

THE UFO THAT NEVER WAS?: The Calvine Photographs

Is this blurry image really the 'most compelling evidence' for UFOs visiting the UK?

A photocopy of a line drawing showing one of the Calvine photographs (Crown Copyright)

Does it show a secret US '**black project**' operating over Scotland?

Or are the Calvine photographs an aerial version of the **Loch Ness Monster**?

After a lengthy investigation, drawing upon responses to FOI requests and testimony from MoD insiders, I can provide some possible answers.

Click here to read my [Calvine case file](#).

An aura of mystery has grown around this story because the identity of the photographer is currently being with-held by the MoD, under Data Protection laws, until **2076**.

Despite the fact that he or she originally sent their negatives to a Scottish newspaper, *The Daily Record*, the name of the photographer remains redacted from MoD UFO files released by [The National Archives in 2009](#). The newspaper did not publish a story and passed the images to the **Ministry of Defence**.

Today, more than 30 years later, it seems that first generation images, taken from the negatives, remain squirrelled away in the UK and/or US intelligence archives (or both).

Pressure from lawmakers on both sides of the Atlantic - and Freedom of Information requests - might [lead to their release](#).

According to which version of the story you believe, the original is one of six colour photographs taken by two men walking near the A9 in the Scottish highlands one August evening in 1990.

They show a dark, wingless diamond-shaped craft accompanied by a smaller aircraft, identified as a RAF Harrier jet.

Both were seen and photographed as they buzzed a remote Scottish valley, 20 miles north of the town of Pitlochry.

What is often not mentioned in media accounts is the incident *allegedly* happened on **Saturday 4 August 1990**, just two days after Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, triggering off the first Gulf War.

Another curious fact is the Calvine photographs were completely unknown to the public until 1996 when **Nick Pope**, ex-MOD desk officer turned UFO pundit, published a brief account of the sighting in his first book *Open Skies Closed Minds*.

In the book Pope says his Head of Division - who he does not name - believed they might show the mythical US spy-plane **Aurora** that was the subject of much Press speculation at the time.

Pope claimed that expert analysis had revealed that the photographs are 'not fakes', but neither they nor he accepted the Aurora theory. He added:

'The Calvine report remains one of the most intriguing cases in the Ministry of Defence's files. The conclusions, however, are depressingly familiar: object unexplained, case closed, no further action.'

Speaking to [The Sun in May 2021](#) he went further, claiming the photos are 'sensational'.

He added: *'The photos are pretty much as good as it gets. They were assessed by the defence intelligence staff as real...they were clearly visible, sharp focused, broad daylight with the Scottish countryside in the background.'*

According to three separate senior MoD sources and documents I obtained from responses to **Freedom of Information** requests, the photographs *were indeed* the subject of several expert investigations. These were carried out by the Defence Intelligence Staff, the RAF's JARIC agency and by the Pentagon.

The dossier reveals how, in 1992, the DIS sent an image of a '**possible research vehicle**' flying in Scottish airspace to the **CIA**. That image was sent to the Pentagon where it was subject to further US-UK analysis, as revealed in a document written by the UK's Air Attache in Washington DC.

But although my sources disagree about what they images show, they all agree that whatever was captured on film was not a UFO because it was not *unidentified*. That might explain why a full set of papers are missing from the UFO files released at The National Archives in 2009.

A source in MoD's defence intelligence staff, whose identity I have chosen not to reveal, claims the object in the photograph *was* identified as a US experimental aircraft. He says it was operating from a RAF base in Scotland and was escorted, not shadowed, by RAF and US aircraft.

If true this would contradict Parliamentary statements in 1992-93 that no authorisation had been given by the UK Government for the US to operate experimental aircraft in its airspace.

'There was nothing extraterrestrial about what was seen in Scotland,' he said. **'No one else other than the Americans had anything like it at the time. We were not allowed to say exactly what it was. But we knew what it was.'**

He claimed the US agencies 'went ballistic' when they saw the image, which he said had been captured by civilians in 'a one in a million chance'.

But his story is contradicted by **RAF Air Commodore Simon Baldwin**, who commanded Britain's last V-bomber squadron that saw action in the Falklands War. Baldwin was serving as Air Attache in Washington when one of the images from Scotland surfaced at the Pentagon in 1992.

When I spoke to Baldwin he dismissed the theory that the object in the photograph was a Stealth aircraft. He believes the whole story is a **spoof** - the same word he uses in a memo sent to MoD in December that year that I obtained using the Freedom of Information Act.

Baldwin says he was called in by a 3-star Lt General after the CIA sent one of the photographs to the Pentagon without informing them the source was UK MoD.

In the misunderstanding that followed, it emerged that the Pentagon believed the image actually depicted a RAF experimental aircraft developed using secret Stealth technology, shared with the British, without the knowledge of the US Government!

Baldwin believes the story - and the photographs - were the result of an elaborate hoax that briefly fooled the intelligence services.

He says the photographs - one of which he saw - depict '*an airborne Loch Ness Monster*'.

Baldwin's involvement is revealed in a series of letters he sent to London whilst Air Attache during 1992, copies of which I obtained using the **Freedom of Information Act**. One was addressed to **Sir Donald Spiers**, Controller of Aircraft at MoD, a 3-star rank at the time.

The prank explanation was confirmed by Sir Donald, a former Assistant Chief Scientist RAF. He said that he recognised the black and white image from the MoD files as the same one he saw at the time. There was, he said, 'no doubt that the photograph was a spoof,' a conclusion he claims is based upon analysis by 'our technical experts'.

So, who should we believe?

It seems to me that we have three options.

No 1 - the Calvin photographs show an unidentified, extraterrestrial spacecraft shadowed by RAF/US aircraft flying in broad daylight over Scotland. The UK and US intelligence agencies have covered-up the evidence for 30 years and have silenced both the photographer and the newspaper that was sent the photographs.

But if this was true the conspiracy has not been very effective.

Why if the photos were 'above top secret' was a poster-sized copy of one image printed out and placed on a [wall in the MoD office](#) where it could be seen by civilians such as Nick Pope? (for more details see my case file [here](#)).

Even if this was an error, why did the intelligence services then allow Pope to blow the gaffe in his book that we know was subject to security clearance before its publication?

And why did MoD agree to the the release at The National Archives of poor quality black and white photocopies of the images 13 years later?

No 2 - the 'object' in the photographs is a super-secret US experimental project such as the [TR-3 Black Manta](#) or the hypersonic [Aurora](#). This is the explanation offered by my Defence Intelligence source. I am convinced he is telling the truth as he remembers it. This is not impossible but seems unlikely.

I remain unconvinced that such a project could be concealed for three decades. Also, if it is so super secret, why risk flying it in broad daylight on a weekend evening in Scotland when it could have been tested in secrecy at Area 51 or above the ocean? When I asked Nick Pope

about this possibility he said 'we know where we exercise and we know where we test' and where you test your exotic hardware is generally over the sea at night.

Even so it remains possible the images show a UAV or some other experimental platform that was undergoing tests shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in Kuwait. Only the full release of UK and US analysis of the images - and the photographs themselves - can resolve this question.

No 3 - *To quote Sherlock Holmes 'once you eliminate the impossible whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth'.*

Using [Occam's Razor](#) I believe we can eliminate option 1 as fiction that belongs to a plot from *The X-Files*. It would be nice to believe it but the evidence simply does not stack up.

Option 2 is not *impossible* but remains unlikely. This leaves us with one remaining theory that makes the fewest uncorroborated assumptions. The only explanation that makes sense is the photographs are fakes. Either this was a deliberately created hoax or an opportunistic one, in that the person or persons concerned photographed a Harrier then, when the pictures were processed, found a flaw on the negative that they then tried to pass off as a UFO.

Due to the compartmentalised nature of the UK MoD this would explain why both Nick Pope and my DI source had no 'need to know' about the results of the UK-US analysis of the images that must have happened early in 1993 and has left no record in the released documents.

It would also explain why the photographer has not come forward, despite significant media coverage. It might also explain why the *Daily Record* spiked the story and why no one (including MoD at the time) has been able to trace the source of the RAF Harrier shown in the image.

If it really was a spoof then the unusual date, time and location provided in the original report to MoD might also be false. As it is a pre-digital image there would be no way of proving its precise provenance.

Interest in the Calvin photographs continues to grow as the story becomes a prototype UFO legend. The idea of a vast conspiracy to hide the truth is characteristic of how these stories grow and become part of the larger UFO mythology.

Last year I told a freelance journalist how **The National Archives** had removed the name of the Calvin photographer from a MoD dossier that mentions the photographs, first released in 2009.

This revelation was published by [The Sun on 10 October 2020](#), along with the 'colourised version' of the image and a comment from Nick Pope, the man who first released news of the story in his 1996 book.

But the tabloid omitted any reference to the actual source of what it called 'a complaint lodged under the Freedom of Information Act about the National Archives withholding documents' that was 'now under investigation by the UK information watchdog'.

It went on to claim 'a dossier into Britain's most significant UFO sighting is to be kept secret for another 50 years' adding further layers to perceived cover-up.

But the redaction of the name was not 'without explanation' as the tabloid claimed, nor was it anything to do with a massive cover-up of the Calvine images.

The facts are that the names and addresses of *all UFO witnesses and MoD officials who dealt with their reports* have been routinely redacted from files transferred to The National Archives since 2005. From that date section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act, covering personal information, replaced the former '30 year rule'. This has been further complicated by the arrival of the GDPR European legislation covering private information.

The name of the photographer is just one of hundreds, if not thousands, of other names and addresses currently being with-held from those files under the draconian Data Protection legislation, sometimes for up to 80 years.

The TNA decision to withhold the name, if upheld on appeal, will remain in force until **1 January 2076**. If successful it will ensure that, unless he comes forward voluntarily, we will never learn who took the Calvine photographs in either his and our lifetime.

Only pressure from politicians and the media will resolve this mystery once and for all.

Of course it would be a better story if the Calvine photographs turn out to be genuine 'compelling evidence' for UFOs - or indeed, top secret military technology.

But if they were the result of a clever hoax that successfully fooled the MoD, the CIA and the UFO community, then maybe his decision to remain anonymous might be a very sensible decision!

Text copyright Dr David Clarke 2021