

**PRESS RELEASE**

**UFO Desk: Closed**

**- Last Tranche of UFO Files Released -**

The final tranche of UFO files released today by The National Archives reveal for the first time the reasons behind the closure of the UFO desk and how sightings, which trebled in its last year, had become a social phenomenon making tabloid headlines and sparking a disclosure campaign for ‘the truth’.

The 25 files, which contain 4,400 pages, cover the work carried out during final two years of the MoD’s UFO desk (from late 2007 until November 2009) including details of government policy, official correspondence with senior ministers and the handling of the largest ever number of UFO sighting reports received since 1978 - the year the film ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind’ was released. The files contain accounts of alleged abductions and contact with aliens and UFO sightings near UK landmarks.

**Dr David Clarke, author of the book 'The UFO Files' said:**

*“The last pieces of the puzzle have finally been revealed with this insight into the last days of the UFO desk. These files spell out clearly why the MoD decided – after 60 years – it no longer needed to keep tabs on sightings, even those made by ‘credible’ people such as police officers and pilots. The last files from the UFO desk are now all in the public domain. People at home can read them and draw their own conclusions about whether ‘the truth’ is in these files or still out there.”*

The UFO Desk received over 600 UFO sightings and reports in 2009, treble the amount of the previous year. With this surge in sighting reports, increasing time and resources were needed to manage the UFO Desk which the files note ‘*serves no defence purpose and merely encourages the generation of correspondence*’. The files also show that in 2009, Defence Minister Bob Ainsworth was told that in more than 50 years ‘*no UFO sighting reported to [MoD] has ever revealed anything to suggest an extra-terrestrial presence or military threat to the UK*’ (DEFE 24/2458/1). This led to their decision to close the UFO Desk and with it the UFO hotline and dedicated email address.

As officials prepared their closure announcement, a campaign calling on government to disclose 'the truth' about UFOs was initiated. The files include correspondence to senior ministers including the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown (DEFE 2629/1).

Also contained in the files are briefings about possible reasons for the surge of UFO sighting reports. The files suggest that it was believed the increase could be partly a result of the craze for releasing Chinese lanterns at weddings and public holidays. One example of this is a UFO sighting by soldiers in Shropshire which made tabloid headlines in June 2008 (DEFE 24/2625/1).

**Dr David Clarke continues:** *"There are many reasons why the number of reports trebled in 2009. Many of the sighting accounts – such as formations of orange lights moving slowly across the sky - describe the appearance of Chinese lanterns even though people did not recognise them at the time.*

*"But that is not the only explanation. Ironically there is evidence that some people were encouraged to report their observations to the MoD and to the Press which could be a direct result of increased public awareness during the period that the first UFO files were being released by The National Archives. I believe this demonstrates that UFOs are very much a social phenomenon."*

The reports include UFOs spotted near UK landmarks; one hovering 'opposite the Houses of Parliament' (DEFE 24/2623/1) and one near Stonehenge (DEFE 24/2451/1). A trend can be seen in the reports with many sightings witnessed in the summer months typically spotted by people while outside walking dogs, smoking cigarettes, at family barbeques - and even while relaxing in hot tubs (DEFE 24/2623/1 & DEFE 24/2624/1).

**Other highlights from the files include:**

- A letter from a school child to the MoD asking for the truth about UFOs after she had seen some strange lights (includes a drawing of an alien in a UFO waving). The UFO desk sent a bag of RAF goodies in response (DEFE 24/ 2457/1)
- A report received via the UFO hotline by someone who had been 'living with an alien' in Carlisle for sometime (DEFE 24/2625/1)
- Report by a man from Cardiff who claimed a UFO abducted his dog, car and tent whilst he was camping with friends in 2007 (DEFE 24/2623/1)

- Report of UFO sighting in Israel with a link to a YouTube video showing an orange ball of light in the sky (DEFE 24/2452/1)
- Report of UFO sighting during the Second World War 1943-44 (DEFE 24/2628/1)
- MoD Police officer sighting of pear drop-shaped 'translucent green light' from Royal Navy Base at Portsmouth (DEFE 24/2460/1)

The files are available to download for free for a month from the website:  
[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufo](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufo)

## **UFO app**

To mark the end of the UFO file release programme, an iPhone/iPad app '[UFO Files UK](#)'\* has been created by Black Plaques in association with The National Archives. The app lets users explore the official data by searching UFO reports dating back 25 years, with almost 5,000 sightings analysed, categorised and mapped. '[UFO Files UK](#)' makes all this data and selected pages from the original files available to the public in a convenient and accessible form. The '[UFO Files UK](#)' app is available from the iTunes store on Friday 21 June.

## **Contact details**

**For further information, interviews or images about the UFO files please contact The National Archives Press Office on: 020 8392 5277 or e-mail: [press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).**

**For further information about the 'UFO Files UK' app, please contact: Frances at Black Plaques, [frances@blackplaques.com](mailto:frances@blackplaques.com), 07961 983 240 or see Black Plaques preview site - <http://is.gd/DI3COi>**

## **Notes to editors:**

The UFO Desk was staffed by civil servants from the Air Staff Secretariat who received scientific and technical advice from DI55 – a branch of the Defence Intelligence Staff who were responsible for assessing UFO reports for information of intelligence interest. In 2000 the Air Staff Secretariat was replaced by DAS (Directorate Air Space) as the secretariat responsible for UFO reports. From 2000 UFO reports were no longer copied to DI55 and the UFO desk was closed in November 2009

**'The UFO files' book** - The inside story of real-life sightings by Dr Clarke is available from [The National Archives online bookshop](#).

**The UFO Files UK app** - The app will be live on iTunes from Friday 21 June priced at 69p.

\*iTunes link for the app from Friday 21 June onwards:

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/ufo-files-uk/id651506199?ls=1&mt=8>.

For more information on Black Plaques please refer to the website:

<http://www.blackplaques.com/>

## **Images**

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## **The National Archives**

For the record, for good... The National Archives is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). As the official archive of the UK government and England and Wales, we look after and make available to the public a collection of historical records dating back over 1,000 years, including records as diverse as Domesday Book and MI5 files.

Our 21st-century role is to collect and secure the future of the record, both digital and physical, to preserve it for generations to come, and to make it as accessible as possible. We do this by devising technological solutions to ensure the long-term survival of public records and working to widen access to our collection. The National Archives also advises on information management across government, publishes all UK legislation, manages Crown copyright and leads the archive sector. We work to promote and improve access to public sector information and its re-use.

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