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Section 40

(Phone & FAX)

25th January 1994

Section 40,  
Secretariat (Air Staff) 2a,  
Room 8245,  
Ministry of Defence,  
Whitehall,  
London SW1A 2HB



Dear Section 40,

Many thanks for your D/Sec(AS)12/3 of 5 January and for the material enclosed with it. I have also seen your letter of the same date to Section 40 as well as the very forthcoming summaries of UFO reports which you released to a number of ufologists last year. Things have certainly changed since my day ! (And for the better, I think.)

As I was the source of Tim's story that a few RAF gun-camera films of unidentified aerial objects were extant in my day, I owe it 'for the record' to enlarge a little on what I told him. This is also the opportunity to explain why I and colleagues in the MOD in the late-60s and early-70s took a fairly unhelpful stance in response to enquiries from UFO groups.

In 1952, when I was the PS to the then VCAS (ACM Sir Ralph Cochrane) news reached him of the remarkable UFO events over Washington, DC, which had occurred in the July of that year. Cochrane was interested; so was the then PM (Winston Churchill). The then Scientific adviser to the Air Ministry (Robert Cockburn) was instructed to make enquiries. Cockburn's report convinced Cochrane that it was 'all American hysteria', though he naturally wouldn't have put it in quite these terms in public. The PM was advised that there was nothing in the 'UFO nonsense'. No further official notice was taken of the subject within the Air Ministry. I think it was clear to the Air Staff and to their civil service colleagues from that time on that their seniors would be unlikely to welcome the devotion of any staff effort to the subject. (There was plenty else to be getting on with, for example the cold war.)

The Bentwaters/Lakenheath events of August 1956, the events at West Freugh in the following year, and other subsequent events which will doubtless be coming into the Public Record Office as time passes, suggested to some of us that a 'UFO phenomenon' of some kind or other certainly existed. But there were never solid grounds for regarding it as a Defence threat or as justifying official steps such as the establishment of a standing committee of enquiry. The subject remained something of a joke (albeit an uneasy one on occasion).

After 1952 I moved to other jobs within the Air Ministry (and subsequently the amalgamated MOD) which did not involve daily contacts with the Air Staff. It was not until early 1969 that I resumed such contacts on taking charge of the then DS8 (whose ambit was, I think, very similar to

that of the present AS.2). I found - without enthusiasm - that DS8 were charged, among their many other jobs, with the responsibility of responding to the public (including, of course, UFO groups) on unidentified objects which had been seen in the sky. I had no indication from any source in the MOD that the topic should be taken seriously: I saw our remit as being to respond courteously (even if sometimes wearily) to reports reaching us from the public and to pass on to the Air Staff the one or two which sounded as if they might have been an inadvertent Russian breach of our air space or a bit of uncovenanted low flying. Among those discharging this thankless chore in DS8 was **Section 40**, occupying a post which sounds very similar to your own. (I forget the names of his successors.) We were, I'm afraid, deliberately churlish in responding to UFO groups: the last thing I wanted was to encourage them! I foresaw the likely generation of an on-going correspondence which I felt would be a diversion of effort from other essential tasks. DS8 may, in consequence, have looked to the outside world as though it had something to hide. Your present policy strikes me as being better judged.

It is worth remembering, however, that the Condon Report had only recently been published in America. Few, if any of us, had had time to glance at more than its covering conclusions; the latter were entirely dismissive of the phenomenon. It was years before I discovered - after retirement, indeed - that Condon had accumulated a mass of very interesting material which seemed to indicate the persistence of a strange but well-evidenced phenomenon. As I saw it at the time, we had good justification for the 'courteous brush-off' stance which represented DS8's policy.

At some stage during 1970 (I have no note of the precise date) a small party of us were invited by (I think) the then D. of Ops (AD) to view some photographic material in the sub-ground cinema during the lunch break. He mentioned 'interesting atmospheric effects'. I attended as Head of DS8; half a dozen members of the Air Staff were present (not above Group Captain level); and there were a few others, including somebody from the Met. Office. The gathering was in no sense a formally constituted one: it appeared to have been arranged at private initiative by Ops (AD). We were shown some slides, purportedly from aerial photographs taken by air crew. The highlight was a couple of brief clips of what I understood to be gun-camera material obtained as far back as 1956. The Bentwaters/Lakenheath events were mentioned. The material was, on the whole, unimpressive: fuzzy greyish blobs in the daylight shots; small glowing globular objects in the night films. We were invited to comment. A civilian - the Met. Office man, I think - suggested that we were witnessing unusual meteorological events. One of the Ops. people said that ground-radar and air-radar responses had been reported on occasion. Somebody reminded us of the tendency of radar to produce spurious images on occasion. No conclusions were reached.

I was subsequently taken up with frenetic jobs deriving from the Mintoff/Malta 'crisis'. I did not follow up the material which had been shown to us except to the extent of a casual conversation with Ops (AD) many months later. We made some joke about UFOs.

Reflecting on this episode, I now rather feel that somebody in Ops (AD) had become uneasy about the occasional reports from air crew of unusual aerial objects but did not wish to expose himself to ridicule. The small informal gathering in the cinema was an opportunity to test the reactions of a few of us to the unusual objects caught on film. The lack of much response from any of us probably persuaded Ops (AD) to drop the subject. Quite possibly, the photographic material was simply scrapped, or 'pinched'

for somebody's private collection of *curiosa*, or conceivably passed to the Met. Office.

I rather regret that my retailing of this story to **Section 40** indirectly put you to the trouble of the enquiries you have been making. The material was not very impressive - less so, indeed, than the extant photographs from, for example, the Hessdalen Valley in Norway of unusual aerial objects or the astonishing account given us by Dr. Harley Rutledge of his studies of 'lights' in the Ozarks in America (*Project Identification*, Prentice-Hall, 1981). The evidence for the persistence of an odd phenomenon (occasionally with very strange effects) is abundant in the serious ufological literature. Collateral from RAF sources would be very useful, though mainly by way of lending 'respectability' to the subject. (The material I recall seeing in 1970 would not, in itself, have added much, if anything, of scientific value to the mass of evidence already obtained by the ufological groups before and since that time.)

That said, I can't help feeling that there must be at least a scattering of good photographic material of unusual aerial objects obtained by the RAF over the years, perhaps backed by radar evidence. This could be of scientific value if released for outside study. Moreover, as I've suggested above, the mere fact that a government department was known to be adopting a non-dismissive attitude to these unusual phenomena might assist in getting the resources for serious research (eg. in the universities) which the ufological groups are unlikely to succeed in obtaining for themselves.

In the meantime, AS.2's willingness to release information about reports received from the public (poor though those reports tend to be) is a welcome advance. I hope this remains MOD policy.

I have from time to time, in response to requests made by colleagues in the ufological groups, placed on record my own perception of the subject as an ex-MOD official. You may like to have the enclosed offprints.

I hope you will be able to give some thought to the possibility of releasing material obtained from RAF sources (though I would be the first to understand the likely official objections!). If you would like to chat informally about the subject at any time, I would be very glad to meet you.

I'm copying this letter to **Section 40** and also to two colleagues who have long taken a responsible interest in the UFO phenomenon - **Section 40** and **Section 40**.

Sincerely,



Ralph Noyes