

A UFO with a High X(mas) Factor

For more details about the Calvine UFO photos see: <https://ap.lc/WnEBM>

One year ago, while discussing the Calvine incident in an email thread started by David Clarke, I brought up the existence of a series of spectacular UFO pictures from Puerto Rico. It concerned a set of widely published photographs taken in May 1988 by abductee Amaury Rivera. It was later revealed that the photos showed a fabricated model and a miniature jet plane. Both objects had been suspended from the tree branches that are visible in the photograph I'm pasting below. For more info on the case, see <https://ap.lc/t5k5x> (in Spanish, I'm afraid).



Image borrowed from <https://ap.lc/K2yw1>

It doesn't seem far-fetched to theorize that the Puerto Rican incident inspired the authors of the Calvine photos to perpetrate a prank of their own. The photos look quite similar, and it may well be that the two Scotsmen used the same technique. After all, we have foliage appearing in the upper part of their shots, too. It's a detail that should always raise suspicion, certainly in combination with the fact that the alleged witnesses were two young males, which is something of a common denominator for perpetrators of fake UFO shots (the Cottingly sisters being the exception to that rule, but that was about fairies not UFOs).

If a prank—I feel that “hoax” is too big a word—, then the alleged circumstances in which the photos were taken should not be taken too literal. There is one element to the story that does indeed seem to contradict what the photo shows. Although not an entirely conclusive argument, Martin Shough and I have pointed out in personal correspondence with fellow researchers that both the object and the clouds appear to be illuminated from above (see normal and darkened version of the picture below), whereas the photographer claimed he encountered the UFO after 9 p.m. With sunset on August 4, 1990 in Calvine occurring at 9:17 p.m., the cloudscape seems somewhat atypical for a photograph taken at or around sunset

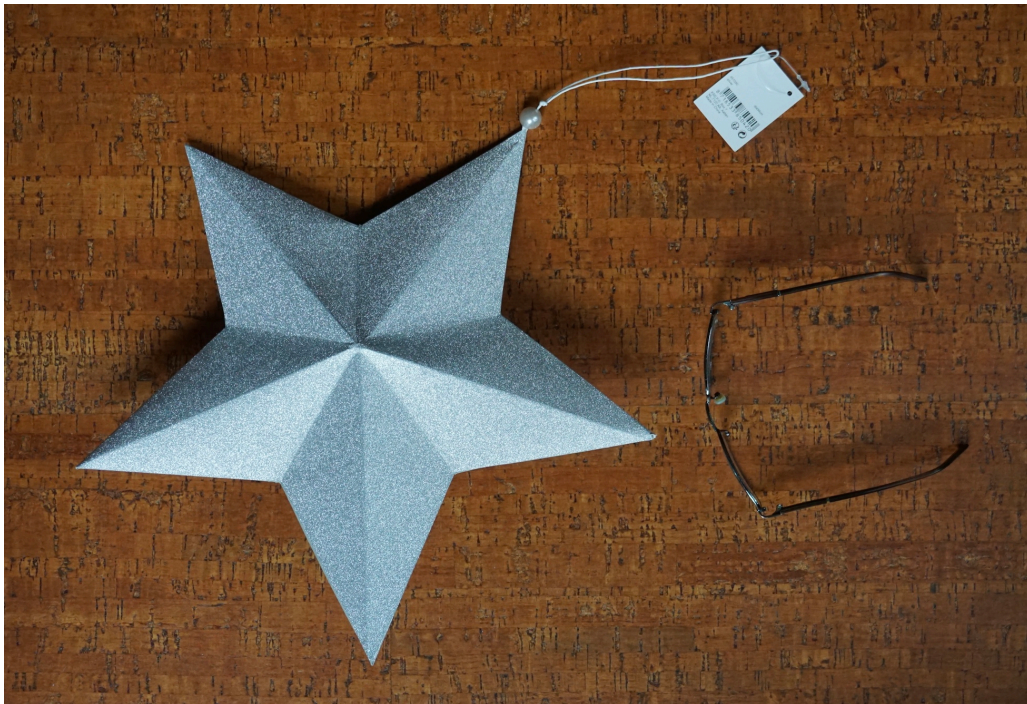


Left normal, right darkened.

If the picture is a fake, the simplest way to get a stealthy-looking super modern craft in the sky, would be to take a small object and suspend it on a wire in front of the camera. But what object? I think the little knob on the right-hand side of the object is the key to the solution. It reminds of a ring or a pierced pearl that is part of an ornament or a medal, and through which a string can be entered. One such object that sprang to mind is a star that can be hung on a Christmas tree.

The latter is an interesting candidate, not only because it has such a ring or pearl at the end of one of its points, but also because there are several Christmas stars for sale that have silver glitter on them. That rough texture combined with the high reflectivity of the silver particles causes incident skylight to scatter in different directions, giving the surface a bright and at the same time diffuse appearance. Placing such an object in a uniformly lit sky will make it look as if it is further away from the camera than it actually is.

The day after David sent us the news of the recovered print, I ordered such a star from a website. Price, shipment included: 15.34 euro. It arrived here on August 17th. The five-pointed star measures 34 cm in diameter and is about 6 cm thick in its center. It is made of cardboard. Here's a picture of the ornament (I placed my spectacles beside it as to give a quick idea of its size):



On the next page are three pictures taken with different ISO's that show how the star looks when suspended horizontally on a fishing line that I attached to the curtain track in front of my (closed) window. Note how the diffuse reflection from the silver glitters in the paint renders the 'arms' of the star almost invisible when photographed from the right angle. Note also that, while the star is at exactly the same distance from the camera as the leaves of the Monstera plant on the right, the two brighter shots give the impression that the star is farther away than the leaves (unfortunately, the pearl is on the wrong side in the over-exposed shot on the right).



It is my impression that the edges of the ‘UFO’ in the Calvin photo and those of the grass-like leaves or pine-tree needles in the bottom left corner are both imaged equally sharp. The same goes for the set-up above: the edges of the star appear equally sharp as the leaves in the bottom right corner, which is only logical because they are at more or less the same distance.

Now remember that the star in these pictures was suspended inside my living room, and therefore didn’t receive much light from above. Ideally, I would have to take this experiment to a more suitable location outside. The pearl is also a bit of a problem as its weight pulls the star down into an oblique position. You would need more strings to get the star nicely horizontal (I attached it to only one string from the center upward), or you could suspend the model from a point a bit closer to where the pearl or ring is. Placing the star on two parallel horizontal strings would arrange that, too, but the simplest way to get it horizontal would be to rotate the camera a little. Although the outcome is not bad, I think a smaller star with a rougher texture, like the ones in the three images below, will give a result nearly identical to what the Calvin photo shows.



Images gleaned from ebay.com, shutterstock.com and grandado.com.

Of special interest is that the stars depicted in these website images have white (damaged?) areas and black specks on them, not unlike the colour variations that can be seen on the surface of the Calvin

UFO. Unfortunately, I couldn't find a site where I can purchase these smaller stars, probably because it's mid-August with Christmas still a couple of months away.

But what about the Harrier jet? Did it just happen to fly by when the young men were taking the pictures? That seems unlikely. Also, considering that, according to the RAF, there was "no record of Harriers operating in location at stated time/date," and that, apparently, no one else living in the area heard the engines' roaring sound, looked up and saw a "100ft" tall otherworldly-looking craft hovering motionless in the sky for "10 minutes", I'm guessing that the plane was a small model too. Plenty of those for sale in the UK. Here's one example (scale is 1/144, price: 25 euro):

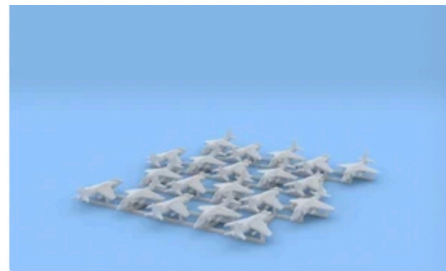


<https://ap.lc/XqTYh>

They also come smaller (scale 1/600) and cheaper (\$ 12.58 each or \$ 22.10 for a set of twenty):



Hawker Siddeley Harrier ...
\$12.58 by wwwitalik



Harrier 20x (1/600)
\$22.10 by jasolo

In summary, I think the two young men went up that hill with the sole intention of fabricating a series of UFO shots. To accomplish this, they took with them a model UFO (possibly a Christmas tree star), a miniature Harrier aircraft, a roll of fishing line and a fishing rod. Upon arrival on the hill, they searched for a location with a vast open sky on the one side and a group of trees with horizontally stretched branches on the other, which is exactly what we see in the pictures taken by Giles Stevens at the presumed location where the shots were taken (you can't have a better support to suspend a model from than the leftmost tree in the screenshot you will find on the next page). Having unpacked their stuff, the men used the fishing line to suspend the model UFO from a branch of one of the trees. The miniature Harrier was attached to the end of the fishing rod, and while one of the men moved the small Harrier around the 'saucer', his companion snapped the pictures. If the miniature Harrier were in motion and close to the camera, that would also explain why it turned up more blurred in the pictures than the 'craft' itself.



<https://ap.lc/1Y0Yz>

We know it was the *Daily Record* who passed the photos to the RAF/MoD, not the ‘witnesses.’ Learning afterwards (via Nick Pope, then Dave) that there was so much commotion about their pictures in such high echelons, the pranksters may have realized that the joke got out of hand and that there was no going back anymore. In many aspects, the Calvine case seems to be a copycat of what happened that very same year with the iconic Petit-Rechain slide. In that case, too, we had a ‘UFO’ dangling from a tree that fooled high-ranked military officers and photo experts worldwide (for a summary of that story, see <https://ap.lc/dt9wF> or <https://ap.lc/btNM4> for a Dutch version).

The above is nothing but a mix of educated guesses and intuition. No hard evidence, but then again, it is not up to the skeptics to prove that something did not happen at a certain time and place.

Wim van Utrecht

(Initial version: August 18, 2022 / adapted version: December 21, 2022)

Second Attempt

While spending the first week of the new year in a holiday cottage in Normandy, France, I took the opportunity to experiment further with the idea that the object in the surfaced Calvine photo is a Christmas star suspended from a tree branch. The present text summarizes the results of these new experiments.

But first something that needs to be corrected.

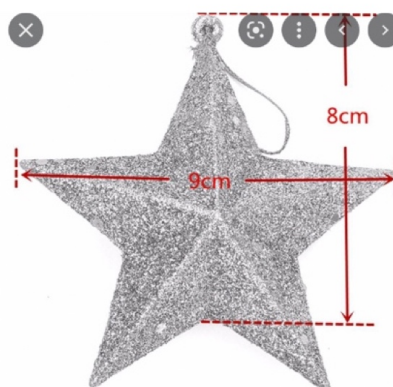
In my previous piece (an adapted version of which can be found at <https://ap.lc/zZ8Vm>), I wrote that the clouds in the Calvin photo appear to be illuminated from above, and that the scenery “does not look like a typical cloudscape you would expect to see around sunset.” That was dead wrong. In fact, more the opposite is true: even when there’s a cloud-filled sky with the sun low on or even below the horizon, the upper parts of the clouds may still receive light from a clear sky overhead, much like in the comparison photos below. In short, there is no reason to believe that the Calvin photo was not taken on or around sunset. My thanks to Manuel Borraz Aymerich for questioning that earlier statement.



Left: darkened image of the Calvin UFO shot.
Center and right: similar cloudscape photographed by the author respectively 6 minutes before and 11 minutes after sunset on January 13, 2023.

Having waited till a couple of days before Christmas, it was easier this time to find what I was looking for. The star ornament I ended up buying is of a smaller size than the one I used for my first experiment (22 cm instead of 34 cm in diameter). It’s less thick, and therefore no longer a perfect match with the proportions of the Calvin UFO. On the other hand, its overall texture is a bit rougher and more similar to what the Scottish photo shows. Like the previous star, it is five-pointed and has glitter glued to its surface. The glitter particles come off easily, revealing lighter colored areas where the star is handled most (plastic this time, not cardboard). The new star has no pearl or ring to suspend it from, but has a hollow tubular extension instead. This enables one to plant the star on top of a Christmas tree. Unfortunately, the tubular extension was too thick to act as the ‘fin’ that can be seen in the Calvin photo. I cut away a part of the tube and attached the pearl from the earlier model to one of the points of the new star.

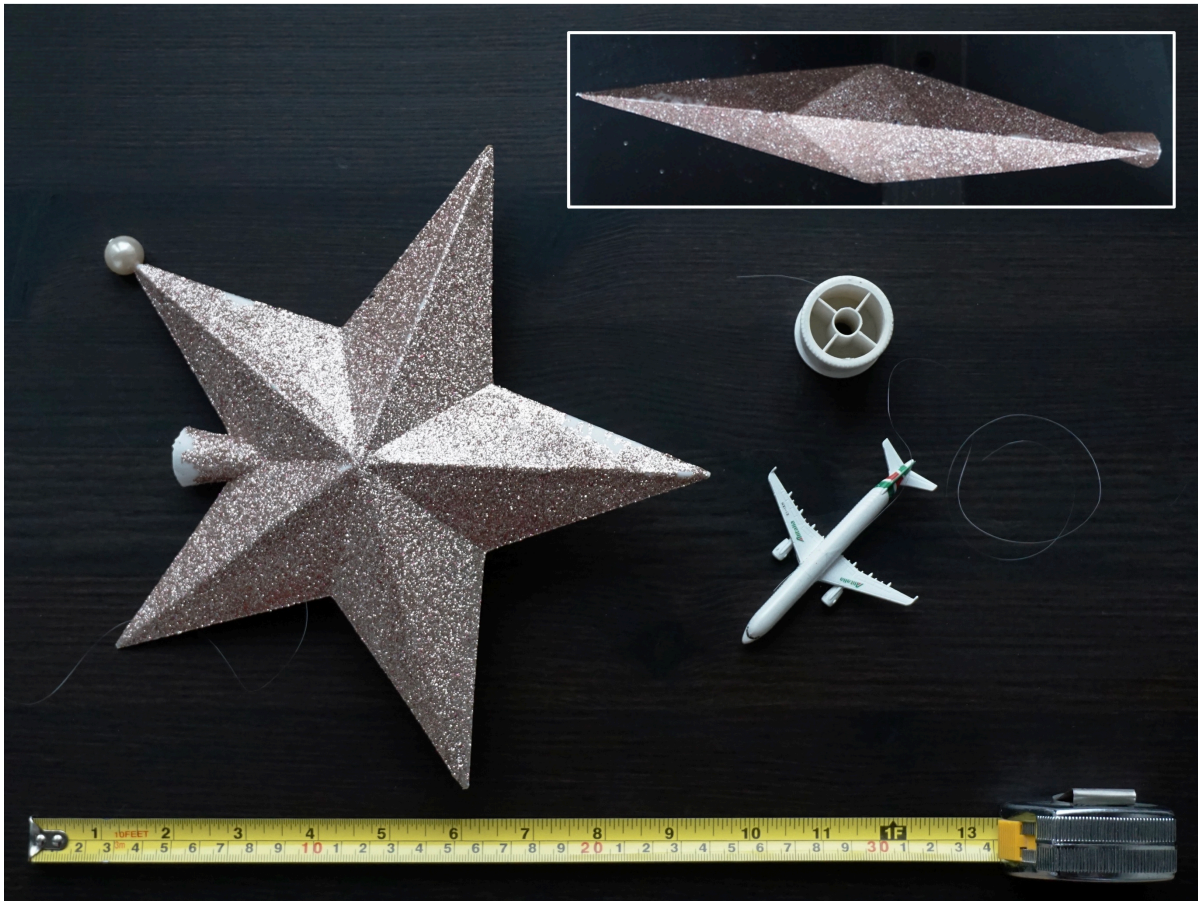
Ideally, I should have used this ornament:



grandado.com

It's smaller, rougher and has a thick ring-like extension of the same texture. But I'm getting the impression that this older ornament is no longer for sale.

Since there was no time to order a miniature Harrier plane, I purchased the first model airplane that was available in the closest model shop: an Alitalia Airbus A321 diecast 1:500 scale model measuring 8.7 cm in length (mark: Herpa). Below is a picture of the star and plane I used. Also on the table is the bobbin with fishing line that served to suspend the models. The insert shows a side view of the star.



This time I took the experiment outdoors, suspended the models from a tree in the garden of the cottage, and took a total of 23 pictures. Below are the two best shots I obtained. The images (Photo 1 and Photo 2) were taken on January 5 at 16:18 and 15:48 CET, respectively.



Photo 1 (original)



Same picture, cropped.



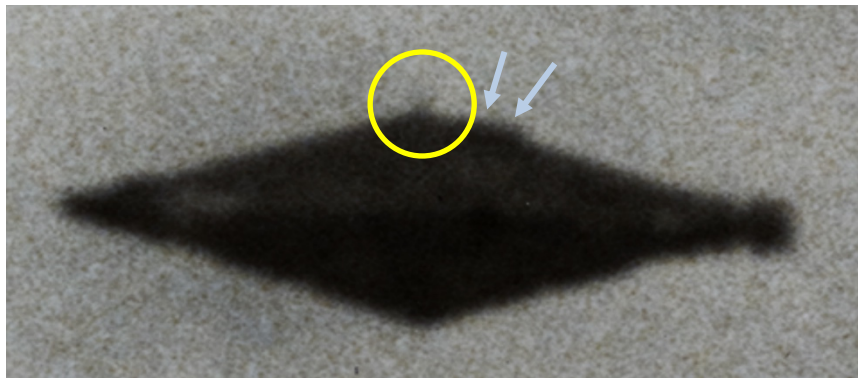
Photo 2 again, now cropped, 10° rotated and with the distracting utility pole digitally erased.

Not too bad, but not as easy to accomplish as I had anticipated. With a SW wind blowing at 19 km/h (10 knots), the model was constantly rocking to and fro, making it difficult to capture it in a horizontal position. Consequently, I had to rotate this image some 10 degrees to get the feel of the original.

It is interesting to note in this regard that the handwritten summary of the Calvine incident (a one-page document which rests in the MoD files—see <https://ap.lc/rloaZ>) states that on August 4, 1990, the wind was blowing from the W to SW at speeds of 10 to 15 knots. The latter corresponds to a gentle to moderate breeze, strong enough to make small tree branches move. So, the wind may have been a bit of a problem for a hoaxer at Struan Point as well, especially if a lightweight plastic or cardboard star was used (and assuming, of course, that the date is right). Using a thicker branch would have partly solved that problem.

The bottom half of the star in my pictures is a bit dark as well, but I think that would have looked better if more light had come from the area where I was taking my pictures (a dark, muddy place surrounded by big trees). I will keep all these points in mind in case there is a follow up. But no promises there.

One more thing: there is some fluffy stuff visible on top of the Calvine UFO. I encircled it with yellow in this darkened version:



One could speculate that we are looking at a bundle of knotted strings or at tape used to attach the string(s) to the top of the model. Perhaps a piece of tape that got lifted up by the weight of the model¹. There is also that elevated part on the right-hand side (blue arrows). This could be one of the arms of the star pointing away from the camera, or it could be more tape used to hold the strings in place.

Wim van Utrecht
(January 2023)

¹ I myself attached the fishing line to the model with the help of a sewing needle which I inserted into the center of the star.