

## TRANSCRIPT

# Media Engagement With Acting AARO Director Tim Phillips on the Historical Record Report Volume 1

March 6, 2024

STAFF: Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming. We are here today to hear from Mr. Tim Phillips, who is the Acting Director of the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office, on the first volume of the historical record report that was directed by the Congress in the fiscal year '23 NDAA.

Now, I will do — I will be moderating and calling on you, so please raise your hand. Remember that this is Mr. Phillips' first engagement with — with any of you, so he does not know you. So when I call on you, I ask you to please identify, at least the first time, identify your name and the outlet that you are with.

Initially, you get one question and one follow up. There's only about seven of you here, so we should have plenty of time to circle back around again on additional questions, all right?

With that, I will turn it over to Mr. Phillips.

ACTING DIRECTOR TIMOTHY A. PHILLIPS: Well, thank you very much. And good afternoon. It's a privilege to be here today, discuss the findings of AARO's Historical Record Report Volume one, which reviews the history of the United States government pertaining to unidentified anomalous phenomena.

Our report is the result of dozens of interviews, archival research, and rigorous fact checking across the government and industry. The goal of this report is not to prove or disprove any particular beliefs. AARO approached its research with objectivity, rigor, without any preconceptions about what we would find. Only a commitment to following the facts wherever they would lead.

Here are some of our findings. AARO has found no verifiable evidence that any UAP sighting has represented extraterrestrial activity. AARO has found no verifiable evidence that the U.S. government or private industry has ever had access to extraterrestrial technology. AARO has found no indications that any information was illegally or inappropriately withheld from Congress. AARO assesses that alleged hidden UAP programs either do not exist or were misidentified authentic national security programs unrelated to extraterrestrial technology exploitation.

We assess that claims of such hidden programs are largely the result of circular reporting in which a small group of individuals have repeated inaccurate claims they have heard from others over a period of several decades. I wish to emphasize that we believe most of the individuals repeated these claims to do so without malice or any effort to mislead the public.

Many have sincerely misinterpreted real events or mistaken sensitive U.S. programs for which they were not cleared as having been related to UAP or extraterrestrial exploitation. In completing this report, AARO faced no impediments to receiving UAP-related information at any level of classification. There's a few things that we did discover. Several authentic current or former programs that were never acquired UAP technology that were all properly reported to Congress. A piece of material alleged to be from a crashed extraterrestrial craft that was analyzed and confirmed to be man-made with no unusual properties.

An authentic program unrelated to UAP that was unnecessarily amended to include reverse engineering and UAP language. The amended program never received any actual UAP information or material. A prospective program called Kona Blue that was proposed to protect research related to extraterrestrial technology. The prospective program was never formally approved by leadership and never possessed any material or information. AARO assesses that the majority of historical UAP sightings result from the misidentification of ordinary objects or phenomena. Some are likely the misidentification of new or experimental technologies.

We are grateful to the dozens of people who provided AARO with information, leads, and shared their personal accounts. We continue to welcome any former or current government employee or contractor who believes they have information relevant to our historical review to contact us at aaro.mil. I want to emphasize that AARO's historical work is not over. The department will submit an historical record report, Volume II. It will incorporate any relevant information acquired since 1 November 2023.

AARO is pursuing existing leads and should we find anything that updates our current findings, we will share the information promptly with Congress and provide as much detail to the American public as possible. As we have said many times before, we will follow the evidence where it leads, wherever it leads. With that, I'm happy to take your questions.

STAFF: Brandi?

Q: Thanks, Sue. Hi, I'm Brandi Vincent with DefenseScoop. Nice to meet you and thanks for doing this. I have one question and one follow up.

So to start, have you noticed a ramp-up more recently that your team assesses is related to the latest boom in U.S. and others experimentation with emerging and next generation technologies? Specifically, there's also been multiple reports on multi-domain – AARO – and shapeshifting craft. Have you resolved any of those reports? And what emerging tech field would those be aligned with?

MR. PHILLIPS: Okay, there's a compound question there. We – we do see an increase in resolved cases where we identified UAS technology. So we're starting to see more UASs out there being reported through operational channels. The fact that we know they're exists and we can adjust our sensors to detect them and identify them more rapidly. We're seeing an increase and that's single-digit increases.

In the last month, we closed about 122 cases that was reported to AARO. 68% of those cases we assess to be some form of what I call aero garbage, balloons, trash that's up there in the atmosphere at – that are advanced sensors, we're able to detect. And then since it was unknown, it was reported to us as a UAP. And we had to research the cases. As far as other advanced technologies, there's been some cases, but we can't discuss that here.

Q: Because of operational security?

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

Q: And then my follow up is the report notes that on top of hoaxes and forgeries, mis- and disinformation is more prevalent and easier to generate and disseminate than ever before. In the process of this sort of assessment, did AARO see any indications that one or more than one foreign adversaries were trying to sow distrust in the American public online on the UAP topic? If so, who and how much of that is a concern for you right now, particularly in an election year?

MR. PHILLIPS: OK. I'm an Intel officer, I can't comment on, you know, politics or election year. What we're trying to do is increase domain awareness. We just can't afford to have an unidentified object, a UAP, operating in proximity to our operational forces, our military forces, or our critical infrastructure. The world is too dangerous of a place to have that happen. And our job is to detect it, identify it, and then help the department deal with it, you know, through the appropriate, you know, means. But —

Q: So foreign adversaries?

MR. PHILLIPS: I'm not going to comment on that at this forum today.

Q: Thank you.

STAFF: Dan?

Q: Hi, Dan Lamothe, The Washington Post. Thanks for your time today. The report pretty early in calls out a sort of pop culture being a challenge for you all on this topic. Sort of the zeitgeist, I guess, kind of — this sort of maybe just being a fun topic for a lot of people, so, you know, on and on we go. How much did it come into play as you all are thinking of policies for this, informing the American public about this, and how much do you hope this report might get after that issue?

MR. PHILLIPS: We're hoping that the more transparent, the more that we can declassify and post to our site is going to demystify this topic. We did see a change in the culture as we looked back, all the way back to 1945, and we actually went all the way back to the 1930s. And we saw the UFO, the UAP mythology change, and it reflected the public's current understanding of what that unknown was.

So early on, you see them talking about moon men. When we got to the moon, we didn't find anybody. Then we talked about Martians. We have a lot better understanding of the planets in our solar system. So we saw that change. The CIA had a really, really great assessment in the early '60s.

The fact that we were operating the U-2 was a guarded secret. It flew at 60,000 feet where most of the aviation at that time was around 20,000. So people were seeing glints. They were seeing something operating. And a lot that we saw, they attributed the U-2 as to be the basis of a lot of, back then, UFO cases being reported in the press by the public. And we kind of see that trend.

So when we started to see developmental stealth aircraft, we started seeing people seeing unusual aircraft shapes and that was attributed by them, probably based off the popular culture, and the movies, and the books in the UFO mythology, that — that's what I'm seeing. You know, I saw it on TV, it must be true.

I can actually relate a story that occurred to me when I was on active duty. We were operating in the Chocolate Mountains, by — it's out by Yuma, the big range out there, and we visually detected an aircraft. We could hear it, then we saw it. And none of us knew what it was. It was a shape none of us ever seen. There happened to be an improved I-Hawk anti-aircraft battery there. It has an optical tracker. So it's not in visual, especially in the daylight. And it locked it up on the camera. And then later on, we were asked if we had seen and tracked anything that was unusual.

What we found much later, after it became public, that was one of the early F-117 fighter aircraft flying around on the range that we had detected with an optical system. And it was really interesting, the stealth worked because the radar didn't pick it up. But to us, we didn't know what that — what that was. And we just assumed the U.S. government owned it and

was developed it. What we saw with many of the interviewees, the people Congress referred to us, many of them made testimony on the Hill, they came in and talked to us, they had sincere beliefs in what they observed.

And in some cases, they were lawfully present at a location in a time when a sensitive technology was being developed or tested. They witnessed something, they didn't understand what it was, they reported it to us. And we were able to go back to the program owners and to the range and ask, by the way, what were you flying during this week? By God, I would have thought it would have been a UAP myself when I actually saw the picture of it.

So these are rational people making observations and just relating to what they know. And that's where that popular culture comes in. I think the way that we're going to be able to communicate with the American people, the fact that if we're doing an investigation — I was actually asked this on the Hill yesterday, you're investigating a UAP incident and you discover it's an extraterrestrial. Are you going to classify that? And the answer is no. If we go to our classification guide, we don't classify something because it's not from this world. That's not our job, OK?

Now, how we communicate that with the public and the administration wants to communicate that, that's why I have experts who do strat-comm for us. But the fact that we don't understand something, it's not necessarily classified. I hope that answers your question.

Q: Thank you.

STAFF: Oren?

Q: Oren Liebermann from CNN. I just want to follow up on one of the answers you told Brandi. You said 122 cases were closed last month. What is the total number of cases you've received? And can you give us a sense of the rate that you are receiving cases and closing cases at this point?

MR. PHILLIPS: I would say that it's over 1,200 cases that have been reported to us. So we worked with the Joint Staff. And we have an operating reporting requirement to the services and combatant commands. If they have a UAP incident, and that's defined in the

GENADMIN message, what that is, they report back through operational channels to us.

So we've had about 1,200 cases that we've looked at. We approximately receive anywhere between 90 and a 100-110 a month\*1 from the operating forces. And you'll see in our reporting, there's a real bias to the Department of Defense because they're out there flying. They tend to have the advanced sensors. And if you're clearing a range before you go hot, if you're looking for something, you might find it. We're starting to see an increase in civil aviation sightings, you know, from — through the FAA and through NASA. We're starting to get few or more cases in, and you'll see that reflected in our heat map on our website. You'll see, with the bright red, that tends to reflect where DOD is operating, where they have those detections.

I would say that we — we probably, on average, around 100 cases a month\*1 we are clearing. And the ones that we can declassify, we'll publish to our website or we'll report back through official channels to the services and the organizations that reported those contacts.

Q: Just a quick follow up. Can you give us an update on the — the submission, the creation of a submission process for UAP reports? It was originally opened up for service members and — and government employees, but there was an effort to try to open it up wider than that, and eventually get a reporting process for the public, which was supposed to be in the works.

MR. PHILLIPS: That was a Phase 3 we're still in. We had the first phase, which was the secure reporting portal for those that had knowledge of the U.S. government — or working on advanced UAP technology that was not revealed to Congress. We're into, I would call, a Phase 2 right now, where we're trying to work out the command and control, the mechanisms on how other government entities can report UAP incidents to us.

We've received a number of reports from Department of Homeland Security and their aircraft reporting to us that we follow up on. So we're working within the government. And we're looking at how can we do it at scale, what is the appropriate way in the future to be able to communicate with the public these incidents.

So it's — it's on our, you know, our tasking. We just haven't got to it yet. And AARO's been around for about 18 months. And we just achieved initial operating capability, I would say, in October\*2 of last year is when we actually were able to bring the staff on and start develop some of the sensors and the capabilities, the flyaway kits, so we could respond quickly when there's a UAP incident.

STAFF: Todd.

Q: Sir, I think AARO, all-domain is included in the name. To what extent are there anomalous phenomenon that are not in the air, but somewhere else?

MR. PHILLIPS: You're absolutely correct because the vast majority of the reporting tends to be in the atmosphere because that's where we're operating. We've received one report in the maritime domain. And we've received no reports in space. However, we do have working groups in space and in the maritime. And what we're trying to do is define what is a UAP incident and how that will be reported.

So there's some policy issues we need to work out. For example, there's a UAP in space, we've detected something we don't understand. A lot of times as orbits, you know, decay, they enter the atmosphere. Now, we've got a track management issue. So who's going to take it from the space domain into the atmosphere? And then if it continues and go into the ocean, now, we have three different domains that we have to work with on how we maintain that (inaudible) and who is responsible for the reporting and then investigation of that act?

I would love to tell you, we'd be more mature in space. I was amazed at the ability of the community of interest to be able to understand their domain. And what we found is, the more data that any domain has, the deeper understanding of these unknown phenomena that exist. So when we did talk to our partners who work in the space domain, they had very few things that they didn't understand in space.

STAFF: OK. Jeff.

Q: Jeff Schogol, Task and Purpose. Did you find any evidence that adversaries like Russia or China had made breakthroughs in technologies, or in hypersonics, and this was being reported as UAPs? Or that they were surrounding American ships and planes with balloons,

drones, other common technology to observe U.S. military operations?

MR. PHILLIPS: I can discuss that AARO assisted in helping identify the high-altitude balloon that came from China.\*<sup>3</sup> We were involved in that case, but I can't speak on any of the rest of that question.

Q: About whether you found any evidence that the Russians, Chinese, etcetera?

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

Q: And follow up question. There are people who sincerely believe that the government has alien bodies, alien crafts, you know, that — that they have communicated with — with extraterrestrials. What can you tell them to try to bring some sort of resolution to this?

MR. PHILLIPS: I can tell them that AARO, as designed by Congress, had unprecedented access to classified programs. Nobody blocked where we could go or the questions we asked. Nobody in the government influenced the findings in the report. As a career Intel officer, I am just amazed at the access we had to some of our nation's most sensitive programs.

Nobody said no. There — there was a challenge because some of these allegations that we received, passed to us by Congress or we had in our interviews. People were commenting on things they saw or they heard second-hand from 20, 30 years ago. And as we would go back and try to do an investigation, most of the individuals with first-hand knowledge are now retired.

And I'll tell you what we did. If we received a claim, that was the beginning of the investigation. Now, we're going to look up for — and we're going to try to find other collaborating evidence to support that claim. And in many cases, what we saw was circular reporting. We saw a small group of people who knew each other, who all cited their observations as the purpose for their beliefs or for their observations.

There was one program that was repeated, Kona Blue. It's in the report. And that was reported as that's where they hide the bodies. That wasn't true. We worked very, very closely with our DHS partners and that just was not true.

Wherever there was a claim, as I had said, you know, previously, it could be an IC agency, it could be another department, it could be in a dusty archive, in DOD. We had access to it. NARA was wonderful as far as giving us access for all the SAPs and CAPs programs out there.\*4 There is an archive. And a lot of this is not digitized. It's a lot of, you know, old school library work where you're going through boxes and boxes, or microfiche trying to explore.

But the claim was the first step, if we just went — we followed every lead we could find to run these to ground. And we had a, you know, two approaches. We had career law enforcement officers who are on our staff. They're DOD law enforcement people who are know how to conduct investigations. And then we have IC officials that follow analytical tradecraft standards who have conducted field interrogations. Very proficient. And we did everything we could to examine these claims. And we found no actual UFO materials in any allegation or incident that was reported to us that we — or that was given to us by Congress.

STAFF: OK. Luis.

Q: Hi. Thank you so much for doing this. I'm Luis Martinez with ABC News. And I just have a ton of questions, so if you could bear with me.

STAFF: You get one and a follow up and then we —

Q: Yes, let me just —

STAFF: — we still have somebody that hasn't had their question.

Q: Yes. I'll try to get the first one in. When you talk about it in the report, the numbered persons and the numbered individuals that were interviewed, there have been two high-profile individuals over the last couple of years, Luis Elizondo and David Grusch. Were they interviewed for this? I know probably for privacy, you can't tell us, but can you tell us whether they were a part for the overall look at this?

MR. PHILLIPS: As a practice, we do not disclose who came in and spoke to us. The individuals are free to share that with you, but I'm not going to talk about who we interviewed. But anybody with knowledge of UAPs or the government covert attempt to reverse engineer or to exploit these materials, we would love to talk to them. So, aaro.mil,

you go online. I'd give my phone numbers, but I've been told I can't do that, but contact us. We want to talk to you. And I will tell you, you know, I'm a guy from Tucson, Arizona, and we treat people — we are government civil servants. We treat the citizens that come in with respect. We listen to their stories.

And if we can prove what they're telling us, we'll do everything we can to do so. You know, we don't have barriers. We aren't biased. We'll let the evidence take us where it takes us.

Q: So that will be my follow up. You kind of touched on this earlier in giving us the process of how wide of a scope this was. Is it safe to characterize this as the most comprehensive U.S. government effort yet to look at this? And how can you — can you explain how you were able to do that in such a short time span? And can you give us an idea of how many people were employed to do this? Or were you relying on these agencies, for example, the CIA, to come up with their own determinations, then you would review their work?

MR. PHILLIPS: All of the above. So I don't think there's ever been a government organization with the authorities and with the amount of funding that we receive from Congress. As the acting director, I work for the Deputy Director of Defense.\*5 There's actually been — there's — trying to get information, we've actually had to solicit her personal assistance to open a door. I don't believe any previous government attempt to research UFOs, UAPs has ever had that type of top cover.

And I will tell you that Congress members and staffers all throughout the government, they took a personal interest in it. They empowered what we did. And I am sincere when I say, and I've only been there since 1 October, but nobody got in our way and said no. And when we had people were slow to agree, the door was eventually opened.

STAFF: Lee.

Q: Lee Hudson, Politico. So what has your initial response been from Capitol Hill from lawmakers and staff? And are you hoping that this report, once it's made public, will quell conspiracy theories?

MR. PHILLIPS: I think the more the government can disclose and declassified the public, they can make calculated, you know, educated decisions. They'll look at the evidence and they'll decide. You know, we're not here to change anybody's beliefs. But we've got an amazing team that Dr. Kirkpatrick put together, just dedicated professionals from a wide spectrum of careers from scientists, you know, to agents. We just have amazing, dedicated, skilled staff that's working hard every day.

I got to send people home at night because they're so excited about this mission. And we just closed on an advertisement in USAJOBS. And I was told, we had over a thousand people applied. It's going to be hard to get through that. But there's a lot of interest, a lot of talent. And the LNOs being offered to us. So we have unsolicited — we've had other government agencies, military services, who've come to us and have put one of their officers on our staff.

And having that LNO really, really assists us as we navigate DHS\*6 or NASA. It's nice to have somebody who understands the terrain. So I can just say we've got great people and they're doing wonderful work.

STAFF: Okay. Luis, we've gone to everybody else. We can go back to you now.

Q: How many people do you actually have on staff right now that were able to work in all of this? And how many were specifically dedicated to this review? And then I have a follow up.

MR. PHILLIPS: This review was primarily, it was the — our operational directorate that was actually making the contacts, arranging for the interviews, they were involved. But then I had our analytical team who was actually looking at the statements, putting the stories together, the act of writing, by Dr. Kirkpatrick. Just probably a good 100 days of tech editing and legal review. I've never had so many help from so many experts on the DOD staff that help us get it right. I would say, we have the staff. And I'm a —

Q: (Inaudible) tell us how much you (inaudible)?

MR. PHILLIPS: I don't want to say that here. Enough to get the job done. But half of our office is almost dedicated to doing the research and then drafting and finalizing the report. In a way, I'm really happy to get this behind us because look, I want to support the warfighter. I want to go after the cases that we received this week. That's where I want to

be. I want to have my officers out in the field, you know, talking to witnesses, trying to gather and preserve evidence, trying to work with the services and the other departments in the government on how to preserve data when there is an incident, helping to write force protection standards so I can capture this in real-time.

Doing it forensically after the fact is difficult. You know, as a marine and as an Intel officer, I want to be ahead of my opponent. And I want to capture it in real-time. And we're working with some crazy — some amazing — I don't want to say crazy, but amazing partners across the spectrum. I'm going to be in London next week. I'm going to be talking at a geospatial conference. And we have other people with capabilities and interests that I'm all with. I want to partner. I want to use your data and your sensors, your reporting networks to help us understand this phenomena.

Q: So are there any — like, when you listed all the programs in the report, like, you know, the Dragon Lady and all this, and the B-2, are there any in that list that were declassified specifically for this report?

MR. PHILLIPS: Some of the programs we worked with the department to be declassified. And hopefully, you'll see some of that soon.

Q: So some of these are included in this report and we're learning for the first time? Or that's like —

MR. PHILLIPS: I think Kona Blue is in the unclass here. And you'll actually see the release — the press release on that from another department, but yes.

Q: That's the first time it's ever been disclosed publicly, I guess?

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, it wasn't declassified until we were able to work with DHS.

STAFF: Brandi?

Q: Just one quick follow up. And thank you again for doing this. You mentioned that you all met initial operating capability, IOC, in October.\*2 When are you slated for full operational capability? And what are the things that still need to be accomplished to meet that?

MR. PHILLIPS: Sure. We're working with some of the government labs such as the Department of Energy labs. And we have a great partner with Georgia Tech. And what we're doing is developing a deployable configurable sensor suite that we can put in Pelican cases. And we're this — we're going to go be able to deploy it to the field to do a long-term collect.

Since the UAP target, the signature, is not clearly defined. We really have to do hyperspectral, you know, surveillance to try to capture these incidents. So we are going to declare a mission capability IOC for our GREMLIN system. That's the name of the deployable surveillance system that we've been developing for the last year.\*7

We're currently at a very large range in Texas. We've been out there going against some known UAS targets, but some unknown targets, picking up a lot of bats and birds. We're learning a lot about solar flaring. We're really starting to understand what's in orbit around our planet and how we can eliminate those as anomalous objects. So we're going to do that and then we're going to go to the department and say, we are ready to deploy our system in response to a national security site or a critical infrastructure with a UAP problem. We want to help solve (inaudible).

STAFF: We've got time for one more question. Dan?

Q: Thank you. Actually, I'd love to follow up for whatever detail you can provide on that deployable system. That's fascinating. What was the vision there? And particularly, deploying it in response to something, what do you hope to learn with those deployments?

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, if we have a national security site and there are objects being reported, okay, that within restricted airspace or within a maritime range, or in the proximity of one of our spaceships, we need to understand what that is. And so that's why we're developing sensor capability that we can deploy in reaction to reports.

Ideally, what we could do is actually have a minimum force protection level, have a spec. And then as we outfit these locations and these capabilities, we already have specified what type of sensors they need to be able to capture this in real-time, and then how that information would be relayed back to us and our mission partners. We could analyze it and help them mediate whatever that particular incident is.

Q: Can you speak to the size of that certain thing –

STAFF: OK. Dan, yes, –

Q: – (inaudible) a suit case or a platform or truck –

STAFF: – Dan, we're going to cut it off here. Thank you all very much. All right. Thanks very much, guys, for coming out.

*[\*1 Eds. note: The number of cases AARO receives and resolves widely varies from month to month.]*

*[\*2 Eds. note: AARO achieved IOC in July 2023.]*

*[\*3 Eds. note: While AARO supported interagency cooperation during the February 2023 People's Republic of China high-altitude balloon incident, that case centered on an 'identified' object and was not within AARO's purview. AARO did provide advice and support regarding the three initially unknown objects that were discovered and tracked shortly after the PRC balloon incident.]*

*[\*4 Eds. note: NARA assisted with archival research. Research into SAPs and CAPs was done through the appropriate SAPCO or CAPCO offices.]*

*[\*5 Eds. note: The AARO director reports to the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence.]*

*[\*6 Eds. note: AARO enjoys a close working relationship with DHS, but does not have a DHS liaison working within the office.]*

*[\*7 Eds. note: While GREMLIN is approaching IOC, AARO is also in the early stages of developing a smaller suite of deployable sensors for rapid response to a UAP incident.]*

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