



LORD HILL-NORTON
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"YOU must talk to the admiral," I was urged, more than once, during my inquiries among members of the House of Lords UFO Study Group.

"Peter," enthused one of the peers, "really knows what it's about and he won't put you wrong. A sailor for 50 years and a more earthy man you couldn't find anywhere. A more square, down-to-earth individual does not exist on this planet.

"No one could call him an idiot or a lunatic. And yet he believes in UFOs."

Admiral of the Fleet Peter John Hill-Norton, created a baron in 1979, was Chief of Defence Staff between 1971-73 and First Sea Lord. His last job, before retiring in 1977, was chairman of the military committee of NATO. He is undoubtedly the group's biggest catch.

My interview with him was perforce brisk and brief. It was Sunday noon, and he had just emerged from his local church at South Nutfield, Surrey, and was striding, with hearty appetite, towards his lunch.

This, rather than the subject matter, about which I accosted him, set the quarter-deck double of a pace at which the conversation was conducted.

"Listen," said Lord Hill-Norton. "I am not an expert in these matters, but I have indeed been interested in the things, in a non-professional way, a good many years, and by that I mean 25 years.

"I've read a fair amount of books about them and when I was

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By ANDREW GRIMES

made a lord about five years ago, and I learned that this outfit, the UFO group, was going, I joined it at once.

"Some of my friends and former colleagues don't understand why, for reasons I am quite unable to understand. Perhaps they think I am a nutter of some kind. I don't care what they think.



"My position is this: Not only in this country, but in France and South America and the United States, and God knows where else, there have been a large number of sightings, a high proportion of which have been by responsible, steady sort of guys, like airline pilots and ships' captains, and not hysterical wives and small school-boys who are just trying to get their names in the papers. By this I mean tens of thousand of sane people.

"From between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of

these sightings have been satisfactorily explained, so I always say that so far as I am concerned the U in UFO stand for 'unexplained' not unidentified.

"Now, we in this small group at the House of Lords hear many decent speakers from time to time. They are not nutters and I have found them all extremely interesting. They all have slight differences of approach and attitude.

"But there is one slight difficulty about them all — they haven't explained exactly what these flying objects are. That is because, like me and you, they can't.

"Some are convinced that they are extraterrestrial, and I am bound to agree that most of these things come from somewhere other than this earth.

"A lot of people are worried about the defence implications of

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being of terrestrial origin, but it wouldn't be possible for either of the super powers to have devised machines that do what these things do. Absolutely impossible, I do assure you of that.

"Everything is leaked anyway, and something would have been found about them by our side or theirs.



I asked Lord Hill-Norton if, as a defence man, he was at all worried about the possibility of extraplanetary vehicles keeping us under constant surveillance. What if the space travellers turned out to be hostile?

"It seems to me," he replied, instantly, "that they are more likely than not benign, because if they were not they would have fixed us up a long

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time ago. If they were hostile and malign they would have done something other than burning holes in the grass when they touched down.

"One hears talk of kidnappings and so on. But not one human being so far as I can see has been damaged by them. If they were malign they would have let us know about it without any doubt whatever. One can only assume they are keeping a watchful eye on us. Probably they don't like what they see."

The talk turned, rapidly, at the admiral's instigation, to Whitehall's apparent refusal to part with information on the sightings. Was there really, I asked, a big government cover up?

"Yes there is," replied Lord Hill-Norton. "But who is responsible for this concealment, that's what I'd like to know? It is certainly not at the Department of Defence. I was supposed to be in

charge of the department and no one kept anything from me. There was no secret to which I was not privy, none.

"And I never, during all my years there, came across any documentation, any discussions, any report, not one written or verbal word, about reports of UFOs. It is inconceivable that any such reports could have been kept from me.



"And yet the experience of our group has been most frustrating. From time to time we put down a question. We are always answered by a junior minister. We never get a bit of sense out of any of them. Never.

"It is not the fault of the ministers concerned. But it is no good saying that all these reports, so many thousands of them, are stories and lies. So who is sitting on them? And why?"

"And what happens to the reports, some from policemen themselves. They reach the right departments surely. And then the reports disappear.

"Who then, is keeping all the information and sitting on it? I suppose it could be the Home Office, but no. That is such a diverse mess I can't believe they are capable of keeping a secret even if they wanted to . . ."

And with this, snorting querulously, and bidding me a brisk good day, the admiral marched off to his slightly delayed Sunday luncheon.

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