

Dr David Clarke discusses the newly released UFO files at The National Archives

This is the 9th collection of UFO files to arrive at The National Archives in Kew and this consists of 25 separate files and somewhere around 7000 pages of information.

So the papers that have been released today talk about the motives behind an intelligence study that was carried out, what kind of things did they reveal?

Well, the intelligence officer was really keen to have this study commissioned. There are some very interesting papers in the policy file from 1993 where he is briefing on the subject and he is saying it is not because he talks to little green men every night, it's just that he thinks this is a subject that the DI55 and the MoD should take seriously because no study had been conducted. During his brief he lists a number of possibilities about what UFOs could possibly be. One of them is mass hallucinations and we can rule that out, some of them are hoaxes. There is a lot of nonsense that is written about the subject but despite that, there are still a large number of sightings by credible observers such as military pilots, air traffic controllers, police officers, that type of thing. One thing he says is that some of these sightings could have been caused by secret aircraft - black project aircraft - perhaps piloted by the Americans or even by the Russians or Chinese which can't be ruled out.

He then goes into all the possible natural explanations such as clouds and ball lightning, meteors, and he has to consider the possibility that some of them could be extra-terrestrial life forms. He says that that is possible, but there is no direct evidence. Now if any of those possibilities such as the extra-terrestrials or the black project aircraft were true there are implications for national security. And he says that the national security implications are considerable because we have many reports of strange objects in the sky and we have never investigated them.

If they are American then there is probably no threat to national security although it would be most alarming if they were flying around without clearance in our airspace. If the aircraft were Russian or Chinese then there would be a threat to national security and we would urgently need to establish the nature of the craft and its capability. And then we return to the possibility that they could be alien or extra-terrestrial and he states that "if the devices are not of this earth then their purpose needs to be established as a matter of priority". He says "there has been no apparent hostile intent" but the other possibilities are: military reconnaissance, scientific or even tourism. So they would be coming here as we would go to another country or a national park, they are coming across the universe to visit us.

He then adds another little interesting thing which turns up in the file report which was produced, he says, "if these reports are taken at face value then devices exist that do not use conventional reaction propulsion systems and they have a very wide range of speeds and are stealthy" and he suggests that we could use this technology if it exists. If we could capture one of these things it could probably be used as some kind of battlefield weapon or new technology.

As with previous releases there are several sightings reports in this collection of files, could you tell us a little bit about some of those?

One of the collections of papers in these files is about a series of sightings that took place in west Wales in Pembrokeshire during 1977-78. This was the subject of some particularly lurid tabloid headlines. At the time the Bermuda Triangle was very popular, with many TV documentaries about it, and this area of Wales became known as the 'Welsh Triangle' because there had been so many mysterious sightings in that area.

There had also been reports from various people of people seeing silver suited humanoids that were believed to have been the UFOs pilots that had been seen wandering around the countryside late at night. The reason this turns up in the files is because one of the people who made one of these reports contacted their local MP who was Nicholas Edwards. She was a lady who ran a hotel on the Welsh coast and one day in 1977 quite late at night she had been woken up by an object that she had seen in the sky which this had descended into a field. She described it like the moon falling down from the sky, and it landed in a field at the back of her property and as she watched she said she saw two very tall faceless humanoids emerge from this object about the size of a minibus and they appeared to wander around in the field taking measurements. She was absolutely petrified by this experience, so much so that she felt the MoD should be looking in to this. Particularly because in the field there was what was later revealed to be a bomb shelter of some kind.

This was reported to the MP, he passed it to the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall, and this was a very unusual thing for them to do, they asked an RAF officer from nearby RAF Boarding airbase to go and have an interview with the lady who had reported the sighting. He went down there and examined the area where the thing had landed and he couldn't find any obvious explanation for this. So he briefed the Ministry of Defence on what he had discovered and the person who was the head of the UFO desk at the time was so concerned about this he had a private word with the RAF police, he asked them to make some enquiries locally and it turned out that they suspected, as a result of this investigation, that someone had been involved in a practical joke and they had borrowed a fire fighting suit that had been on display in a local shop. They said it had been white with a big black visor over the face and this person had been walking around in this suit late at night and maybe this is what had caused some of the weird sightings. But even so, they still couldn't explain all the sightings, this was one possible explanation. They weren't saying that they could forget about the 'Welsh Triangle' but there was some very clear suggestions that someone had perhaps been pulling someone's leg.

Were there other sightings from around that country, in Brighton?

Around 2005-2006 people began to release Chinese lanterns on a regular basis and they became popular at the Glastonbury pop festival from the summer of 2003. Lots of people hadn't seen these things in the sky before, so when people started reporting fleets of bright revolving lights moving in formation some people became very worried about it. One report in the file from 2005 states that a lady from Brighton had seen a group of these objects in the sky and she had rung the MoD to report this and was absolutely petrified asking for an explanation and saying that all her friends were really worried about it.

Looking at it now, looking at the details – orange lights that are revolving- and a very good description of what we now know to be Chinese lanterns, but it shows that it is quite possible to have an experience with these things and believe it is something extraordinary when really it is just a small hot air balloon lit by a candle.

One of the documents in the policy file is quite interesting. This was drawn up by an Intelligence Officer in 1978 and this was in preparation for the House of Lords debate on UFOs that happened early in the following year and basically the Ministry of Defence asked all their scientific advisors to advise on what to say in this debate and this Intelligence Officer came back and he was talking about the possibility of visits to earth by extra-terrestrials. He said one point that should be made is that if there were extra-terrestrial space activity by other civilisations then one would have expected some of the intensive radio listening services out there carried out by reputable scientific organisations – in America for instance – to have intercepted some of the transmissions between spacecraft or between spacecraft and their original base. As far as he was aware nothing as yet had been intercepted that was acceptable by reputable scientists as being of alien intelligence and since radio transmission is somewhat cheaper than space travel one would have expected rather more radio communication than actual visits.

He then goes on to say, another good argument against the extra-terrestrial origins for UFOs are as follows “recent American and Soviet space probes rule out the possibility of intelligent life elsewhere in the solar system”. So he says that if UFOs are alien in origin then they must have come from outside our solar system.

So if one makes a reasonable assumption about the number of stars in the universe and the proportion of those which have inhabitable planets and then further drew up a list of all the interesting places in the universe that an intelligent community might wish to visit. One is driven to the conclusion that a visit to an insignificant planet such as the Earth of an uninteresting star (the sun) would probably not occur more than once in a thousand years or so, even if one assumes that every intelligent community makes a launch at least ten launches a year. He therefore says that the thousands of claims of visits in the last decade or so by alien spacecraft to planet earth is just too large a number to be credible.

All the files I have been talking about are now available on The National Archives UFO website which is www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos