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UFOs or *Australia* the old spy in the sky trick?

Jack Grimston

INTELLIGENCE officers scoured hundreds of UFO sighting reports in the 1980s and 90s looking for top-secret US stealth-plane projects, newly released files have shown.

At the end of the Cold War, the British Ministry of Defence was worried the US was developing mysterious planes but not telling its closest ally. Staff at department DI55 of the Defence Intelligence Staff logged and investigated hundreds of sightings by pilots, air-traffic controllers and private individuals who believed they had seen an alien presence.

“The MOD did not believe Britain was being visited by aliens, but these files show they were obsessed with the fear that our closest ally was developing spy planes and keeping them secret from us,” said David Clarke, a lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, and UFO specialist at the National Archives, which has just released hundreds of official UFO files on its website.

In one incident logged in 1989, an oil-rig worker trained in aircraft observation saw a “perfect black triangle” escorted by two US fighters. An official noted: “Attention is now focusing on this, despite a recent US Air Force ‘denial briefing’. This is bound to prompt parliamentary interest.”

In 1990, the crews of six RAF Tornado jets flying over Germany reported seeing a UFO. RAF staff noted the pilots had reported the “aerial phenomenon” overtaking them, and said: “Possibly (identified) as a stealth aircraft.”

The same year the MOD believed two men had sighted a spy-plane called Aurora, thought to be in development by the Americans. They reported a diamond-shaped UFO above the A9 in Perthshire, Scotland.

The files settle a long-standing UFO conspiracy theory on the death of American fighter pilot Captain William Schaffner during an exercise over the North Sea in 1970. To the distress of his family, some have claimed that officials covered up a sinister incident possibly involving a UFO. The files include the RAF’s official inquiry into the crash, which concluded Schaffner’s Lightning fighter had brushed the sea during a delicate, low-speed manoeuvre. When he tried to eject, the cockpit canopy remained stuck because of poor maintenance, and Schaffner was believed to have drowned.

The vast majority of the files record calls from the public reporting various cigar-shaped objects, mysterious lights and saucer-shaped craft.

In 1989, RAF Wattisham in Suffolk was phoned by a “distressed female” who described being engaged in conversation while walking her dog by an alien with a Scandinavian accent. He was dressed in a brown garment that resembled a flying suit and told her the purpose of the alien visit was friendly. He then left in his spaceship.

The same year, the RAF was told of a large flying object seen approaching “from Filton airport” by a “pleasant lady” in Bristol. It had an object on top “like a teapot lid”.

In 1992, a secret memo reported nocturnal sightings in east London of “a bright cigar-shaped object, moving very slowly and making little or no sound”. An intelligence analyst recorded that the craft was “almost certainly a brightly illuminated airship advertising the new Ford Mondeo”.