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Case 5. Washington National Airport, July 19 and 26, 1952

Many more Bluebook file reports that are in the "explained" category also involve radar-tracking of intriguing nature, but have been tagged with a variety of other identifications. One of the most famous is the 1952 episode near Washington National Airport (July 19 and 26, 1952). I shall not give an account of it here (see for example Hall or Ruppelt or Ref. 1), but only remark that my own analysis of the radiosonde data for those two nights leads me to diametrically opposite conclusions from those that have remained the official views for fifteen years. There were only very weak inversions and moisture gradients present on those nights, incapable of causing the striking radar and visual effects reliably reported. I have recently interviewed five of the CAA controllers and four pilots involved in that sighting and can only say that it is a case of extremely great interest - fully deserving the national-headline treatment it got in 1952.

Further measure of the limited knowledge of the actual history of UFO investigations held by the USAF personnel charged with UFO responsibilities can be found in the same April 5, 1966 testimony previously cited. (See H.D. 55, Hearing by Committee on Armed Services, HR, 89th Congress, 2d Session, 4/5/66, p. 6075). Congressman Stratton asked Bluebook Officer Quintanilla: "Was there not a sighting, back it seems to me in 1947, when an object was observed on radar, either at National Airport or Bolling, both coming in and going out? It seems to me there was also a visual sighting that went along with that...Is this in your records at all?" Now, almost anyone who had attempted a serious study of UFO history would immediately recognize that Mr. Stratton, albeit confused about his recollected details, was asking of the famous Washington National sightings of July, 1952. Yet the incumbent Bluebook officer replied, "I am sure that if the sighting was reported to the Air Force it is on record, but I am not aware of this particular one, sir." Dr. Hynek did not offer correction, if he was aware that correction was needed.

Some months later, after I had been at Project Bluebook, studied their file on this important case, recomputed the refractive-index gradients to assess the Air Force claims that anomalous propagation effects caused the radar returns (numerous objects moving with variable speeds, high accelerations) and weighed official claims that optical refraction anomalies caused the visual reports (mainly from pilots flying well above the weak ground-inversion and sighting some of the objects maneuvering even above their flight altitudes), I asked Air Force consultant Hynek how he could have permitted those incorrect radar "explanations" to be passed on to press, public, and Congress for all these years. His reply was in the form of a question: "How could I set myself up against all those radar experts from Washington?" This led me to comment that it should have taken him only about one or two weeks of study of standard radar-propagation references to become fully conversant with all relevant radar details, and that homework ought to have been done by him twenty years ago, in view of his UFO consulting obligations. It is, I fear, such casual failure to really close with the puzzling nature of the UFO problem that has left it in limbo for twenty years. And all of that time, Pentagon press statements gave repeated assurances that real expertise was at work proving the correctness of the Air Force position as to misidentified natural phenomena. It is a very distressing and a very unbelievable story, which is only faintly hinted by the brief remarks that can be made here. But from the point of view of deserved international scientific attention to the UFO problem, candid criticisms of the USAF handling of this problem seems necessary to make clear that there has never been any in-depth UFO study within the U. S. Hence, I now wish to put myself on record once again as characterizing most of the past 15 years of Bluebook work as scientifically incompetent and superficial. Yet it has done the trick: it has kept all of us unconcerned about the UFO problem.

Conspiracy? No, not as I see it. Foulup.

Jell: "UFOs on Internet
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