

UFOs and the Condon Report

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Let's consider some good examples of Unexplained UFOs in the Condon Report, considering them in a date-chronological sequence. Page references in the following will be to the Bantam paperback edition of the Condon Report, published 1969. Actually, there is ambiguity in the Report as to which of the Unexplained cases is the earliest. I think perhaps the earliest may be the June, 1954 multiple-witness sighting from a BOAC Stratocruiser over Labrador (pp. 139-140), since the tally displayed on page 173, two Unexplained cases in Category I-D and the reader finds only a single case in that Category clearly tagged as Unexplained.

The famous BOAC sighting is so utterly inadequately "explained" in the Condon Report that I suspect it is actually the other one of the two cited Unknowns. I shall show elsewhere why the "horizontal-mirage" toyed with in the Report's examination of that case is quantitatively quite unacceptable; but that is the portion of Report criticism I am putting aside tonight, so we'll begin with a 1955 multiple-witness sighting in the Northeast as the Unexplained case in the Condon sample bearing the earliest date. I strongly emphasize that my own studies lead me to regard as Unexplained many dozens of cases of still earlier date.

1. June 23, 1955, Utica, N.Y. (case 1482-N, p. 143)

We read that a 150-foot ellipsoidal object, light gray with several "windows" (from which a bright blue-green light emanated), passed an estimated 500 feet above a Mohawk Airlines DC-3 which was flying 1000 feet below an overcast, near noon on 6/23/1955. Pilot and copilot observed the object's eastward flight for several miles, during which color-changes were noted. A few minutes after it went out of sight, two other aircraft also reported having seen it, and the Albany control tower reported an object go by on the Victor-2 airways. A short time later, Boston radar reported tracking an eastbound object on Victor-2, the elapsed time implying a speed of several thousand miles per hour. No sonic booms were reported by an observers. The Report concedes that "it does appear that this sighting defies explanation by conventional means." Interesting and provocative, couldn't we say?

2. August 13-14, 1956, Lakenheath RAF Station, England (Case 2, pp. 163-164, 248256)

The Report terms this "the most puzzling and unusual in the radar-visual files." It is a complex case, and I shall have to study the original Project Bluebook case-file before I shall be satisfied on certain details on which the Condon Report leaves me confused. The following summarizes the more clear-cut features of the case report.

Control tower personnel at RAF Station C (evidently Bentwaters RAP Station) sighted a glowing object moving from west to east over the airfield at an altitude estimated at several thousand feet. Simultaneously, a radar unit at Station C tracked an unknown travelling westward at two-to-four thousand

mph. The pilot of a C-47 flying at 4000 feet above Station C reported concurrently that “a bright light streaked under his aircraft travelling east to west at terrific speed.” The time of these events was evidently 2257 hours on the 13th (see below for still earlier sighting at Station C); the whole series of sightings extends over about 5 or 6 hours.

RAP Station C alerted RAP Station B (which I infer to be Lakenheath RAP Station and will hereafter so designate it). The report filed with Project Bluebook evidently was prepared at Lakenheath by USAF personnel stationed there and involved in at least the radar-tracing aspects of the incident. The Condon Report quotes verbatim from portions of what appears to be the teletype transmission of the UFO report from Lakenheath, filed according to the standard form stipulated in USAF Regulation 200-2. Unfortunately, readers are not told that they can eliminate a large amount of confusion in interpreting the array of answers to unstated questions on page 253-254 by merely turning to pages 824-825, where the standard Air Force format is given.

Evidently ground observers at Lakenheath saw two luminous objects, which are described as round white lights, equal in angular size to a golf ball at arm's length. Here is a good example of the needless confusion created by failure to refer the reader to AFR 80-17 in the Report Appendix; most readers will mistakenly think the ground observers described the actual size as about that of a golf ball, since they will be unaware of the “arm's length” stipulation built into that particular question of the standard form. No discernible details were seen by the ground observers, but they noted the unusual feature that the luminous object was “travelling at terrific speeds and then stopping and changing course immediately.” They remarked that the “flight path was straight but jerky with object stopping instantly and then continuing,” a pattern also observed on radar. For example, Lakenheath “Radar Air Traffic Control Center observed object 17 miles east of Station making sharp rectangular course of flight. This maneuver was not conducted by circular path but on right angles at speeds of 600-800 mph. Object would stop and start with amazing rapidity.”

When first sighted visually by Lakenheath ground personnel, the objects were at an estimated altitude of 2000-2500 feet and were on a SW heading, when suddenly “object stopped and immediately assumed an easterly heading.” (The switch from singular to plural is painfully typical of the shortcomings of many Bluebook reports filed under AFR 200-2.) The report next notes that, at a later time (unspecified), Lakenheath tracked the unknown from a point six miles west to a point about twenty miles southwest “where target stopped and assumed a stationary position for five minutes.” That target next began moving northwesterly, came in to within two miles of the Station, and again stopped. “GCA reports three to four additional targets were doing the same,” so there were evidently as many as four or five unknown objects airborne near Lakenheath during this incident.

The references to GCA (ground-controlled approach) that run through the report are confusing, since a GCA radar is not a search or tracking radar, but a fixed-beam glide-path radar. Without seeing the original Bluebook report, I am uncertain as to how to interpret this point of confusion. My guess is that the CPS5 search radar and not the CPN4 radar provided the key data. I suspect that, in most passages where “GCA” appears, one should read “ATC,” for “air traffic control.” At least part of this confusion is evidently due to those who prepared the Condon Report, because they state that the USAF non-commissioned officer who first called this incident to their attention in early 1968 was the “Watch Supervisor at the GCA station,” whereas his own letter makes clear he was “Watch Supervisor in the Radar Air Traffic Control Center at Lakenheath.

In that non-com's letter, quoted at length in the Condon Report (pp. 248-251), he describes how he and his radar operators watched the previously stationary target start moving at a speed of 400 to 600 mph to the NNE until it reached a point about 20 miles NNW of Lakenheath. He comments that "there was no slow start or buildup to this speed, it was constant from the second it started to move until it stopped ... The target made several changes in location, always in a straight line, always at about 600 mph and always from a standing or stationary point to his next stop at constant speed." The non-com also recalled a very puzzling feature that is confirmed in the Bluebook report on the case: Although the search radars had full Moving Target Indication (MTI), designed to remove all stationary targets plus those moving at speeds below some lower limit that was evidently about 40 knots for these radars, the MTI did not take out the blip of the unknown(s) during seemingly stationary hovering periods that varied from about three to six minutes. (Could this have been due to high-speed but small-amplitude motions not resolvable on radar?)

The Bluebook report, summing up the radar and ground-visual data comments: "The fact that three radar sets picked up the targets simultaneously is certainly conclusive that a target or object was in the air. The maneuvers of the object were extraordinary; however, the fact that radar and ground-visual observations were made on its rapid accelerations and abrupt stops certainly lend credence to the report."

The non-com's letter describes the successive stages of airbase-alert over these unknowns, culminating in RAF decision to scramble Venom interceptors, a step also spelled out in the Bluebook report. The first of two Venoms (Mach 0.8 single-jet DeHaviland fighters flown by the RAF in 1949-1962 period) was vectored in on one of the UFOs. The pilot radioed that he had a "bright white light in sight," but as he moved to within about a dozen miles of it, the light suddenly disappeared. Next, Lakenheath ATCC vectored him to another target ten miles east of the Station. The pilot reported that he had the unknown on his airborne radar and that he was locking on. But after a brief lock-on, the unknown disappeared from the pilot's radar screen. His radio query to ATCC radar controllers as to what had happened was answered with the information that the unknown had taken up a position on the tail of the aircraft.

The non-com's letter states that several of his radarmen saw (on radar) the unknown swing around at very high speed to take up the pursuing position. He further emphasizes that, to try to break the tail-chase, the Venom pilot "tried everything - he climbed, dived, circled, *etc.*, but the UFO acted like it was glued right behind him, always the same distance, very close, but we always had two distinct targets," as the pilot continued for an estimated ten minutes to try to elude the unknown.

The Bluebook report puts that portion of the incident more briefly: "RA TCC requested pilot acknowledge this chase. Pilot acknowledged and stated he would try to circle and get behind the target. Pilot advised he was unable to 'shake' the target off his tail and requested assistance. One additional Venom was scrambled from the RAF station. Original pilot stated, 'clearest target I have ever seen on radar.'" The RAF first pilot, low on fuel, started back to his home field. "The target (UFO) followed him only a short distance, as he headed SSW, and the UFO stopped and remained stationary," the non-com states.

The second Venom was vectored towards the UFO, but failed to make contact before developing some mechanical malfunction that necessitated a return to base. The Bluebook report states that, at RAF Station C, where the first unknown was detected shortly before midnight, "three other radar targets behaved in a similar manner and intercept attempts made from 2130 to 2215 GMT by an American T-33 jet aircraft were fruitless." (Note those times. They seem to imply that, at least an hour before Station C alerted Lakenheath at 2255 GMT, one or more unknowns had been radar-tracked near Station C and that

intercept was attempted prior to alerting Lakenheath. Evidently, then, this entire UFO incident lasted over five hours.)

The discussion of the Lakenheath UFO incident in the Condon Report, after considering but rejecting anomalous radar propagation as an explanation, ends in the concession of “the probability that at least one genuine UFO was involved.” In another discussion of the same case (page 164), it is suggested that “the apparently rational, intelligent behavior of the UFO suggests a mechanical device of unknown origin as the most probable explanation of this sighting.” I concur; but must ask how, with a case such as this before him, Condon could conclude that there's nothing of any scientific interest in the UFO problem. Nothing in today's aerospace technology, here or abroad, can account for performance characteristics of the type observed near Lakenheath by ground and airborne visual observers and by ground and airborne radar that night. Yet cases equally puzzling have lain in the Bluebook files for even longer than the twelve years during which the Lakenheath case has been gathering dust there. I can vouch for the fact that the Condon Project had still other Air Force cases similarly puzzling in nature, yet omitted them from its final Report (for example, the Fukuoka, Japan, Oct. 15, 1948, F-61 radar-visual case that I have discussed at last year's Congressional UFO Symposium). A case like Lakenheath cries out for scientific attention, yet Condon proposes that the Air Force, the government, and the scientific community ignore such cases. Has he really studied his own Report?

The Lakenheath case, as well as the 1957 B-47 case discussed below, were not known outside of Air Force circles prior to their appearance in the Condon Report. Evidently Air Force UFO consultant J.A. Hynek was aware of the Lakenheath case, since his views on possible role of the Perseid meteors are cited in the Bluebook report on the case (page 255). But to my knowledge, no other students of the UFO problem had ever heard of this interesting case; and the Texas B-47 incident was not even known to Hynek apparently, since no report was even filed at Bluebook by ADC after that incident. The fact that these two very impressive Air Force-related UFO cases have been made public via the Condon Report seems to me only one of numerous considerations arguing quite strongly against any suspicions that the Condon Project is part of a high-level cover-up. I reject that hypothesis and view lack of interest in the UFO problem and a documented prior judgment, not cloak-and-dagger work, as the primary factors shaping the negative final conclusions and recommendations of the Condon Report.

3. November 14, 1956, near Mobile, Alabama (Case 14-N, pp. 127-128)

This third unexplained UFO case from the Condon Report actually embraces a pair of separate sightings by the same Capital Airlines pilot; I shall discuss here only the first, though both are conceded to be unexplainable in the Report. Names of witnesses are systematically deleted from the Condon Report; and, for the major cases, not even geographical locations and dates are given, which might almost be said to remove the Report from the category of scientific documentation, since independent checks of the Report findings are rendered impossible for those who do not already know all about the cases. In this instance, anyone who has studied the UFO literature would recognize almost immediately that this is the 1956 sighting by Captain William J. Hull and his copilot, Peter H. McIntosh.

Of the many dozens of significant UFO sightings by commercial airline pilots made in the past twenty years, the Condon Report confronts only two or three, thereby limiting its attention to so tiny a fraction of these important reports that it must be criticized for failing to grapple with one of the principal segments of the UFO problem. Incidentally, it is asserted on page 244 that the famous Nash-Fortenberry sighting of July 14, 1952 is discussed in Section III, Chapter 5. It is a pity that this statement is in error, for it

would have been quite interesting to see how that famous airline sighting would have been explained.

But the Hull sighting does appear in the Report. And it is conceded to be unexplained, following a few comments (scarcely relevant in my opinion) about possibilities of accounting for it in terms of mirage or autokinetic effects. It is characteristic of this inadequate Report that the reader is given no clue as to just where the information presented on this sighting was obtained. Phraseology such as “the pilot remembers noting... “ will be construed by uninformed readers as implying that Condon Project members must have interviewed Capt. Hull. But since he was killed in a 1958 aircraft accident, and since I personally interviewed the only other witness, Copilot McIntosh, only a few days ago and found that I was the first person to query him on that incident in many years, I may conclude that the unreferenced source of all the information on the Hull sightings contained in the Condon Report is probably NICAP file material (which, in turn, came chiefly from the files of the defunct but once extremely productive New York UFO group, CSI). Details like that belong in studies purporting to be definitely scientific in nature, else how can independent investigators cross-check conclusions?

Hull and McIntosh were at cruise altitude over Alabama in their Viscount, on southwesterly heading for Mobile on a clear night at about 2200 LST, when a bright light source suddenly shot down at an angle from upper left to dead ahead. The first impression that it was a bright meteor had to be rejected when it decelerated and then halted abruptly and hovered motionless. It was “brighter than Venus at brightest magnitude,” and McIntosh told me he recalled their thinking that it might be an emergency flare of some kind. Suddenly the light began “darting hither and yon, rising and falling in undulating flight, making sharper turns than any known aircraft, sometimes changing direction 90 degrees in an instant,” as recounted in the Condon Report.

After another hovering interval, it resumed “another series of crazy gyrations, lazy eights, square chandelles, all the while weaving through the air with a sort of rhythmic, undulating cadence.” Then, the account in the Condon Report notes, the luminous source “shot out over the Gulf of Mexico, rising at the most breathtaking angle and at such a fantastic speed that it diminished rapidly to a pinpoint and was swallowed up in the night.” (All of those quotations that appear in the Condon Report come ultimately from a letter to CSI, written by Hull on June 5, 1957, incidentally. A copy is on file at NICAP, where I have studied it.)

When I interviewed McIntosh recently, the features of the incident that remained most vivid in his mind were the intense brilliance of the erratically darting white light and especially the extraordinary acceleration with which it climbed out to the south over the Gulf. His remark to me was that it “moved faster than anything we'd ever seen.” He was emphatic in asserting that its departure speed exceeded any known aircraft flying then or now.

Here again, in the Hull-McIntosh sighting, we have a UFO case that the Condon Report concedes to be unexplained. Here again, the key question is posed: Don't such observations constitute matters calling for scientific scrutiny rather than scientific shrugs? What the Condon Report will not tell you is that there exist many other reports of very similar behavior of “airborne light sources” exhibiting erratic motions or acceleration characteristics quite unlike any known light sources of natural or technological nature.

I have recently interviewed an airlines pilot, Capt. W.R. Hunt, who was involved in a very similar sighting near Dodge City in 1951. And the sighting of May 29, 1950, by American Airlines pilot Capt.

Willis Sperry is another in this category. More could easily be cited; many of them were specifically suggested to the Condon Project for study, yet they go ignored in the Report. They cry out for scientific attention, yet Condon proposes that we just forget them, as he has shown willingness to do.

4. September 19-20, 1957, Texas-Louisiana area (case 5, pp. 56-57, 136-139, 260-266, and 877-893.

This case has a very interesting history, since it was brought to the attention of the Project staff when one of the principal witnesses, an Air Force lieutenant colonel, was at a Project briefing session for airbase UFO officers. As is elaborated in the Report, a determined search failed to turn up any official report on the incident in Bluebook files, so it was concluded that Air Defense Command (ADC), which had direct cognizance of the incident, had not passed on a report to Bluebook. (I see no reason to view this as evidence of super-secret handling; many such instances come to one's attention in digging into the UFO problem. The system is big and just tends to work that way all too often; commands are semi-autonomous; it's a bother to fill out detailed report forms, and, if it's known that higher echelons tend to treat as some kind of nonsense problem the subject of one's report, it may just not get filed.)

A B-47 out of Forbes AFB was conducting a composite mission on the night of September 19-20, 1957, had completed navigational exercises out over the Gulf of Mexico, and was approaching Gulfport, Mississippi, on northbound heading, when the operator of #2 radar monitor picked up unusual signals near a frequency of 2800 MHz. The operator was puzzled by the fact that, on his monitor display, the blip moved up-scope instead of down-scope, as it should have moved had it been a stationary ground radar unit.

(This was a B-47 equipped with electronic countermeasures equipment, and carried a crew of six, of whom three were ECM personnel. It was presumably an RB-47H. An ECM radar-monitor listens passively while frequency-scanning is performed until it detects impinging radar signals from hostile ground-defense radars. Once so detected, frequency scanning ceases, and bearing readings plus other required information are fed into the monitor system to yield a scope-display in which the azimuth to the radar source is the principal output information. Various types of information processing are possible, and, without precise information on the particular monitor used, the reader cannot reach clearcut conclusions on some aspects of this sighting. The Condon Report gives some, but not enough, information on certain of these points.)

Evidently, when this up-scope effect was first noted on crossing the Gulf Coast near Gulfport, the #2 monitor operator in the aft section was uncertain as to whether these were ambiguously processed signals from some ground radar, so he did not then report it to the cockpit crew.

I had heard this case discussed with great interest by members of the Condon Project months ago (especially relative to hoped-for impact on Dr. Condon himself), and hence knew the name of the B-47 pilot in this incident. After studying the case-description in the Condon Report and noting that it gives the reader no indication that this aircraft-pacing case extended over a total distance of more than 400 miles, I located the officer and went over the incident with him in some detail. He pointed out that my earlier information was correct, in that the UFO was first picked up well east of the Ft. Worth area which most readers will think was the locale of this incident. He had sighted a bright white light closing on what seemed a collision course, from an eleven o'clock initial position, shortly after they had turned into a westbound heading over Jackson, Miss.

Since the incident terminated near Mineral Wells, Texas, the section of the flight in which the UFO was near the B-47 extends over 450 miles. At B-47 cruising speeds in the 30,000-foot altitude range involved, that would represent a time period of about 45 minutes. I think many physicists and meteorologists who read the Condon Report's deliberations over mirage and anomalous propagation interpretations of this complex, protracted UFO incident, will feel that they have been seriously misled by not being informed that the radar-visual observations involved in this case were occurring in generally consistent manner over so great a distance. This was information well-known within the Project staff. If this were the sole example of significant case details not fully and clearly spelled out in the Condon Report, it might not merit remark; but it is not an isolated example.

I tried to secure from the pilot his recollections of the angular diameter of the inbound bright light, but he recalled only that, for the first few moments, during which he alerted the rest of the crew to be ready for sudden evasive maneuvers, the light looked essentially like aircraft landing lights. After closing still further, until it "appeared to the pilot to be a glowing body as big as a barn" (page 262), the light abruptly and with very high angular velocity shot across their flight path to their right and blinked out. That marks only the beginning of what the crew regarded as the unexplainable portions of the incident, and it was only the start of a 400-mile-long pacing-and-pursuit incident. As the Condon Report put it, "all remained deeply impressed by the experience."

The pilot told me that, after he and his copilot began joking about having perhaps seen a "flying saucer," the #2 monitor operator switched back to the 2800-MHz frequency at which he had picked up unexplainable signals back near Gulfport, to see if anything showed up on the 360-degree scan of his spinning antenna. He got 2800-MHz return from some source out on their 2 o'clock relative azimuth. And it held there in a manner that would not have occurred had this been a fixed ground radar emitting 2800-MHz signals. I queried the pilot as to whether the #2 monitor was getting signals of pulsed or continuous-wave character, but he said that all he could reliably assert was that it was a strong signal because "the #2 monitor had no difficulty tracking him." As the Condon Report notes (page 262), the 2800-MHz source held a steady bearing as the plane kept moving westward, and even speed-variations led to no apparent bearing-variations in the azimuth painted on the #2 monitor.

At some undetermined time after these developments, the pilot radioed the radar controller at the flight control center in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area, and was informed that ground radar was showing two echoes, at 10-mile separation, in his area. No visible object was present at this time, but #2 monitor had the 2800-MHz signal coming in from the 2 o'clock position, and the relative positions on the ground radar were compatible with this.

Soon thereafter the #2 monitoring officer informed the pilot that the unknown was beginning to move up-scope (for the first time since its rapid maneuver into the 2 o'clock position). The pilot emphasized to me that this shift in position was also being followed by the ground controller, who informed him that it shifted to a 12 o'clock position at 10 miles range. The #2 monitor also showed it stopping at a new bearing dead ahead. As it reached that position, it "again became visible to the eye as a huge, steady red glow" (page 262).

The Condon Report continues: "The pilot went to maximum speed. The target appeared to stop, and as the plane got close to it and flew over it, the target disappeared from visual observation, from monitor number two, and from ground radar." I asked the pilot if he had any feeling for its apparent distance below him as he overflowed it; he did not. He remarked that they went in over it "wide open" and that the

apparent closure rate struck him as due solely to their own motion in the aircraft, in accord with ground radar's painting the return as stationary.

Putting the B-47 into a turn (which the pilot remarked to me requires about 20-30 miles at top speed), they started to head back to try to pick up the unknown again. "About halfway around the turn, the target reappeared on both the monitor and ground radar scopes and visually at an estimated altitude of 15,000 feet. The pilot received permission from Ground Control to change altitude and dove the plane at the target, which appeared stationary. As the plane approached to an estimated distance of five miles, the target vanished again from both visual observation and radar" (page 263).

As the B-47 leveled off near 20,000 to head north to its home base, a final signal on the #2 monitor originated from behind the aircraft; but whether it was from the unknown or from a ground radar unit is indicated as unsure. There were no further encounters with the unknown following that diving maneuver and disappearance in the vicinity of Mineral Wells, Texas.

The Condon Report gives much interview information bearing on the subsequent ADC intelligence interrogation of the crew and on their several recollections of whether there was or was not a wire-recorder aboard and operative. As noted earlier, a concerted search did not turn up any official records at Bluebook or ADC headquarters on this incident. The three crew members interviewed by investigators of the Condon Project "were surprised that a report of it was not part of Bluebook files."

Although a few comments appear in the Condon Report that will be construed as indicating that mirage effects (page 138) might explain the visual sightings and that an elevated radar duct present near 7000 feet altitude (page 891) might have caused misinterpreted ground returns, both of those hypotheses fall far short of adequately explaining the observed phenomena. It is therefore only appropriate that the Condon Report further notes that, "there are many unexplained aspects to this sighting, however, and a solution as is given above, although possible, does not seem highly probable. One of the most disturbing features of the report is the radar operator's insistence, referring to ground and airborne radars, that '...this would all happen simultaneously. Whenever we'd lose it, we'd all lose it.' Another unexplained aspect is the large range of distances, bearing angles, and to some extent, altitudes covered by the UFO." This case was outlined to a group of plasma specialists who rejected the hypothesis that such a report could be attributed to any known plasma effects.

So, in this 1957 B-46 case, I think we have one more example of an impressive Unexplained UFO within the body of the Condon Report, and one more reason for wondering how Condon could urge that "further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby." To me, the above UFO report is loaded with implications and questions of very substantial scientific interest. Why shrug off reports like that? Why advise the scientific community to ignore such matters? And, if there are cases like the above in the record (and I can assure you there are all too many equally baffling, equally intriguing in Air Force records alone), why should Condon even advise the Air Force to drop its already inadequate UFO project rather than to advise it to expand its efforts to unravel events like that which clearly impinge on matters of fairly direct military concern? Puzzling indeed, the Condon Report Conclusions and Recommendations and their seeming mismatch with the contents of the Report.
