

PROJECT BLUE BOOK

The United States Air Force has the responsibility under the Department of Defense for the investigation of unidentified flying objects (UFOs). The name of this program, which has been in operation since 1948, is Project Blue Book. It has been identified in the past as Project SIGN and Project GRUDGE.

Air Force interest in unidentified flying objects is related directly to the Air Force responsibility for the air defense of the United States. Procedures for conducting this program are established by Air Force Regulation 80-17.

The objectives of Project Blue Book are two-fold: first, to determine whether UFOs pose a threat to the security of the United States; and, second, to determine whether UFOs exhibit any unique scientific information or advanced technology which could contribute to scientific or technical research. In the course of accomplishing these objectives, Project Blue Book strives to identify and explain all UFO sightings reported to the Air Force.

HOW THE PROGRAM IS CONDUCTED

The program is conducted in three phases. The first phase includes receipt of UFO reports and initial investigation of the reports. The Air Force base nearest the location of a reported sighting is charged with the responsibility of investigating the sighting and forwarding the information to the Project Blue Book Office at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

If the initial investigation does not reveal a positive identification or explanation, a second phase of more intensive analysis is conducted by the Project Blue Book Office. Each case is objectively and scientifically analyzed, and, if necessary, all of the scientific facilities available to the Air Force can be used to assist in arriving at an identification or explanation. All personnel associated with the investigation, analysis, and evaluation efforts of the project view each report with a scientific approach and an open mind.

The third phase of the program is dissemination of information concerning UFO sightings, evaluations, and statistics. This is accomplished by the Secretary of the Air Force, Office of Information.

The Air Force defines an unidentified flying object as any aerial object or phenomenon which the observer is unable to identify.

Reports of unfamiliar objects in the sky are submitted to the Air Force from many sources. These sources include military and civilian pilots, weather observers, amateur astronomers, business and professional men and women, and housewives, etc.

Frequently such objects as missiles, balloons, birds, kites, searchlights, aircraft navigation and anticollision beacons, jet engine exhaust, condensation trails, astronomical bodies and meteorological phenomena are mistakenly reported as unidentified flying objects.

The Air Force groups its evaluations of UFO reports under three general headings: (1) IDENTIFIED, (2) INSUFFICIENT DATA, and (3) UNIDENTIFIED.

IDENTIFIED reports are those for which sufficient specific information has been accumulated and evaluated to permit a positive identification or explanation of the object.

Reports categorized as INSUFFICIENT DATA are those for which one or more elements of information essential for evaluation are missing. Some examples are the omission of the duration of the sighting, date, time, location, position in the sky, weather conditions, and the manner of appearance or disappearance. If an element is missing and there is an indication that the sighting may be of a security, scientific, technical, or public interest value, the Project Blue Book Office conducts an additional investigation and every attempt is made to obtain the information necessary for identification. However, in some instances, essential information is requested from the observer and is never received; therefore, no further action can be taken.

The third and by far the smallest group of evaluations is categorized as UNIDENTIFIED. A sighting is considered unidentified when a report apparently contains all pertinent data necessary to suggest a valid hypothesis concerning the cause or explanation of the report but the description of the object or its motion cannot be correlated with any known object or phenomena.

TYPES OF UFO IDENTIFICATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

There are various types of UFO sightings. Most common are reports of astronomical sightings, which include bright stars, planets, comets, fireballs, meteors, auroral streamers, and other celestial bodies. When observed through haze, light fog, moving clouds, or other obscurations or unusual conditions, the planets, including Venus, Jupiter, and Mars have been reported as unidentified flying objects. Stellar mirages are also a source of reports.

Satellites are another major source of UFO reports. An increase in satellites reported as UFOs has come about because of two factors. The first is the increase of interest on the part of the public; the second is the increasing number of satellites in the skies. Positive knowledge of the location of all satellites at all times enables rapid identification of satellite sightings. Keeping track of man-made objects in orbit about the earth is the responsibility of the North American Air Defense Command Space Detection and Tracking System. This sophisticated electronic system gathers complex space traffic data instantly from tracking stations all over the world.

Other space surveillance activities include the use of ballistic tracking and large telescopic cameras. ECHO schedules are prepared by the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center at Greenbelt, Maryland, and schedules of the South/North equator crossings are prepared by the Smithsonian Institution at Cambridge, Massachusetts. From the data produced by these agencies, satellites mistakenly reported as UFOs can be quickly identified. Some of these are visible to the naked eye.

Aircraft account for another major source of UFO reports, particularly during adverse weather conditions. When observed at high altitudes and at some distance, aircraft can have appearances ranging from disc to rocket shapes due to the reflection of the sun on their bright surfaces. Vapor or condensation trails from jet aircraft will sometimes appear to glow fiery red or orange when reflecting sunlight. Afterburners from jet aircraft are often reported as UFOs since they can be seen from great distances when the aircraft cannot be seen.

The Project Blue Book Office has direct contact with all elements of the Air Force and the Federal Aviation Agency civil air control centers. All aerial refueling operations and special training flights can be checked immediately. Air traffic of commercial airlines and flights of military aircraft are checked with the nearest control center, enabling an immediate evaluation of aircraft mistakenly reported as UFOs. However, since many local flights are not carried, these flights are probable causes of some reports.