

Does It Matter That the DOD Released Those UFO Videos?

The Department of Defense isn't admitting that aliens exist. But apparently they don't mind if you check out their sweet rides.



A still from a video of a flying object taken by a Navy pilot's camera. PHOTOGRAPH: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

ON MONDAY, THE US Department of Defense officially released three videos depicting encounters between Navy pilots and unidentified aerial phenomena. These events occurred in 2004 and 2015, but the videos didn't publicly surface until *The New York Times* included them with a front-page story about the Pentagon's "mysterious UFO

program” in 2017. The Navy previously acknowledged that the videos are authentic, but the Pentagon never authorized them for release. Now it has.



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Each of the three videos contains footage captured by Navy pilots that show a strange-looking oval zipping through the air and over the ocean. In a video from 2015 called “Gimbal,” a flying object shaped like a Tic Tac whips through the clouds before it slows and begins to rotate. The pilot filming the encounter describes it over the radio as “a fucking drone, bro.” In another video from 2015, referred to as “Go Fast,” a small white speck is tracked by a jet’s infrared system as it flies low over the ocean. The oldest video, “FLIR1,” is also from a jet infrared system and shows an oval object rapidly accelerating.

The videos were originally published by *The New York Times* and To the Stars Academy of Arts and Sciences, a company founded by former Blink-182 frontman Tom DeLonge to research UFOs and other unexplained phenomena. When the videos were released in 2017, To the Stars staffers claimed that the footage had “been through the official declassification review process and has been approved for public release.”

VIDEO: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

“All videos were previously reviewed by the cognizant DOD authority under the 1910 process and were cleared for ‘unrestricted release’ by the Defense Office of Prepublication Security Review,” says Luis Elizondo, To the Stars’ director of government programs and services. Elizondo is a former Department of Defense employee who claims to have led its Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program, the “mysterious UFO program” alluded to in the *Times* report. The “1910 process” refers to the Defense Department form 1910 used to request clearance to release DOD information to the public.

But in their statement this week, Pentagon officials describe the 2017 release as “unauthorized.” Three years later, the DOD is finally ready to authorize the videos ... even though they’ve already been watched by millions of people. “After a thorough review, the department has determined that the authorized release of these unclassified videos does not reveal any sensitive capabilities or systems, and does not impinge on any subsequent investigations of military air space incursions by unidentified aerial phenomena,” Department of Defense officials wrote in a press release published on Monday.

(As of press time, a spokesperson for the US Navy had not returned a request for comment.)

So does the official authorization of these videos mean the Pentagon has finally admitted that aliens exist? Nope. For starters, anything the military labels “unidentified” is not necessarily extraterrestrial. It’s just something in the sky that military officials can’t explain—civil and military pilots see unidentified aircraft all the time. Could they be piloted by little green men? Sure, if you have an active imagination. But usually they turn out to be something much more mundane—an atmospheric illusion, an undisclosed military drill, a satellite, or evidence of a tired pilot’s brain playing tricks on them.

In the case of the videos released this week by the Pentagon, it’s still unclear what’s in them. As a Department of Defense staffer notes in the press release, “the aerial phenomena observed in the videos remain characterized as ‘unidentified.’” The flying objects in the video might be aircraft, but if they are, they don’t move like any aircraft we’re

familiar with. Audio from the 2015 video suggests that even the pilots who filmed it couldn't understand what they were seeing. "What the fuck is that thing?" one of the pilots asks over the radio.

If these were evidence of extraterrestrial activity, or even just advanced military aircraft built by another country, one would expect that the Pentagon would classify those videos faster than you can say "Freedom of Information Act." But here's the thing: The DOD described the videos released this week as *unclassified*, which is not the same thing as *declassified*. Unclassified means that the military never thought the information was sensitive enough to slap national security restrictions on it in the first place. A spokesperson for the Department of Defense told WIRED that "imagery from military aircraft are routinely treated as classified until they are reviewed" and that a copy of the FLIR video had been "erroneously marked as classified during the intelligence investigation process." According to the press release, the reason the Pentagon decided to release the videos was "to clear up any misconceptions by the public on whether or not the footage that has been circulating was real, or whether or not there is more to the videos.

"The investigation into unidentified incursions into military airspace involves various intelligence methods and agencies, which means these videos were part of classified investigations," a spokesperson for the Department of Defense told WIRED in an email. "The videos themselves were eventually deemed unclassified, but we do not release information that is part of ongoing investigations."

Ultimately, the release of these videos is nothing more than the Defense Department giving them an official stamp of approval. But that doesn't mean the mystery is finished. "This historic acknowledgement will cause a seismic shift in the attitudes and stigma surrounding these events, allowing more reputable institutions to openly share reliable data for research," says Elizondo. "It will be looked at for years to come as a fundamental step in gaining people's trust."

Unless, of course, you trust no one.

Updated 4-29-2020, 12:40 pm EDT: This story was updated with comment from the Department of Defense.