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Courtesy of the National Archives

The British National Archives published document records of UFO sightings in Britain in the 1970s and '80s.

British release UFO reports; what about ours?

BY TOWN TRAVIS
MAY 15, 2008

Stories of extraterrestrials and flying saucers usually appear in supermarket tabloids, but Wednesday the British National Archives released its UFO reports, which made mainstream news.

"There's a lot of conspiracy theories that have grown up, both in this country and in the U.S.A., about the military interest in UFOs," David Clarke, an unidentified flying object expert who helped with the British document release, said in a podcast. "What we're getting to see in these papers are the actual facts."

Although there is no public government database on UFOs in the United States, other organizations do keep track of reports of UFO sightings.

"We have some 50,000 [national] cases [online], and I am about to post another 500 cases in the very near future," said Peter Davenport, director of the non-governmental National UFO Reporting Center in the state of Washington.

More than 1,600 UFO sightings have been reported in Illinois since 1980, many of them in and around Chicago, according to the Reporting Center.

Other organizations get reports too. "In Chicago, we certainly receive over 100 reports per year," said Mark Rodeghier, scientific director of the Center for UFO Studies in Chicago. "We don't investigate every sighting. If a sighting seems interesting enough, we will look into it. In extreme cases where there's lots of evidence, a full investigation is conducted."

One of the most recent Chicago sightings happened in Tinley Park in 2005.

"Many people saw a triangular configuration of three orange-ish red lights. They were moving very slowly through the sky, staying in formation. They were seen for upwards of 20 minutes by thousands of people," Rodeghier said. "We did contact the FAA. They stalled long enough so no radar data could be released. We don't know whether it was seen on radar or not."

Perhaps the most famous Chicago sighting occurred Nov. 7, 2006, at O'Hare International Airport. Several airport and United Airlines employees claimed to have seen a metallic disc-shaped object hovering above gate C-17.

"We had multiple witnesses. We had official witnesses," Rodeghier said. "When it left it went straight up into the air and punched a hole in the clouds. Unfortunately the UFO did not appear on radar."

After the event, the Federal Aviation Administration issued a statement to reporters, saying the UFO was probably just a weather phenomenon. Rodeghier said no official FAA investigation was conducted.

In most cases, UFO sightings in both the United States and Britain are investigated minimally. The British Ministry of Defense said once a UFO is ruled out as a security threat, no further investigation is conducted.

The U. S. Department of Defense treats sightings in a similar fashion. Government information about UFOs is scarce, as most government agencies remain closed-mouthed.

"The first sighting was made in America," Britain's Clarke said. "The U.S. Air Force set up a project [Project Blue Book] to investigate these sightings. They produced a report that concluded that 90 percent of these sightings could be explained by natural phenomena."

For Americans, knowing where to call to report a UFO is difficult.

"People do sometimes try to contact us to ask about unusual phenomena they see in the sky," said Doug Roberts, director of space visualization at Adler Planetarium, "but honestly we don't respond unless there was something we know of to explain what they saw (i.e., if we knew of a weather balloon or International Space Station in transit)."

The most detailed information on notable UFO sightings is found at the National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena -- a California-based organization that examines sightings by airline personnel. A 2007 report from NARCAP provided a technical analysis of the sighting at O'Hare, focused primarily on safety risks.

"Scientifically, we think UFOs are important," said Rodeghier, from the Center for UFO Studies. "The UFO problem should never be given to a defense agency. It should be given to a scientific agency."

With its document release this week, the British National Archives made public reports of UFO sightings in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They are the first in a series of UFO files to be made public during the next few years, officials said.

More than 11,000 Freedom of Information requests were filed asking for details about the British government's UFO documents, prompting the National Archives to release the documents.

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[UFO files from the National Archives](#)

[Center for UFO Studies](#)

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Did you know?

The Vatican released an unexpected announcement May 14 stating that belief in extraterrestrials "doesn't contradict [Catholic] faith."