



DERMOT PURGAVIE'S AMERICA

Still up *BH* in the air

YESTERDAY was the 35th anniversary of the birth of that now ubiquitous exclamation: 'What's that?'

It is customarily delivered from the ground with head upturned and arm extended, pointing, but back then on June 24, 1947, an Idaho businessman was sitting at the controls of his plane and cruising near Mount Rainier in Washington State when he made the first recorded sighting of an unidentified flying something.

There were nine disc-shaped objects moving in formation. They made undulations in the sky that he described as 'like a saucer skipping over water' and thus begat the mythology of the flying saucer.

Since then there have been thousands of reported sightings, and those who claim to have seen UFO's have been generally dismissed as genuinely mistaken, drunk or nutty. (Detractors have been abetted by the likes of the woman who said she knew it was a flying saucer because it had 'UFO' painted on the side.) But there has been a nagging residue of sightings that could not be explained by known natural or man-made objects and now on their 35th anniversary UFO-spotters have gained a new credibility.

Formerly classified files forced out of the archives under the Freedom of Information Act established that the Government, while publicly debunking UFOs, denying their existence and ridiculing those who claimed to have seen them, has actually been taking them very seriously and been concerned about them almost to the point of obsession. For more than 30 years steady fellows in the CIA, FBI and the Forces have earnestly monitored all reported UFO activity and continue to do so.

It seems that no close encounter has ever represented any threat and now—when the summer's hottest film is E.T., about a UFO-naut that gets left behind on Earth—those who feel we may be being inspected by benevolent aliens anxiously wait for a clinching piece of evidence from the great out-there.

Says Fred Whiting of the Fund For UFO Research in Washington: 'There is considerable evidence to support the theory that some of these unidentified flying objects are extra-terrestrial spacecraft, but there isn't any proof of it.'