

The strangest job in Whitehall

UFO files reveal behind the scenes of the 'UFO Desk'

UFO files released today by The National Archives reveal for the first time, the role of the UFO Desk Officers*, what they really thought about the possibility of alien visits, their ideas to harness alien technology as a weapon, and their briefings to Tony Blair on UFO policy.

The 25 files, which contain over 6,700 pages, include a job description for the UFO Desk Officer post. Described as a relatively junior role, it contains a summary of the 'daily mechanics' of the UFO Desk Officer job, written by the incumbent before being transferred to another post in November 2009 when the UFO desk was closed.

Daily duties included providing briefings on the Ministry of Defence's position on UFOs and extraterrestrial life, undertaking UFO investigations, handling hundreds of FOI requests, and managing UFOlogists (UFO 'experts') and press enquiries.

The Desk Officer says the idea of UFO investigations "tends to suggest to the public that there are Top Secret teams of specialist scientists scurrying around the country in a real life version of the X-Files....[but] this is total fiction." In fact according to the Desk Officer, many investigations involved searching the internet.

Dr David Clarke, author of the book 'The UFO files' and Senior Lecturer in Journalism from Sheffield Hallam University, said: *"These records allow us to look behind the scenes of what must have been one of the strangest jobs in Whitehall. We now have a fascinating insight into some of the extraordinary reports and briefings which passed over the UFO Desk on a daily basis and how its officers used logic and science in their attempts to explain 'the unexplained'."*

Amongst the files is a 1995 briefing by a UFO Intelligence Officer which states that although there is no hard evidence for alien craft, if sightings were indeed alien visitors there were a number of possible reasons for their visit including "a) military reconnaissance b) scientific c) tourism". The briefing paper also states that if the reports were to be believed, alien technology was far superior to ours and goes on to suggest that the Ministry of Defence could use the UFO technology, if it existed.

In a briefing prepared for the Ministry of Defence prior to the House of Lords UFO Debate in 1979, a UFO Intelligence Officer questions why, in such a vast universe, aliens would want to visit “an insignificant planet (the Earth) of an uninteresting star (the sun)”. He also raises the point that no radio tracking systems had ever picked up any alien transmissions. He concluded that claims of thousands of visits in the last decade were far too large to be credible.

Dr David Clarke continues: *“These files also detail the background to the MoD’s decision to release these files to the public in the first place, something I had been campaigning for over several years under the Freedom of Information Act. Now they have been released at The National Archives they will provide future generations with a fascinating snapshot of an unexplored aspect of contemporary social history.”*

Other highlights from the files include:

- A lengthy briefing on UFO policy to PM Tony Blair’s office at the time the government had just begun the implementation of the FOI Act.
- Behind the scenes of MoD’s decision to open the UFO files following an FOI campaign by Dr David Clarke of Sheffield Hallam University
- Findings of an Unexplained Aerial Phenomena study suggested that some UFOs were rare atmospheric plasmas (e.g. ball lightning) that could be harnessed or used by the military as ‘novel weapon technology.’
- A 1982 memo notes a fall in numbers of UFO sightings since the beginning of the Falklands War but notes “large numbers of UFOs have been seen in the vicinity of the Task Force – presumably Little Green Men in ponchos.”
- A hotel owner in West Wales who complained to her MP after a UFO landed in a field from which two tall silver-suited “faceless humanoids” emerged and began “making measurements”.
- A late night visit by three ‘men in black’ to a person who reported having a UFO encounter in Spalding, Lincolnshire. The UFO witness later had no recollection of either the men or the UFO encounter.
- UFO sighting by a Police Officer at Chelsea Football club

The files are available to download for free for a month from the website:

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos

For further information, interviews or images please contact The National Archives
Press Office: t.020 8392 5277 or e-mail: press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

* The UFO Desk comprised of Officers from the Air Staff Secretariat and DI55 – a branch of the Defence Intelligence Staff responsible for assessing UFO reports for information of intelligence interest. In 2000 the Air Staff Secretariat was replaced by DAS (Directorate Air Space) as the secretariat responsible for UFO reports. From 2000 UFO reports were no longer copied to DI55 and the UFO desk was closed in November 2009

The UFO files - The inside story of real-life sightings by Dr Clarke is available from The National Archives online bookshop.

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