

Written Answers

Thursday, 25th January 2001.

Chinook Helicopter Mk II: Conversion Training

Lord Chalfont asked Her Majesty's Government:

When the Chinook helicopter simulator training facility and its related training programme were upgraded to cater for the Mk. II version of the helicopter; and when Flight Lieutenants Tapper and Cook completed their upgraded training programme. [HL324]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean): The reconfiguration of the Chinook simulator to Mk2 standard was completed in the last quarter of 1993. The instructing training staff of the Operational Conversion Flight had completed conversion to the Mk2 version in August 1993.

Flt Lt Tapper and Flt Lt Cook completed their conversion training programmes on 28 February 1994 and 17 March 1994 respectively.

European Security and Defence Policy: Intelligence Management

Lord Shore of Stepney asked Her Majesty's Government:

What are the commitments which the United Kingdom has entered into, under the European Security and Defence Policy, for the gathering, analysis and distribution of intelligence material for European Union purposes. [HL405]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: At the European Council at Nice, EU member states agreed the terms of reference of the EU Military Staff, which would perform "early warning, situation assessment and strategic planning for Petersberg tasks".

To carry out this task the staff will rely on appropriate national and multinational intelligence capabilities. The detailed arrangements for handling intelligence material will be subject to stringent safeguards and will take full account of existing national and multinational agreements.

* Rendlesham Forest Incident *

Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether they are aware of any involvement by Special Branch personnel in the investigation of the 1980 Rendlesham Forest incident. [HL303]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: Special Branch officers may have been aware of the incident but would not have shown an interest unless there was evidence of

a potential threat to national security. No such interest appears to have been shown.

* **Lord Hill-Norton** asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether personnel from Porton Down visited Rendlesham Forest or the area surrounding RAF Walton in December 1980 or January 1981; and whether they are aware of any tests carried out in either of those two areas aimed at assessing any nuclear, biological or chemical hazard. [HL301]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: The staff at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) Chemical and Biological Defence (CBD) laboratories at Porton Down have made a thorough search of their archives and have found no record of any such visits.

* **Lord Hill-Norton** asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether they are aware of any uncorrelated targets tracked on radar in November or December 1980; and whether they will give details of any such incidents. [HL302]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: Records dating from 1980 no longer exist. Paper records are retained for a period of three years before being destroyed. Recordings of radar data are retained for a period of thirty days prior to re-use of the recording medium.

* Unidentified Flying Objects *

Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government:

What is the highest classification that has been applied to any Ministry of Defence document concerning Unidentified Flying Objects. [HL304]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: A limited search through available files has identified a number of documents graded Secret. The overall classification of the documents was not dictated by details of specific sightings of "UFOs".

Arms Brokering and Trafficking: Licensing

Lord Hylton asked Her Majesty's Government:

When they expect to implement licensing for arms brokering and trafficking, which they announced at last year's Labour Party Conference. [HL343]

The Minister for Science, Department of Trade and Industry (Lord Sainsbury of Turville): The new licensing controls on arms brokering and trafficking announced last September will be introduced under new powers on trafficking and brokering to be contained in an Export Control Bill; The Queen's Speech announced that the Government will publish this Bill in draft during this session of Parliament. Full details of the new controls proposed on arms

| <i>Section/Schedule of Act</i> | <i>Timing of Commencement</i> |
|---|---|
| Schedule 21 (Minor and consequential amendments) | |
| Paragraphs: 1 to 5; 6(1), (5), (6), (7)(b) & (c), (8) & (9); 8 to 11, 12(2) & (13); and 13 to 15. | 16 February |
| Paragraphs: 6(2) & (7)(d) and 16 to 18 | 1 July 2001 |
| Paragraphs: 12(2) & (3) | On Royal Assent (i.e. on 30 November 2000) |
| Schedule 22 (Repeals) | As with corresponding provisions |
| Part I of Schedule 23 (Transfer of Registration of existing registered parties). | Two weeks after Royal Assent (i.e. on 14 December 2000) |

Those provisions of the Act not listed in the table will be brought into force by means of one or more subsequent commencement orders at a date or dates to be announced.

Rendlesham Forest/RAF Bentwaters Incident

* Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether they will detail the underground facilities at the former RAF Bentwaters installation; and what is the purpose of these facilities. [HL320]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean): There are no underground facilities at the former RAF Bentwaters.

* Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether they are aware of any involvement in the 1980 Rendlesham Forest incident by either Ministry of Defence Policy or personnel from the Suffolk Constabulary. [HL321]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: The Minister of Defence is not aware of any involvement by the Ministry of Defence Police in the alleged incident. The Ministry of Defence's knowledge of involvement by the Suffolk Police is limited to a letter dated 28 July 1999 from the Suffolk Constabulary to Georgina Bruni that is contained in the recent book.

* Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether they are aware of any investigation of the 1980 Rendlesham Forest incident carried out by the United States Air force, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations or any other United States agency. [HL322]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: The Ministry of Defence's knowledge of an investigation by the US authorities into the alleged incident in Rendlesham Forest in 1980 is limited to the information contained in the memorandum sent by Lt Col Halt USAF, Deputy Base Commander at RAF Woodbridge, to the RAF Liaison Officer at RAF Bentwaters on 13 January 1981.

* Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether, in the light of the new information contained in Georgina Bruni's book *You Can't Tell the People*, they will now launch an investigation into the Rendlesham Forest incident and the response to this incident by the United States Air Force and the Ministry of Defence. [HL352]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: No additional information has come to light over the last 20 years to call into question the original judgment by the Ministry of Defence that nothing of defence significance occurred in the location of Rendlesham Forest in 1980. Accordingly there is no reason to hold an investigation now.

* Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether they have made any approach to, or received any approach from, any United States government or military agency concerning Georgina Bruni's book *You Can't Tell the People*; and, if so, whether they will give details of any such approach. [HL353]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: As a matter of courtesy, the Ministry of Defence informed Headquarters 3rd Air Force at RAF Mildenhall about the book. The US authorities have not subsequently approached the Ministry of Defence on the issue.

* Lord Hill-Norton asked Her Majesty's Government: *

Whether they now agree with the analysis of the basic facts of the Rendlesham Forest/RAF Bentwaters incident in the fourth paragraph of Lord Hill-Norton's letter to Lord Gilbert of 22 October 1997, reported on page 429 of Georgina Bruni's book *You Can't Tell the People*; or, if not, in what respect they disagree. [HL354]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: The Ministry of Defence's position regarding this alleged sighting remains as it did at the time of Lord Gilbert's reply to the noble Lord's letter of 22nd October 1997. From surviving departmental records, we remain satisfied that nothing of defence significance occurred on the nights in question.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Lord Ashley of Stoke asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether they will make available to British nuclear test veterans the same screening facilities that are being provided for other ex-servicemen. [HL374]

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: Work coordinated by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), together with other published studies, indicates that even the most powerful radiobiological techniques for estimating historic radiation exposure in individuals are of doubtful use in the case of nuclear test veterans.

BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Lord Hill-Norton, Chief of the Defence Staff from 1971 to 1973, has a long standing interest in 'UFOs' and over a sixteen month period, up to December 1998, tabled 26 PQs.
2. Lord Hill-Norton has tabled ten PQs relating to the subject of Unidentified Flying Objects ('UFOs'). Nine, are in respect of information contained in a book by Georgina Bruni on the subject of an alleged Unidentified Flying Object ('UFO') incident said to have occurred in 1980. One asks for the highest classification of any MOD document on the subject of 'UFOs'. This linked background note is in respect of four of the ten PQs, numbers 0348L, 0349L, 0350L and 0351L for answer on 26 January, the remaining six are for answer on 30 January.
3. The title of the book is "You can't tell the people - the definitive account of the Rendlesham Forest UFO mystery". It concerns a well known 'UFO' incident, alleged to have occurred in Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk over the Christmas period in 1980 in the vicinity of two RAF bases, made available at that time to US Visiting Forces, RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge. The subject of the incident first came to prominence in 1983 when a memorandum sent to MOD shortly after the event by the then Deputy Base Commander, Lt Col Charles Halt USAF, was unearthed in the US by researchers. The Halt memorandum describes the alleged incident in some detail and is reprinted in the book where claims are also made that USAF personnel met and communicated with "beings".
4. The book is a detailed account but one that includes contradictory evidence from a range of alleged witnesses. It accuses both UK and US authorities of a "cover-up" of the detail of the event. There is an unclassified MOD file on the subject. It was opened almost two years after the event is alleged to have occurred and appears to contain documents drawn from a number of other files. It cannot be regarded with any degree of certainty as a record of all the papers ever held by MOD on the event.
5. PQs 0348L and 0350L ask about alleged involvement in enquiries following the incident of personnel from either the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) Chemical and Biological Defence (CBD) laboratories at Porton Down, or from the Special Branch.
6. The book repeats the allegation of an unidentified witness that a team of four scientists from the CBD laboratories at Porton Down visited the site of the alleged incident shortly after the event is said to have taken place. Lord Hill-Norton has asked whether personnel visited the Rendlesham Forest or in the area of Watton (further to the north) in December 1980 or January 1981. MOD has been informed by DERA that a search of records has been conducted and enquiries made of a very few existing members of staff who were working at the CBD laboratories in 1980 but that no information has come to light.

UNCLASSIFIED

7. A copy of a letter is reprinted that was sent to Ms Bruni from Police Headquarters in Suffolk in answer to a number of questions, including the possibility that Special Branch officers may have been aware of the event. In connection with this enquiry it has not proved possible in the time available for the Home Office to locate any files that might relate to the alleged incident. In addition many personnel serving in the force in 1980 have since retired and are no longer available for consultation. The reply repeats information contained in the letter from Suffolk Police Headquarters and confirms that Special Branch would not have had an interest in the event unless there was evidence of a potential threat to national security. It is believed that no such threat was evident.

8. PQ 0349L asks if there were any uncorrelated targets tracked on radar in November or December 1980. Uncorrelated targets may be defined as radar tracks that have not been positively identified by normal means. No records remain dating back to 1980. Some paper information is retained for a period of three years before destruction; recordings of radar data are retained for only 30 days prior to re-use of the recording medium.

9. Lord Hill-Norton's fourth question, PQ 0351L asks for the highest classification applied to any MOD document concerning 'UFOs'. A search of material identified as relating to 'UFOs', necessarily limited by the time available, indicates that the vast majority of the papers that exist on the subject, on open and closed files, are unclassified. Directorate Air Staff (Secretariat) has traced a small number of documents classified SECRET. They relate to discussions concerning handling of correspondence and administrative arrangements rather than 'UFO' reports and appear to hold a higher classification than might be expected from the nature of the material they contain. The DIS has applied the classification of SECRET UK EYES ONLY to a recent report on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP). The overall classification of the report was dictated by analysis material included on the UK Air Defence Ground Environment. The document is otherwise UK RESTRICTED.

REMEMBER you are accountable for the accuracy and timeliness of the advice you provide. Departmental Instructions on answering PQs can be viewed on the CHOTS public area and on DAWN.

DRAFTED BY : Section 40
AUTHORISED BY :
GRADE/RANK : B1
BRANCH : DAS(Sec)

TEL: Section 40
TEL:

DECLARATION: I have satisfied myself that the above answer and background note are in accordance with the Government's policy on answering PQs, Departmental instructions (DCI GEN 150/97), and the Open Government Code (DCI GEN 54/98).

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BACKGROUND NOTE

1. This linked background note is in respect of six PQs that have been tabled by the Lord Hill- Norton on the subject of Unidentified Flying Objects. Three are for answer on Friday 26 January, the remaining three are for answer on Tuesday 30 January. All relate to incidents alleged to have occurred in Rendlesham Forest around Christmas 1980. A book, "You can't tell the people - the definitive account of the Rendlesham Forest UFO mystery" written by Georgina Bruni, was published in November 2000. Four other PQs tabled by Lord Hill-Norton, on the same subject, are also for answer on 26 January (PQs 0348, 0349, 0350, 0351) and have been submitted separately.

2. PQS 0355L and 0393L - The book by Ms Bruni alleges a cover-up of information of the alleged events and subsequent investigation by the US authorities. Lord Hill-Norton asks about MOD awareness of any US investigation in 1980 and whether any approach was made to US authorities, or by the US authorities to MOD, concerning the publication of the book.

PQ 0355L - There are only a very few papers from the early 1980's on a MOD file concerning the alleged events. Along with correspondence from members of the public, they include the report from Lt Col Charles Halt USAF to the RAF Liaison Officer at RAF Bentwaters and limited official comments on that report. However, a press briefing prepared in 1983 reveals that evidence of investigation by the US authorities was limited to the information contained in Lt Col Halt's memorandum.

PQ 0393L - In view of the fact that the book was critical of US authorities, and that RAF Bentwaters/Woodbridge were at the time US bases, Headquarters 3rd Air Force were informed by telephone of the publication of the book. The aim of the call was to ensure that the HQ 3 AF public relations staff were aware, so that they would not be compromised by any media contact. As the answer indicates, there has been no other contact on the issue.

3. PQ 0358L - Asks whether there is any knowledge of involvement by the Ministry of Defence Police, or personnel from the Suffolk Constabulary. Ms Bruni pursued both lines of enquiry as US ex-Servicemen interviewed by her suggested that British Police (she assumes from either the Ministry of Defence Police or the local Suffolk Constabulary) might have visited the site of the alleged landing of a craft and kept civilians away from the site. Replies from both the Head of the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) Secretariat and from Suffolk Police are reprinted in the book. No reference to events in Rendlesham Forest has been found in incident files held by the MDP. In addition several Senior Officers of the Force were contacted but they had no recollection of MDP officers having investigated, or having been involved in, the alleged events. The Home Office has been able to confirm that the letter from the Suffolk Constabulary is genuine but has been unable, in the time available, to locate the incident files or confirm the detail with the author of the letter who has retired from the Force.

4. PQ 0359L - Asks for information on the nature and purpose of the underground facilities at RAF Bentwaters. Ms Bruni was taken round the site and installations at the former RAF Bentwaters, now owned by Bentwaters Investments Ltd, while conducting research for her book. Her viewing of the buildings led her to suggest there might be underground facilities and that nuclear weapons may have been stored there in 1980, contrary to UK/US Treaty obligations. In 1997 Lord Hill-Norton asked if nuclear weapons were stored at RAF Woodbridge and Bentwaters at the time of the alleged events in Rendlesham Forest. The answer given was that it was the policy of present and previous Governments neither to confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons at any site, either in the past or present; this policy has not changed. The current reply repeats the advice of Defence Estates who have confirmed that there are no underground facilities at the former RAF Bentwaters.

5. PQ 0392L - Asks if HMG will agree with an analysis of the basic facts of the alleged incident in Rendlesham Forest as set out in a letter (written by Lord Hill-Norton) to Minister DP in 1997. A copy of that letter, and the reply from Lord Gilbert's office (D/Min(DP)/JWG/MP/4290/97/M) is attached at Flag A.

6. The unclassified MOD file on the subject was opened almost two years after the event is alleged to have occurred and appears to contain documents drawn from a number of other files. It cannot be regarded with any degree of certainty as a complete record of all the papers ever held by MOD on the alleged event. However, the text of a press release issued by DS8 (now DAS(Sec)) in October 1983 indicates that Lt Col Halt's memorandum had been passed to staff concerned with air defence matters and the conclusion was that there was nothing of defence interest in the reported sightings. This conclusion has been repeated in reply to numerous enquiries over the intervening years and features once again in the answer to this question.

7. PQ 0394L - Asks if HMG will launch an investigation into the alleged incident and the response to this incident by MOD and the USAF in the light of new information contained in Ms Bruni's book. The response by MOD to other requests to reopen the investigation has been that no additional information has come to light that might call the original judgement into question and that remains the position. The memorandum sent by Lt Col Halt was received by MOD shortly after it was written. Although a complete set of papers has not been traced, the 1983 press release confirms that the memorandum was supplied to MOD staff concerned with air defence matters and that MOD was satisfied that there was nothing of defence interest in the alleged sightings. The press release goes on to confirm that there was no question of any contact with "alien beings", which was one allegation made when the interest of the press was aroused in 1983 and subsequently in Ms Bruni's book.