

11 Nov 2009

PS/USofS

Copy to:

PS/SofS	ACAS	Air Command:
PS/Min(AF)	D News Dir	PSO/CINCAIR
PS/Min(DES)	PS/CDI	PSO/DCINC
PSMin(IDS)	SO1 Air & Ops Dev	PSO/AOC 1 Gp
PS/PUS		PSO/AOC 2 Gp
PS/VCDS/2 nd PUS		Cmd Sec
PS/CAS		DCS(CS)
DE/CE		Hd MCG

MOD POLICY CONCERNING UFO REPORTS

Issue

1. Reassessment of MOD Policy concerning UFO sighting reports in order to make best use of defence resources.

Recommendation

2. That the Minister **notes**:

- a. In more than fifty years no UFO sighting reported to the Department has indicated the existence of any military threat to the UK;
- b. There is no Defence benefit in Air Command Secretariat recording, collating, analysing or investigating UFO sightings;
- c. The level of resources devoted to this task is increasing in response to a recent upsurge in reported sightings, diverting staff from more valuable Defence-related activities;
- d. The release of existing UFO files to the National Archive is nearing completion;

and **agrees**:

- e. The closure of the "UFO Hotline" answerphone service and associated e-mail address from 30 November 2009;
- f. That reported sightings received from other sources should be answered by a standard letter and, on the advice of Corporate Memory and The National Archive, should be retained for 30 days and then destroyed, largely removing any future FOI liability and negating the need to release future files post 30 November 2009;

- g. That all UFO files dated up until 30 November 2009 should be released to the National Archive one year from the date of closure.

Timing

1. Routine. Subject to Ministerial agreement this policy will be implemented from 30 November 2009.

Background

2. Since the end of WW2, the MOD has had responsibility for UFO matters. This work is currently performed in the RAF Business Secretariat in Air Command, having been transferred from the Air Staff in Main Building earlier this year. The work comprises answering a range of correspondence from Parliament and the general public, including FOI requests and reports of UFO sightings left on a dedicated answerphone (the "UFO Hotline") and e-mail address. Where an address has been left on the hotline, a Treat Official response is provided, in line with current Departmental policy. Very occasionally, when a sighting is reported by a credible source, such as aircrew, air traffic controllers or police officers, the UFO desk investigates sightings in a little more depth. This involves air defence specialists reviewing radar records. The UFO desk also has responsibility, together with Defence Intelligence Staff, for the transfer of some 160 historical UFO files to the National Archives, as agreed by USofS in September 2007¹.

3. Over the last decade the MOD has received an average of some 150 reports of UFOs from members of the public each year. This year, the rate at which reports are being received has risen substantially and to date the total stands at over 520. Also, 97 FOI requests have been received since January. The increased workload caused by this upsurge in sighting reports is now exceeding the level of staff resource (1xBand D) allocated to the task and impacting on other tasks. However, no investigation of a UFO sighting has ever revealed anything to suggest an extra-terrestrial presence, or a military threat to the UK. Since UFO investigations and correspondence have no apparent defence value we have reviewed the continuing need for this work, rather than simply accept the risk it now presents to other public and Parliamentary business or seek to allocate additional resources to it.

4. This led to the conclusion that we should seek to reduce very significantly the UFO task, which is consuming increasing resource, but produces no valuable Defence output. In doing so we concluded:

- The dedicated UFO Hotline answerphone service and e-mail address serve no Defence purpose and merely encourage the generation of correspondence of no Defence value. Accordingly these facilities should be withdrawn as soon as possible, preferably by 30 November. At that point a statement would be placed on the MOD website, setting out the MOD's revised policy in relation to UFOs, a draft of which is included in the Newsbrief at Annex A. The "Hotline" answerphone would be set up to play a recording of the policy statement, but would no longer take messages;

¹ D/MSU/2/9/is dated 25 September 2007.

- Investigations into UFO sightings, even from more reliable sources, serve no useful purpose and merely divert air defence specialists from their primary tasks. Accordingly, no further investigations should be carried out into UFO reports received from any source. Any UFO reports received in future should be answered by a standard letter a draft of which is attached at Annex B and there should be no suggestion that they have been investigated by MOD. This does not apply to, or signify any change in, the standing arrangements for control and defence of UK airspace;
- There is advantage in extending the transfer of files to the National Archive to include all Air Command UFO files over one year old. This would minimise the volume of information held by the department and allow FOI requests to be dealt with under exemption s.22 (Information Intended for future publication). This practice should be adopted as soon as possible, following on from the current transfer of files, and should apply to all files opened before 30 November 2009;
- There is no Defence value in holding future UFO sighting reports from the public on MOD files. Corporate Memory, after discussions with the National Archive, have recommended a policy of destroying UFO sighting reports from the public after 30 days. This would mean that there would be no FOI liability and no requirement to release any further files to the National Archive, since the only filing generated would be copies of the standard response. A single generic copy of the standard letter would be placed on the MOD publication scheme.
- There is no merit in maintaining a dedicated UFO desk in Air Cmd, nor in adding to the staff resource allocated to the UFO task. The current UFO staff resource should be redeployed to other public and Parliamentary tasks as soon as possible. However, Air Command Bus Sec should continue to act as secretariat focal point and policy lead for UFO matters across MOD, as required, allocating this residual task within existing resources.

Other Nation's approaches

8. We have deliberately avoided formal approaches to other Governments on this issue. Such approaches would become public when the relevant UFO files are released and would be viewed by "ufologists" as evidence of international collaboration and conspiracy. However, a search of the US Department of Defence website shows that they publicly state that the issue of UFOs is no longer being investigated by the US Government. Relevant documentation was placed in the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) some time ago (Annex C). This is broadly in line with our proposed way forward. Public sources suggest that other Governments are taking a similar approach to ours, with the Canadian, French and Danish Governments publishing their historic UFO files in recent years.

Presentation

10. A decision to cease investigating UFO sightings will attract negative comment from "ufologists". They may, individually or as a group, mount a vociferous, but short-lived campaign to reinstate the "UFO Hotline" suggesting that, by not investigating UFOs,

MOD is failing its Defence commitments. It is possible that there will be a resulting short term increase in public and Parliamentary correspondence. The press interest is also likely to be high initially, but more frivolous in tone than critical.

11. MOD's public response will be to stress that:

- MOD has no opinion on the existence or otherwise of extra terrestrials;
- In more than fifty years, no UFO sighting reported to the Department has indicated the existence of any military threat to the UK
- We have a responsibility to use defence resources only for activities which contribute to the defence and security of the UK;
- No defence benefit arises from the receipt, of UFO sighting reports from the public and responding to it diverts MOD resources from tasks of relevance to defence;

12. A statement will be placed on the MOD website on 30 November confirming that the dedicated UFO Hotline answerphone and e-mail address have been withdrawn, MOD will no longer respond to reports of UFO sightings and that no action will be taken in response to those we receive. Draft press lines are attached (Annex A).

{Signed on DII}

C N MANTELL
Cmd Sec AIR



Annex A

DEFENSIVE NEWSBRIEF

DATE: October 2009

SUBJECT: MOD Policy Concerning UFO Reports.

SOURCE: [REDACTED] Hd of Bus Sec Air Cmd, [REDACTED]

Background

Despite receiving reports of UFOs since the end of WW2, the MOD has never had any evidence of extra terrestrial life, nor any threat to the UK. Investigating UFOs diverts resources away from core defence business.

As such, from 30 November 2009, the dedicated UFO hotline and e-mail address will be withdrawn. The statement below will be placed on the MOD website.

STATEMENT OF MOD POLICY ON UFO SIGHTINGS

MOD has no opinion on the existence or otherwise of extra-terrestrial life. However, in over fifty years, no UFO report has revealed any evidence of a potential threat to the United Kingdom.

MOD has no specific capability for identifying the nature of such sightings. There is no Defence benefit in such investigation and it would be an inappropriate use of defence resources. Furthermore, responding to reported UFO sightings diverts MOD resources from tasks that are relevant to Defence.

Accordingly, and in order to make best use of Defence resources, we have decided to withdraw the dedicated UFO hotline answer-phone service and e-mail address. MOD will no longer respond to reported UFO sightings or investigate them. The ongoing programme to release Departmental files on UFO matters to the National Archive will continue.

LTT

The MOD has decided to remove the dedicated answer-phone service for telephone reports of UFO sightings from 30 November 2009.

None of the thousands of UFO sightings reported over the years have ever provided substantiated proof of the existence of extra terrestrials. There is no Defence value in investigating UFO reports

It is important that the MOD directs its resources where they are needed most. Investigating and responding to UFO reports would divert MOD resources from tasks of relevance to Defence

.

.

The MOD does not carry out research into extra-terrestrial matters and does not provide an aerial identification service. It would realise no defence benefit and be an inappropriate use of defence resources if we were to do so

MOD has no interest in receiving reports of UFO sightings and will not be actioning the reports that we receive post November 2009.

The defence of the UK remains of the highest importance to the MOD and this statement implies no change to arrangements to defend our air space.

Q&A

Are our skies being left undefended?

There will be no change to current arrangements and air space integrity will be maintained through the existing mixture of civil and military radar and aircraft on quick reaction alert.

Why have you changed things now?

The MOD must ensure that it prioritises and targets resources where they are most needed. This decision is a response to the continuing need to achieve best value from defence resources

Does this mean the MOD will no longer deal with UFO matters?

MOD will continue to comply with its obligations under the FOI Act and the planned programme to release historic UFO files will continue.



XXXXX

**HEADQUARTERS AIR
COMMAND**

RAF Business
Secretariat
Room [REDACTED]
Spitfire Block
Royal Air Force High
Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

XXXXXX

Our Ref: UFO Report

XXXXX

Dear XXXXX,

I am writing with reference to your report of an 'unidentified flying object'.

MOD has no opinion on the existence or otherwise of extra-terrestrial life. However, in over fifty years, no UFO report has revealed any evidence of a potential threat to the United Kingdom.

MOD has no specific capability for identifying the nature of such sightings. There is no Defence benefit in such investigation and it would be an inappropriate use of defence resources. Furthermore, responding to reported UFO sightings diverts MOD resources from tasks that are relevant to Defence.

Accordingly, in order to make best use of Defence resources, MOD will no longer respond to reported UFO sightings or investigate them. Additionally, we have decided to withdraw the dedicated UFO hotline answer-phone service and e-mail address. The ongoing programme to release Departmental files on UFO matters to the National Archive will continue.

I hope this is helpful.

XXXXX
RAF Bus Sec