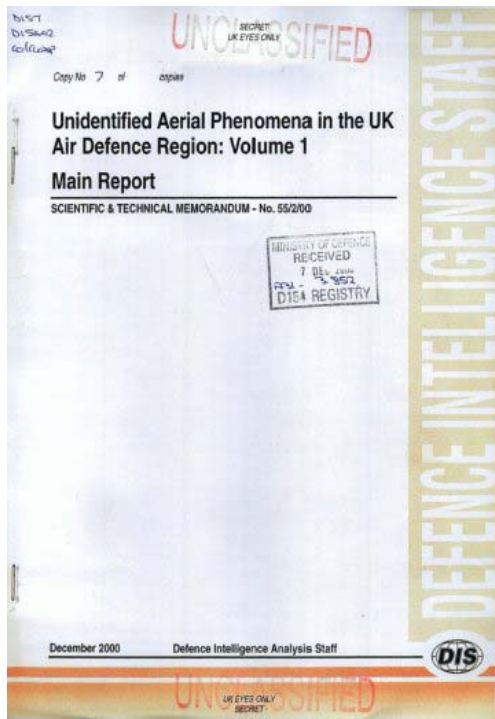


The Condign Report **(or how to mangle science to wangle an explanation!)**

To much fanfare, the Ministry of Defence released Project Condign to the public on Monday, 15th May, 2006. This was the MoD's in-depth study into UFOs, launched in 1996 and completed in 2000. Strangely, the term 'UFO' is barely used in the document, the phrase 'Unidentified Aerial Phenomena' (UAP) replacing it for the most part.

The document came to light after a Freedom of Information request by Dr David Clarke of Sheffield University and many thanks should go to Dr Clarke for his efforts.



'Unidentified Aerial Phenomena in the UK Air Defence Region' (to give the report its official title) was classified as 'SECRET' and fills over four hundred pages with all manner of explanations for the various UFO

reports it has chosen to focus upon. While the press have gleefully leaped upon the fact that Condign seems to suggest that UFOs are nothing more than peculiar weather conditions that affect not only radar, electrical equipment and even the human brain, what is not noted is the aim of the report itself:

The aim of the investigation has been **to determine the potential value, if any, of UAP sighting reports to Defence Intelligence.** Consistent with MoD policy the available data has therefore been studied principally to ascertain whether there is any evidence of a threat to the UK, and secondly, should the opportunity arise, to identify any potential military technologies of interest. (page 4)

'Potential military technologies of interest'... Call me paranoid, but that leaped out of the page at me right from the start!

At the recent Paraquest Conference in Manchester, former MoD 'UFO guy', Nick Pope, stated that he helped get the report off the ground, although he himself played no part in compiling it. Indeed, he said that the report was deeply flawed, particularly in its use of scientific explanations of 'UAPs'. He said that its researchers were limited in the scientists that they could consult because of the reports secret status; hence their interpretations were not really based in genuine science. Perhaps Nick was having a dig at the writer(s), because one particular part of the report notes:

"It is further noted that since Pope's book [*Open Skies*,

Closed Minds? – SJ] has been published airline crews are unlikely to wish to take the matter further with Sec(AS2), or with the civilian UFO organisations.”

Basically, what he’s saying is that an official government report, classified as ‘SECRET – UK EYES ONLY’ is pseudo-science, the kind of stuff that gets ripped apart in magazines like *The Skeptical Enquirer* on a regular basis. Have we heard anything from such sources on this occasion, though?

The report was written, so it is said, by a single expert working from offices in Whitehall, however (and this is just a personal observation) on reading the report, I noticed more than one writing style. I think several people have written this report, not just one mystery defence contractor who, it seems, wants to remain anonymous to protect the government from embarrassment (!).

The release of the document was widely reported in the news media, so we all know the basic conclusions – that UFOs are nothing more than little-understood atmospheric phenomena and nothing more. So what we have is a report that tries to explain one unexplained mystery with another!

That’s like saying Bigfoot sightings can be explained away as Loch Ness Monster reports!

NON-IONISING EM EFFECTS ON HUMANS

EM FIELD FROM A PLASMA

1. The EM field from a radiating plasma is assumed to be present in three forms:

- The Radiation field which diminishes with range at $\frac{1}{R^2}$.
- Induction components which diminish at $\frac{1}{R^2}$.
- A Quasi-Static field which reduces at $\frac{1}{R^3}$.

2. **Near Fields** The induction and quasi-static fields are near field components, only of significance close to the source and thus of particular interest in the study of those UAPs which might be caused by plasmas or electrically charged bodies. Assuming that the dimension D (effective linear ‘aperture’) of the plasma is large compared with the wavelength (λ), then the near field is taken to extend to a distance $2D^2/\lambda$ from the source. The Radiation Field (far-field) is not of interest in this study. In the normal case of an EM source (for example, antenna emission) the radiation field beyond the near field stabilises with spatially uniform distributions of the E and H field components, which are at right angles to each other and transverse to the direction of propagation, they are in phase and have a constant amplitude relationship.

Condign tends to focus on a pet theory that UFOs are caused by some form of atmospheric plasma. This magical stuff can generate electromagnetic (EM) fields that will knock out electrical power, muck up radar, create balls of light that will dance about the sky and affect the brain so that witnesses think they are seeing aliens and flying saucers.

Of course, all of this is written in highly credible, scientific language, complete with graphs and equations and all manner of illustrations and maps. I’m no scientist, but I still got the feeling that I was reading the script from the latest *Star Trek* movie, rather than a serious MoD document.

Maybe it all makes sense, maybe not. I'm sure the bigwigs on the report's mailing list were scratching their heads just as much as I was.



Not content with explaining away UFOs over UK airspace, the report then goes on to suggest to our pals at NASA that an object seen by astronauts aboard the space shuttle, *Challenger*, was a 'linked vortex ring', an effect created by solid or liquid particles attracting into rings or strings that can twist and turn in the atmosphere or remain as steady rings (a cigarette smoke ring is an example of a vortex ring).

I'm sure Story Musgrave (the astronaut that filmed a 'snake-like' object while in orbit) will sleep easier knowing that Project Condign has solved his little mystery!

So where do we stand with regard to this report? Should we accept its findings, that it's all natural and nothing to worry about and move on? Should we dismiss it out of hand as MoD filibustering, an attempt to deflect attention from the realities of the UFO phenomenon? Or does the answer lie somewhere in-between?

Perhaps when the MoD received the report, they laughed their socks off.

Perhaps they regarded it seriously and took its conclusions to heart. Perhaps the report said exactly what they wanted it to say, what they told its author(s) to say, knowing full well the truth that UFOs are not entirely explainable by a few hundred pages in a Whitehall filing cabinet.

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The full report can be downloaded from
<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FreedomOfInformation/PublicationScheme/SearchPublicationScheme/UnidentifiedAerialPhenomenaInTheUkAirDefenceRegion.htm>