

The Cosford Incident

On 30 and 31 March 1993 there was a series of UFO sightings in the UK involving over a hundred witnesses. Many of these were police officers and military personnel. The UFO also flew directly over two RAF bases. What follows is the extraordinary story of what has been dubbed The British UFO Mystery, investigated by Nick Pope who at the time worked for the MoD.

Overview

The first sighting took place on 30 March at around 8.30pm in Somerset. This was followed by a sighting at 9pm in the Quantock Hills. The witness was a police officer who, together with a group of scouts, had seen a craft that he described as looking "like two Concordes flying side by side and joined together". The reports came in thick and fast and when Nick Pope arrived at work the following morning he received a steady stream of reports. It was soon clear that he had a major UFO event on his hands. One of the most interesting reports came from a member of the public in Rugely, Staffordshire, who reported a UFO that he estimated as being 200 metres in diameter. He and other family members told Nick how they had chased the object in their car and got extremely close to it, believing it had landed in a nearby field. When they got there a few seconds later, there was nothing to be seen. Many of the descriptions related to a triangular-shaped craft or of the lights perceived as being on the underside of such a craft. Indeed, in an apparent coincidence these sighting occurred three years to the very day after the famous wave of sightings in Belgium that had led to F-16 fighters being scrambled to intercept a UFO being tracked on radar.

One very important sighting that only came to light in 2007 was that of Darren Perks. At the time he was an air cadet waiting to enlist in the British Army Air Corps. At approx 11pm whilst walking to his home on the northern outskirts of Shrewsbury, Shropshire he saw and large structured black triangle shaped craft moving slowly from South to North just in front and above him. The craft at an approx height of 300ft moved very slowly and was clearly visible against the stars and night sky. It fired a very bright white coloured beam down to the ground as if it was searching for something, and then just shot off to the North at an incredible speed which is described as much faster than any known jet aircraft. Darren was experienced in all types of aircraft recognition due to a personal interest in the subject and air cadets experiences involving flying at many RAF bases in the UK, and he states that the craft was nothing that any conventional military or civilian company could have operated let alone engineered given the speeds that in manoeuvred in front of him. He also recalls a very low humming sound that was irritating to listen to as the craft moved off. Darren decided to keep the incident to himself as he did not think anything of it until he stumbled across Nick Pope's website. On reading the information about the Cosford incident he realised that everything then made sense, and he was part of something much bigger than he originally thought.

RAF Cosford

The UFO was seen by a patrol of RAF Police based at RAF Cosford. Their official police report (classified Police in Confidence) stated that the UFO passed over the base "at great velocity ... at an altitude of approximately 1000 feet". It described two white lights with a faint red glow at the rear, with no engine noise being heard. The RAF Police report also contained details of a number of civilian UFO sightings that they had been made aware of in the course of making enquiries with other military bases, civil airports and local police.

RAF Shawbury

Later on that night, the Meteorological Officer at RAF Shawbury saw the UFO. He described to Nick how it had moved slowly across the countryside towards the base, at a speed of no more than 30 or 40 mph. He saw the UFO fire a narrow beam of light (like a laser) at the ground and saw the light sweeping backwards and forwards across the field beyond the perimeter fence, as if it were looking for something. He heard an unpleasant low frequency humming sound coming from the craft and said he could feel as well as hear this - rather like standing in front of a bass speaker. He estimated the size of the craft to be midway between a C-130 Hercules transport aircraft and a Boeing 747. Then he told how the light beam had retracted in an unnatural way and that the craft had suddenly accelerated away to the horizon many times faster than a military aircraft. Here was an experienced RAF officer who regularly saw aircraft and helicopters, telling Nick that it was something he said was quite unlike anything he's ever seen in his life. The MoD party line about UFOs being of "no defence significance" was looking decidedly shaky. What was Nick supposed to say to him, he wondered - "don't worry, it was probably just a weather balloon"! Nick did correspond with him about this but, unlike some sceptics, he intended to respect witness confidentiality and wouldn't name him. But in recent years this witness went on to work at the MET office headquarters in the Enviromental section and I can name him as Wayne Elliott.

How Many Reports?

For a number of reasons UFOs are notoriously under-reported. The two main factors here are fear of disbelief and/or ridicule, and the fact that many people do not know who to contact with details of their sightings. While there were standing instructions that UFO reports sent to military bases, civil airports and police stations should be forwarded to the MOD for investigation, this national reporting system did not always work. The casefile on the 30/31 March 1993 UFO incident makes it clear that there were many more sightings than ever reached the Department. One throwaway line from a signal reporting how police officers in Liskeard, Cornwall, had seen a UFO stated that the object was "seen by other police officers throughout Devon and Cornwall". We can only guess at the number of sightings that went unreported that night.

Radar

Nick Pope launched a detailed investigation into these sightings, working closely with the RAF, colleagues in the Defence Intelligence Staff and personnel at the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System at RAF Fylingdales. One of the first things that he did was order that radar tapes be impounded and sent to him at MOD Main Building in Whitehall. The radar data was downloaded onto standard VHS video cassettes and arrived shortly thereafter. He watched it with the relevant RAF specialists who told him that there were a few odd radar returns, but that they were inconclusive. Radar is not an exact science and in certain circumstances, false returns can be generated. But one question still unanswered is why the Clee Hill Radar Monitoring Station in Shropshire went off line for no apparent reason that very night?

Aircraft

Later, a more formal assessment of the radar data was made. Unfortunately, one of the radar heads was not working on primary radar during the reporting period (Clee Hill) so only aircraft working Secondary Surveillance Radar could be seen. But with this and with other checks, what they were able to do was build up a picture of all aircraft and helicopters activity over the UK, so that they could factor them into the investigation and eliminate them from their enquiries if appropriate.

RAF Fylingdales and Cosmos 2238

The Ballistic Missile Early Warning System at RAF Fylingdales, with its powerful space-tracking radars, was an important part of Nick's UFO investigation. They quickly alerted him to the fact that there had been a re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere of a Russian rocket carrying a communications satellite, Cosmos 2238. He postulated that this was a possible explanation for a cluster of UFO sightings that occurred at around 1.10am on 31 March. As an interesting footnote, ufologists such as Jenny Randles have previously claimed that some UFOs may be interested in re-entries!

Ufologists

Most ufologists had not even heard about this case until Nick wrote about it in 1996, in his first book, Open Skies Closed Minds. One ufologist who had been very closely involved was Doug Cooper. Nick worked closely with him during the course of his official investigation, as part of a new more open policy that he had instigated. Some ufologists like Doug had welcomed this but others, sadly, saw Nick as a sinister Man in Black and refused to have anything to do with the MoD believing that they were part of a conspiracy to cover-up the truth about UFOs. Doug shared with Nick his own report into the wave of sightings. Like Nick, he had concluded that the Cosmos 2238 re-entry was the probable explanation for the cluster of sightings at 1.10am. But there were some interesting gems in his report, including a reference to one of the UFO sightings having unnerved cattle in a field, which were reported as having been restless somewhere between midnight and 1am. The witnesses then described their absolute astonishment at seeing all the cows standing in a circular formation in the middle of the field, all completely silent.

The British UFO Mystery

On 1 November 2006 Channel Five showed a one hour documentary on this case, entitled "The British UFO Mystery". The investigative documentary was part of Channel Five's second "Stranger Than Fiction" series. The production company, Steel Spyda, had adopted an unusual approach when making this documentary. All too often, UFO documentaries rely on an endless series of 'talking heads', with witnesses telling their stories, followed by believers and sceptics from the world of ufology expressing their contrasting views. Steel Spyda tried a new approach. They obtained the MoD's case file on the incident (which ran to 105 pages of documentation) and based the programme around that. As Nick led the investigation, they asked him to front the programme, giving viewers an unprecedented insight into the methodology of an official MoD investigation. The programme drew just over one million viewers - a strong showing for Channel Five. Ufologists were pleased to see their subject back on one of the national networks at primetime.

Sceptics

Sceptics soon jumped on the bandwagon and some lengthy analyses of the case (actually little more than a reproduction of material from the MoD casefile) appeared, following the broadcast of the Channel Five documentary. These were conclusion-led and marred by misunderstandings about the way in which the military record time and the way in which aircraft heights are recorded. Sceptics leapt on the Cosmos 2238 explanation (which MoD had known about at the time) to explain the cluster of 1.10am sightings and promptly tried to shoehorn all the other sightings into this, suggesting that witnesses who had seen the UFO at any other time must have got the time wrong - sometimes by several hours!

Black Projects

A theory often put forward to explain some of the most spectacular UFO sightings is that they might be prototype aircraft or UAVs. Of course, at any time there will be test flying of various things that you won't see at the Farnborough airshow for several years, but the bottom line is that they test fly such things in certain areas so at least within government they can differentiate between black projects and UFOs. In view of the controversy about Aurora (an alleged hypersonic replacement for the SR-71 Blackbird) they did, in the case of the March 1993 UFO sightings, raise the issue with the US authorities, through the British Embassy in Washington. Was it possible that something had gone wrong with the normal processes for overflight of another country and could our UFO sightings be attributable to some US prototype? The answer Nick got back was extraordinary. The Americans had been having their own sightings of these large, triangular-shaped UFOs and wanted to know if the RAF might have such a craft, capable of moving from a virtual hover to speeds of several thousand mph in an instant. We wish we had! The interesting thing about this was that somebody in the US was still clearly taking an interest in UFOs, despite the apparent disengagement from the subject in 1969 with the closing down of Project Blue Book. Sadly, a letter to the US Embassy about Aurora was the only document missing from the casefile released to Steel Spyda following their FOIA request for documents relating to the March 1993 UFO sightings.

Jodrell Bank Observatory

Intriguingly, even the cluster of 1.10am sightings might not all be explained by the Cosmos 2238 re-entry. The sceptics were torpedoed by Professor Ian Morrison, Director of the Jodrell Bank Observatory (and hardly a believer in UFOs!) who in speaking about these sightings on "The British UFO Mystery" said "Sometimes people see a pattern of lights that stay pretty much in formation for maybe several minutes at a time and to be honest I don't believe that can be the breakup of space junk or anything else. Those things are short-lived and they all leave streaks and the relative positions may well change as they travel".

Conclusion

Given the MoD's "no defence significance" conclusion on UFOs, it seems fitting to conclude with quotes from MOD documents which contradict the usual stance. In a briefing that Nick prepared for his Head of Division on 16 April 1993 he wrote:

"It seems that an unidentified object of unknown origin was operating in the UK Air Defence Region without being detected on radar; this would appear to be of considerable defence significance, and I recommend that we investigate further, within MoD or with the US authorities".

His Head of Division was normally sceptical about the UFO phenomenon, but on this occasion he agreed with Nick's conclusion. His 22 April 1993 brief to the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (one of the UK's most senior RAF officers) stated:

"In summary, there would seem to be some evidence on this occasion that an unidentified object (or objects) of unknown origin was operating over the UK."

This is about as close the MoD will ever get to saying that there's more to UFOs than misidentifications or hoaxes.

Today the Cosford Incident is still being investigated and ongoing research is now conducted by Darren Perks into the events. There are new witnesses coming forward and new information which is shedding more light on the events.

The important thing about this incident, is that on the night of March 30th/31st 1993 a UFO freely entered UK airspace and manoeuvred around over RAF bases at such ease and speeds that we have never seen. It was not captured on radar that we know of and the MoD was fully aware of what was happening. Most of all there are some very important witnesses who saw this craft. Maybe one day it will return.....

Postscript

[The incident is well known around the world and has featured on TV shows, documentaries and film in countries such as Australia and the USA.](#)

[To date all known files on the Cosford Incident have been released and more recent releases have shown no new details.](#) However some files were held back and we may never see them released.

[\(My thanks to Nick Pope for guidance with writing and supplying the article\)](#)

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