

# THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE APPROACH

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I N Britain we tend to look rather enviously at the official pronouncements of other countries. When we see the President of the United States of America supporting the reality of the phenomenon, or the French Minister of Defence speaking to the nation on radio and saying: "Yes UFOs are real," we feel rather left out. Just what are members of our officialdom doing, saying, or thinking about this problem?

Of course, we do not really know the answers to these questions. We know, however, that there is a section of the Ministry of Defence (Department S4 Air) which is publicly responsible for making comment about the UFO phenomenon. It is also said that the staff consists of no more than a couple of junior clerks. Whether there is more to it behind the scenes we are obviously not going to find out. We know that M.O.D. investigates some UFO incidents, and that they do not inform witnesses of the results (if any). Their published statistics indicate the familiar "10% unexplained," posing inevitable questions.

I decided to push the Ministry as far as I could, expecting of course that I would not get very far with this policy. On May 17, 1978, I wrote a long and rather detailed letter. Basically, I used the line that I was about to enter full time work in the UFO field and would like to establish a link with their department as we seemed to be working towards the same objectives. I made it clear that I was not trying to proclaim the existence of extraterrestrial spaceships and that they were probably as aware as I was that the evidence (such as it is) seems to point away from this direction. I also added that I did not say that they were hiding information nor that they should open their files to me. I accept their reasons for not doing this. All I proposed was a meeting with them to discuss possible areas of co-operation since we had a number of cases that they might find most illuminating and, probably, *vice versa*.

Controversial stuff, I realised. The reply was dated May 26th, signed by a Miss G.J. Jamieson. I quote:—

"As you know the Ministry of Defence interest in UFO reports is solely to see if they have any bearing on the defence of this country. Our interest is not confined to those reports which originate in the vicinity of defence establishments; all reports are examined to see if they contain any defence implications..

"Investigations over a number of years by the authorities directly concerned with the air defence of the UK have so far produced no evidence that UFOs represent a threat to this country... The records of past sightings are closed to the public because publication would involve a good deal of editorial work both to preserve the anonymity of the people who have written to us and also to delete any

reference to classified subjects... The files must therefore remain closed under the rules laid down by the Public Records Acts which at present precludes disclosures until 30 years have elapsed since the last action taken on them. The earliest UFO records we hold are dated 1962... I should add that the Department does not dismiss the possibility that intelligent life could exist in outer space, but no evidence has reached the Ministry of Defence to date to suggest that UFOs have extraterrestrial origins."

Interesting stuff, to be sure (especially that last portion) but hardly a direct answer to my letter. Presumably, the hope was that I would "go away." But I did not. On June 6th I prepared my next move.

Basically, I asked — if all their study of UFO reports had brought them no evidence of a defence threat and if they were not interested in the problem if it appeared to have no "defence implications," why continue to waste time over the reports? Why not promote some other authority to handle UFO reports, perhaps based on a University. I suggested that we knew scientific teams willing to do this. Surely the public could be re-educated into reporting to them. The other point I made was that, whilst I did not contend that the Department was deliberately suppressing information, some of the public and the media obviously did. This was because they never offer replies to witnesses who write to them and they refuse to undertake the limited effort in editing just one or two case reports to let scientists see the type of data they are handling. The extra workload here could surely be minimal while the payoff could be considerable in terms of public image and scientific progress.

The reply took a little longer this time. On June 23rd it arrived and I quote from parts of it:—

"I am sorry that you cannot accept the position as stated in my earlier letter, to which there is very little of substance that can be added... There is certainly no question of the Ministry of Defence suppressing facts about UFOs. The reason for protecting the anonymity of UFO reporters is simply that all forms of correspondence received from the general public is regarded as confidential.

"Consequently if UFO reports were made available to public scrutiny every single piece of paper would have to be edited to remove the identity of the observers, or their written permission would have to be obtained to divulge the information provided. We just have not the resources to undertake such a formidable task and there is no guarantee it will be undertaken in the future. This editing would still have to be done if the reports were made available to a university or scientific organisation... As you know

we have to satisfy ourselves that UFO reports have no implications for the defence of this country and the defence specialists naturally draw upon classified information where this might be relevant to a specific report... Reports received in the department are passed to the specialist authorities directly responsible for the air defence of the UK. Such staff have access to all information available to the Ministry of Defence and they can call on the full resources of the Department, including scientists. I cannot of course comment further on their investigations... My statement that investigations over a number of years had so far produced no evidence that UFOs represent a threat to this country was certainly not meant to imply that past investigations were considered to be a waste of time; nor do we presume that nothing of defence interest will appear in the future... Having satisfied ourselves on the defence aspects we do not carry investigations beyond our defence interest to a point of positive identification of the object seen... your letter implies that the Ministry of Defence does not discharge its duty to the public in the field of UFOs in a responsible manner. I can only repeat that pressures on the defence budget are so severe that expenditure of public funds on activities outside our strictly defence interests cannot be authorised."

This letter was a very long one, and I presume they hoped that it would finally get rid of me. They still refused a meeting, insisting it would be a waste of time. On June 28th I decided to have one last attempt, making sure I asked specific questions that I felt they had failed to answer so far. I also made a last brave effort to get something out of them by suggesting that they could further the cause of serious research—without effort to themselves—if when a report was made to them they were to simply suggest that the person involved should contact UFOIN or FSR at the same time. Clearly they could not attempt to find an explanation owing to lack of time, but if the case was referred to an experienced UFO investigator everyone might benefit.

The reply this time took a full month; it was dated July 28th. Perhaps Miss Jamieson was on holiday or perhaps I was now felt to be just a bit of a nuisance. Certainly the reply was short and to the point;

"I am sorry that we cannot agree to your suggestion that people who make reports of UFO sightings to a service base or establishment should be asked to telephone or write to you. You will no doubt realise that were the Ministry of Defence to indulge in any form of sponsorship of your particular organisation, requests for similar assistance from many other

associations would inevitably follow..."

However, they did provide a better response to my questions, which mainly concerned the statement made in 1974 by M. Robert Galley (the French Minister of Defence).

"We are aware of the group GEPAN, set up at the National Centre for Space Studies in Toulouse, France. The United Kingdom has, however, no formal links with the group. So far as we know, the French Ministry of Defence view does not differ significantly from our own. However, with regard to M. Galley's broadcast I would direct your attention to the House of Lords official report (Hansard) of 9 March 1978 when it was stated that the Ministry of Defence has the official transcript of the broadcast and that nothing in it indicates the existence of a threat to the United Kingdom. For a number of years we have stated openly that the Department has no evidence that UFOs are of extraterrestrial origin and no evidence that they represent a defence threat. *Nor have we ever denied that there are many curious and puzzling phenomena in the skies.*" (My italics-J.R.)

So — where do we stand? Do we accept the M.O.D. letters as giving a real reflection of what goes on? Personally, I think that one can read a few significant things into these statements and realise that the Ministry are not withholding facts (as such) but may be keeping their interpretation of these facts to themselves. It may well be that they are right in saying they have no evidence that UFOs are of an extraterrestrial origin or that they pose a defence threat. In my ten years of UFO research I have not come up with anything which might contradict this. So, if the problems posed by the "curious and puzzling phenomena in the skies," are still unsolved it may be that like us they are still searching for the truth and accept that research into UFO sightings is by no means, as they say, "a waste of time."

Perhaps the best summing up is that the Ministry seem to have had as much contact with the phenomenon as we have as ufologists. Since their opinion, they claim, does not differ significantly from that of the French Government they must also accept the existence of UFOs *per se* (indeed the last sentence of their reply to me virtually admits this). In other words, they have studied the data, recognised that it is worth continuing study, and have obviously reached some tentative conclusions — as have ufologists. I think we can take it that they know *at least as much* as we do, but — a sobering note to end on — if their study is limited simply to an assessment of the physical threat to the defence of this country can we assume that the knowledge they have of the subject is being properly applied?

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