

Airport Incident, although he had to hedge simply because he did not have all the answers. Nevertheless, the news media in general accepted the possibility that the radar tracks were caused by temperature inversions, and turned their attention to other subjects. Actually, the explanation of the Washington National Airport Incident is still officially listed as "unknown." General Samford's press conference should have convinced the Air Force that public relations trouble could be avoided when an honest attempt is made to present the facts. But somehow the Air Force missed the message, because it continued its non-information policy regarding UFOs.

The PR Game

Because the Air Force continued to envelop Project BLUE BOOK in secrecy, the period 1953-1965 was characterized by antagonism. Keyhoe's second book, *Flying Saucers From Outer Space*, appeared in October 1953 and quickly made the best-seller lists. Authors discovered that there was money in flying saucers, and the rush was on. Most of the books and magazine articles during this period were highly sensational. A favorite theme was that the earth was under surveillance by mysterious visitors from outer space and that the government was concealing this fact from the people.

Air Force reaction was to periodically issue press releases outlining statistically the result of Project BLUE BOOK investigations while maintaining a hard line against the existence of flying saucers. The first such release was made on 25 October 1955 and quoted then Air Force Secretary Donald A. Quarles as stating "...we believe that no objects such as those popularly described as flying saucers have overflowed the United States." Similar news releases were made on 5 November 1957, 6 October 1958, 22 January 1959, 15 July 1959, 29 January 1960, and 21 July 1960. Each release stressed the lack of evidence to indicate spaceships and the decreasing percentage of cases that remained unidentified. In 1955 the percentage of unidentifieds to total cases was about three percent.

The need for thorough scientific study went unsatisfied but not unrecognized. A December 1958 ATIC staff study recognized the problem and, according to *BLUE BOOK Project Files*, recommended the transfer of the Aerial Phenomena Group to Air Research and Development Command. ARDC, after reviewing the program, declined the transfer, indicating that "the data available was not qualitative and therefore of limited

scientific value." Recognizing that the program had become mostly a public relation problem, ATIC then recommended its transfer to the Air Force's Pentagon information office (SAFOI).

When SAFOI wouldn't accept it either, the Air Force began to suggest other agencies such as NASA, the National Science Foundation, The Smithsonian Institution, or the Brookings Institution. But there were no takers, and the U.S. government's only UFO program remained that run by four people in a small office in a "temporary" World War II building at Wright-Patterson AFB.

By 1965, Headquarters USAF finally seemed to recognize that UFOs were more of a public relations problem than an intelligence matter. On September 28th, it was the Director of Information Maj. Gen. Ben LeBailly who wrote to the Military Director of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) asking for a review of Project BLUE BOOK.

At General LeBailly's request, a group of five distinguished scientists was formed as the "Ad Hoc Committee to Review Project BLUE BOOK." Chaired by Dr. Brian O'Brien, the committee met for a one day session on 3 February 1966 and released its report in March. Unlike previous Air Force UFO reports, this one was unclassified and was released to the press—undoubtedly due to General LeBailly's efforts. Although the work of Project BLUE BOOK was complimented, the O'Brien Committee believed there was a need for scientific investigation of UFOs in more detail and depth. Toward this objective, BLUE BOOK files show that the committee recommended that contracts be negotiated with a few selected universities to provide scientific teams to investigate promptly and in depth certain selected sightings of UFOs.

The Air Force had just received the O'Brien Committee report when it was given the strongest possible push to take action—a Congressional investigation. Public opinion over a rash of sightings in then Rep. Gerald Ford's district of Michigan, plus successful lobbying efforts by NICAP, led to a one-day hearing on 5 April 1966 on the UFO problem in the powerful House Armed Services Committee, chaired by the late H. Mendel Rivers of South Carolina. Once again the old secrecy charge was dusted off and presented anew. The difference, of course, is that the accusation was made before Congress for the first time.

In response, Secretary of the Air Force Dr. Harold Brown repeated a familiar theme: UFOs pose no threat to national security, represent no developments or principles beyond present-day scientific knowledge, and do not give evidence of

being extraterrestrial vehicles. According to the hearing records, Dr. Brown went on to make the first public announcement regarding the O'Brien Committee report:

Recommendations ... are presently under study and are expected to lead to even stronger emphasis on the scientific aspects of investigating the sightings that warrant extensive analysis....

Realizing that his committee could not do the subject justice in only a day, Congressman Rivers endorsed the idea of an independent, civilian inquiry into the flying saucer phenomenon. The Air Force, with Congressional sanction, now saw a golden opportunity for getting off the UFO hook: a university-based study composed entirely of outsiders might just be the means to convince the public that the Air Force was playing it straight all along. And maybe, just maybe, the Air Force could kiss the flying saucers good-bye once and for all.

The Condon Report— and a Rebuttal

Air Force Secretary Brown assigned responsibility for implementing the O'Brien Committee recommendations to the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (OSR), a natural for the job, as its mission was one of basic research involving contracts with hundreds of universities throughout the U.S. Dr. William J. Price, OSR's Director, led an in-house study which recommended that the UFO project be located at a single university rather than piecemealing the work out to several. The next question was which university. Informal contact with Harvard and MIT met with negative results. It appeared as though scientists at the nation's leading universities were unwilling to drop their research in favor of flying saucers. Finally, some interest was found at the University of Colorado, and physics professor Dr. Edward U. Condon was persuaded to head the study. Condon was formerly Director of the National Bureau of Standards, and OSR was pleased to obtain someone with his eminent reputation as a thorough and independent scientist. Negotiations were completed during October 1966, which resulted in a contract that would eventually cost the Air Force \$572,146 for an 18-month study. Assistant Dean Robert J. Low of the CU Graduate School was appointed project coordinator.

It was Low who wrote a memo on 9 August 1966, which eventually turned up in *Look* magazine—a memo that almost scuttled the entire project. Low's memo contained what he believed to be the pros