneak out with your Dad's hooch, grab a blanket & stare up at the stars. Skies so clear you can count constellations...
5/

Some of Oliver's friends have seen more than constellations. They've seen stars, streaks and bright lights moving across these same peaks, at about 14k ft. He figures they're drinking too much. Then he sees a few himself. Not like SHIPS or saucers, just lights that speed
6/

He's not scared - he's excited. The sky got way more exciting. He directs his passion for engineering toward aeronautics. I mentioned once that: him being 14, discovering a connection between that article, the 14k sighting & the 14ers was pretty

coincidental. He just smiled 7/

Then he asked me if I thought a USAF dispatch about Santa might be a convenient cover for something else, something much worse. I didn't answer. He asked, what's harder to believe in; Santa, or a conspiracy to cover up evidence of an imminent alien threat? He just smiled...
8/

Skip ahead; it's 1955 & 21 y o grandad is trying to get work at Colorado Springs CONAD, Continental Air Defense Command (precursor to NORAD as we know it). Security is tight, hard to even get a foot in the door. Oliver gets discouraged, but those sky lights never go away
9/

Oliver gets part time work at the local paper, Colorado Springs, The Gazette. A lot of grunt work, taking ads over the phone and setting type for local retailers, etc.
Then, December of 1955, something insane happens. And I swear this is true. Again, you can look it up...
10/

Oliver helps set an ad for a local SEARS. Kids can call in & talk to Santa. Kids stuff again. Promotion. But something goes wrong - a single digit is off on the phone number. The calls never connect to the small office at SEARS where a Colorado Springs drama student waits...
11/

"Santa's Elf," getting into character for a call that never comes. Every call placed at the number in the ad goes right to CONAD & Crew Commander Harry Shoup's desk, who gets so fed up talkin to kiddies about Santa he & his team take turns making up Santa's current location.
12/

Legend lays out the birth of the Santa Tracker...
But that's where it gets weird. Grandad swore up and down he wrote the right number down; he was a 21 y o kid, hungry for work; mistakes like that cost papers money and kids like him their jobs. Someone GAVE him that number
13/

The odds that a single digit "mistake" would connect directly to CONAD, while not astronomical, are still very HIGH, probability wise. But even THAT math doesn't work when you factor in the Santa thing back in 48, also being connected to the USAF. Or Oliver's involvement...
14/

I brought this up once, maybe twice, & each time grandad leaned close & whispered; someone WANTED those coincidences. They wanted people, KIDS, watching the skies, every winter, & they wanted to get that data back to a higher authority. Someone was looking out for us, he said
15/

Little pitchers have big ears, he said, and even larger eyes. Asking adults to watch the skies for the Russians would have just fueled more Cold War paranoia - this was 1955. But asking kids to watch the skies for SANTA... It wasn't the Russians they were worried about.

16/

There are things in the skies over Colorado. And they've been there for a very long time. There's a history there. (As of August, there's been over 100 sightings in Colorado this year alone.) The #NORADSantaTracker was never just for fun. It was an early warning system...
17/

From 1955 on, the tracker is tradition and public knowledge. Grandad said, two year later, CONAD gets a big upgrade, becomes North American Aerospace Defense Command, official Sept 12, 1957. From Continental to Aerospace, why? Why Colorado? The visibility? No, he told me.
18/

The lights, the regular sightings, the 14ers, four corners, ley lines too, all of it - Colorado's an epicenter. Every winter it's the same, they come back, he told me. And we need to stay vigilant. So Santa's an alien? I blurted out once. Grandad put his rough hand on mine...
19/

You're old enough now, he said. Old enough for what? I thought. He said, What's Santa, son? Who is he? A jolly old elf who brings you gifts? In his sleigh, pulled by flying deer, bending the rules of time and space, bringing joy to children, only, he comes with a WARNING...
20/

How many gift-giving angels come with warnings? Too many, I said. Good answer, he smiled. Then he leaned back and took off his glasses.
The stories and songs are WARNINGS
Grandad laughed.
Bet you didn't know he wasn't always chubby...
21/

I listened. Sure, Grandad said, he had a bowl full of jelly back in 'Twas the Night Before Christmas,' in the early 1800's, but the white-haired fat man was invented by Coca-Cola & illustrator Haddon Sundblom in the thirties
The warnings are for a Santa you don't know...
22/

Why do you think Santa needs you to stay asleep, to stay in your beds? he asked. So we don't see you wrapping our gifts, I said. He smiled & roughed up my hair. Smart boy. But maybe we say stay in bed for the same reason we tell you not to go into the woods at night...
23/

Maybe the Santa isn't BRINGING anything - it's HUNTING. His face changed then. My grandad was always a warm man, accessible. But when he told this story, he got colder, vulnerable. I could feel it.
Think of the songs, son, he said, then he looked at me & his eyes turned pale
24/

You better watch out
You better not cry
Better not pout
Then...
He sees you when you're sleeping
He knows when you're awake
He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake...
Stay in your bed, he said, because you're being hunted by SOMETHING WE CAN'T STOP
25/

I couldn't breathe. He grabbed me then, & hugged me close to his chest, his breath like peppermint and leather. He kept saying, I'm sorry, son. I'm sorry... watch the tracker. Always watch the tracker. Then you'll know where it is. How close. Be ready. Ready for what? I asked
25/

My words hardly came out of my mouth. When you're a kid, your whole world changes the moment you see fear in the face of an adult. What I saw in my grandad's eyes was worse than fear. Then, suddenly, he was done. He shook it off, propped me up on my feet & smiled, almost
26/

What is it? I asked again. Tell me. Grandad took me by my shoulders and nodded at our big oversized fireplace, knowing smirk on his face.
Whatever it is, I'm not sure milk and cookies are gonna protect either of us from what comes down the chimney....
27/

Then he pulled an old shotgun into his lap and pushed me toward my bedroom.
I have some... presents left to wrap, he said, and I know you don't wanna spoil the surprise.

I went to bed that night, but I didn't sleep.
In the morning, grandad was gone.
Fishing, my Dad said...
28/

But I knew he was lying, I'd learn the truth a few weeks later. Christmas morning was a quiet one that day, strange, everyone going through the motions. Trying to cheer me up, Dad brought over his laptop. He wanted to show me the Santa Tracker he found. It's NORAD, he said...
29/

That means it's real, he said. He pointed at the screen, and my stomach knotted. Santa was here last night, said Dad, pointing to the radar image. He was really here. But I didn't need to see it.
I could still smell the gun powder in the air.
30/

Grandad warned me to be ready. And now, I will be. Every year, I get closer. I just keep my eye on the #NORADSantaTracker and I plan, and I wait.

I don't cry
I don't pout
I don't sleep
Because Santa Claus is coming to town
And this time, I'm going to be ready

31/END

Thanks everyone for reading and sharing! #MerryChristmas