

USAF pays for unbiased UFO inquiry

UFOs, those unidentified flying objects that plague the Americans and promote curious notions about the arrival of men from Mars, are being taken more seriously by the United States Air Force.

By 1966 the USAF had collected information on 10,147 sightings in the US since 1947. However, the subsequent investigations—called "Project Blue Book"—disposed of all but about 600 of them as natural phenomena of one kind or another.

The remainder went unexplained because there was insufficient information to reach any kind of conclusion, and this area of uncertainty led to widespread suggestions in the US that the air force was concealing the truth—either on security grounds or because of fears of national panic.

This unhappy situation could

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be dealt with only by bringing UFO sightings into the open, and recently the USAF placed a contract worth £120,000 with the University of Colorado for a thorough, independent, scientific investigation of the 100 most puzzling sightings in 1967.

The investigation is under the direction of Dr E. U. Condon, a former director of the National Bureau of Standards; the American Physical Society; and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. This sturdy background should convince even hardened UFO seers that wisdom and impartiality will dominate the studies.

The investigating team will include specialists on such natural phenomena as airglow, a psychiatrist, and astrophysicists, and the fact that their final report

will be reviewed by the National Academy of Science in 1968 is an indication of the seriousness with which it is regarded.

But the underlying questions—not mentioned in the investigators' terms of reference, but touched on obliquely at a colloquium on UFOs last month at the Goddard Spaceflight Centre—are why UFOs are so fond of the US, and how it is that American eyes see them more clearly and convincingly than those of other nationalities.

With hints of national panic in the background, the inclusion of an eminent psychiatrist in the team might be taken as a partial answer. The trouble is that not all UFO seers are nuts, and some are technically well qualified to assess what they are reporting.

One point, seldom raised, is that UFOs are never malevolent. Perhaps the psychiatrist can explain that more easily.

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