

Script for National Archives UFO files - August 2009 podcast

Hello I'm David Clarke from the Dept Journalism, Sheffield Hallam University. I'm the consultant to The National Archives for the ongoing release of the MoD's UFO files.

This is the fourth instalment of files transferred from the MoD. They are available to download from the National Archives dedicated website www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos

There are 14 files in all – containing just over 4000 pages of material spanning 15 years, between 1981 and 1996.

There are detailed files covering specific UFO incidents, correspondence, a Parliamentary questions and a series of files containing UFO reports from the period between January 1993 and August 1996

During these three years there were more than 800 sightings reported to MoD, with a large increase in numbers during 1996 when 609 incidents were logged. This was more than all the three previous years added together (1993: 258 sightings; 1994: 209 sightings; 1995: 117)

The large increase in numbers during 1996 may reflect increased public awareness of UFOs and aliens due to the popularity of the TV series *The X Files* and the release of the movie *Independence Day*.

What the Key files?

There are two files that deal with the “Rendlesham Forest” UFO sightings in Suffolk.

Rendlesham is undoubtedly Britain's best known UFO incident. It has become known as "Britain's Roswell".

It involves sightings of mysterious lights in the forest outside the perimeter fence of RAF Woodbridge made by USAF personnel in December 1980. They claimed a UFO had landed in the forest, leaving traces including markings on the ground and radiation.

A summary of the events were included in a famous memo to the MoD by Lt Col Charles Halt (USAF deputy base commander), who witnessed one of the sightings.

Halt's memo opens this file, which consists largely of correspondence between the MoD and members of the public about the case between 1983 and 1995. The file also shows the MoD were unable to explain the incident, but decided it was of "no defence significance" as no unidentified objects had been detected on radar at the time.

Another file in this release contains the **MoD's final position statement on the Rendlesham incident**. This was written for the defence minister Lord David Trefgarne in 1995 and says: "...it is highly unlikely that any violation of UK airspace would be heralded by such a display of lights. I think it equally unlikely that any reconnaissance or spying activity would be announced in this way. We believe that the fact Col Halt did not report these occurrences to MoD for almost two weeks after the event, together with the low key manner in which he handled the matter are indicative of the degree of importance in defence terms which should be attached to the incident."

But Lord Hill-Norton, a former Chief of Defence Staff, was unconvinced by the MoD's statements on the case. He believed the Rendlesham forest UFO incident was "a potential banana skin looming for the MoD".

In a letter to Defence Minister Michael Heseltine he said: "...If the [USAF] report...is accurate, there is evidence that British airspace and territory are vulnerable to unwarranted intrusion to a disturbing degree. If, on the other hand, [Halt's report] must be dismissed, then we have evidence – no less disturbing, I suggest – that a sizeable number of USAF personnel at an important base in British territory are capable of serious misperception, the consequences of which might be grave in military terms."

Responding to another letter about the incident, Michael Heseltine said: "I can assure you there is not a grain of truth in the allegation that there has been a cover-up about alleged UFO sightings" including Rendlesham.

Belgian UFOs:

Another important UFO story covered by these files is the wave of sightings that occurred in Belgium during 1989 -90. These reveal how in March 1990 the Belgian Air Force scrambled F-16 fighters to intercept strange brightly-lit triangular-shaped flying objects reported by police officers and others.

In a statement sent to the British MoD in June 1994 General Wilfried de Brouwer, Chief of Operations, Belgian Air Staff, confirms that F-16 pilots obtained "lock-ons" with their radars but

were unable to explain what had caused the phenomena. MoD were not informed of the incident at the time and concluded there was no threat to the UK.

For their part, the British MoD told an inquirer “we have never detected a structured craft flying in UK airspace that has remained unidentified.”

What are the other highlights of this release?

UFO sightings in London. In 1993 and 1994 there were many sightings of a brightly illuminated oval object moving slowly over London.

The MoD discovered these were caused by a Virgin airship advertising the launch of the Ford Mondeo. This airship was even seen by the MoD’s UFO desk officer. The files contain many accounts and sketches of the London UFOs, many depicting saucer-shaped UFOs. It is interesting that several people refused to believe the UFO was the airship!

Cosford incident: One entire file is devoted to this flap. Bright lights were seen across central England in the early hours of 31 March 1993 by police officers and military witnesses including a police patrol at RAF Cosford, near Wolverhampton.

During 6 hours there were more than 30 sightings reported to the MoD across the south and west of the British Isles. The MoD’s UFO desk were so concerned they asked the RAF to replay radar tapes but this found nothing unusual had been detected.

But soon afterwards, it emerged the majority of sightings were caused by the re-entry into earth's atmosphere of the Russian rocket that launched Cosmos 2238 satellite. This was one UFO that eventually became an I-F-O: "identified flying object."

Can you tell us about some of the more unusual accounts in these files?

Alien Abductions (attempted!): Staffordshire Police sent a report to the MoD about a weird incident in May 1995.

Two terrified youths ran into the police station late one night and claimed they saw a UFO land in a field at Chasetown. They were hit by a blast of heat. A face appeared and a voice said: "We want you - come with us." They panicked and ran.

Police returned to the field with the lads the next day but could only find a farmer spraying crops. He said he had not seen anything unusual!

UFO attack on cemetery: Cheshire police report from July 96: young man returning home near Widnes ran after seeing UFO over cemetery.

Beams of light were projected onto the ground, a wailing noise was heard and smoke rose from the ground. Investigations at the scene found a hole burned in a railway sleeper still smouldering when police arrived...

Scotland UFO flap: Bonnybridge, a small town in southern Scotland, was featured in the national press during 1994-95 as Britain's hotspot for UFO sightings. It was claimed there had

been more than 3,000 separate reports. In 1995 a local councillor wrote to John Major asking for an inquiry and later he tried to twin the town with Roswell.

All 14 files can be downloaded from the TNA website which is:

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufo