

The hunt for missing pieces

By [Billy Cox](#), Herald-Tribune
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The Air Force maintains it shuttered Project Blue Book in 1969 because, among other things, UFOs didn't constitute a national security issue. But we've known that was a snow job since 1979. That's when public-records sleuth Robert Todd excavated the "[Bolender memo](#)," which had been issued a decade earlier. Even while advocating the termination of the USAF's 22-year-old data-gathering operation, Brig. Gen. C.H. Bolender was writing through back channels that "reports of unidentified flying objects which could affect national security are made in accordance with JANAP 146 or Air Force Manual 55-11, and are not part of the Blue Book system."

Oh. OK. That doesn't sound the least bit fishy, thanks for playing it straight. We'll all just shut our brains off and never ask about it again.

Mission Date	Mission Identified Headquarters	Launch Unit Identified Headquarters	Mission Primary Function	Mission Identification Number	Service Supported Designator	Country or Mission
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	VISUAL RECCE	IN COUNTRY	USA	SOUTH VIETNAM
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	RECONNAISSANCE TARGET NAME/DESCRIPTION, OR AREA DEFINE POSITION (ENCL) (POSTER)	SUSP UFO		
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	VISUAL RECCE	IN COUNTRY	USA	SOUTH VIETNAM
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	RECONNAISSANCE TARGET NAME/DESCRIPTION, OR AREA DEFINE POSITION (ENCL) (POSTER)	SUSP UFO		
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	VISUAL RECCE	IN COUNTRY	USA	SOUTH VIETNAM
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	RECONNAISSANCE TARGET NAME/DESCRIPTION, OR AREA DEFINE POSITION (ENCL) (POSTER)	SUSP UFO		
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	ASB INTERSECTION	IN COUNTRY	USA	SOUTH VIETNAM
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	RECONNAISSANCE TARGET NAME/DESCRIPTION, OR AREA DEFINE POSITION (ENCL) (POSTER)	SUSP UFO		
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	ASB INTERSECTION	IN COUNTRY	USA	SOUTH VIETNAM
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	RECONNAISSANCE TARGET NAME/DESCRIPTION, OR AREA DEFINE POSITION (ENCL) (POSTER)	SUSP UFO		
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	ASB INTERSECTION	IN COUNTRY	USA	SOUTH VIETNAM
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	RECONNAISSANCE TARGET NAME/DESCRIPTION, OR AREA DEFINE POSITION (ENCL) (POSTER)	SUSP UFO		
02/01/69	USAF	USAF	ASB INTERSECTION	IN COUNTRY	USA	SOUTH VIETNAM

The USAF's Combat Air Activities File holds at least 16 UFO cases that never made it into Project Blue Book; nearly 50 years later, they're still classified./CREDIT: Barry Greenwood

Recently, Barry Greenwood, co-author of 1984's *Clear Intent*, the seminal look at federal UFO documents acquired under the Freedom of Information Act, appears to have stumbled across some of the cases Bolender was alluding to. While trolling through a recently digitized National Archives database called Combat Air Activities File (CACTA), Greenwood discovered a spread sheet of 16 UFO encounters during the Vietnam war, mostly from early 1969. Now, to be sure, there was a known history of UFO activity during our dismal hearts-and-minds experiment in Southeast Asia; Greenwood and late writing partner Larry Fawcett made note of the war-zone phenomena in *Clear Intent*. And as far back as 1973, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Gen. George Brown was going on record about it:

"I don't know whether this story has ever been told or not. They weren't called UFOs. They were called enemy helicopters. And they were only seen at night and they were only seen in certain places. They were up around the DMZ in the early summer of '68. And this resulted in quite a little battle. And during the course of this, an Australian destroyer took a hit and we never found any enemy, we only found ourselves when this had been all sorted out. And this caused some shooting there,

and there was no enemy at all involved but we always reacted. Always after dark. The same thing happened up at Pleiku at the highlands in '69."

So, a few weeks ago, as Greenwood noodled through the online nooks and crannies of official memory, he discovered the CACTA stash. Just as Bolender implied, these 1969 cases were categorized as "secret." The listings offered few details. But in the "Determination" column, investigators inserted conclusions like "UFO," "SUS[pected] UFO," and "UFO Chase." That was surprising. During years of FOIA fishing expeditions for military UFO records, Greenwood assiduously avoided using the dreaded U-word for fear of getting his requests tossed in the screwball bin; now, suddenly, here was the Air Force routinely employing the radioactive acronym. Imagine that. Anyhow, Greenwood cross-checked the CACTA cases against the official Blue Book records and, sure enough, just as Bolender wrote, they were nowhere to be found.

"Most everything we've gotten from Vietnam comes from anecdotes and memories," says Greenwood from his home outside Boston. "This is quite striking because now we have dates, times and locations. It's a complete reversal of what we'd expect from the Air Force. I can't imagine more of a national security issue than events occurring in wartime. I'm not in a literal sense suggesting these were spaceships. But what we do know is that this happened, and the records are still classified."

Furthermore, the 16 cases in question are only from 1967 and 1969. As Greenwood points out, Uncle Sam was invested in Vietnam for a good decade. What else is out there? What are the details behind the summaries of the incidents we now know about? "UFO Chase"? Really? Say what? Greenwood, who published his unexpected findings last month in a limited-distribution newsletter, is filing more FOIAs.

In the meantime, Nam vets, listen up: If you've got something to contribute, Barry Greenwood would like to hear from you at uhrhistory@verizon.net