

A sky suddenly full of saucers



Boise businessman Kenneth Arnold was flying lazy circles around Mount Rainier on June 24, 1947, hoping to sight the wreckage of a light plane believed to have crashed on the snowy slopes the previous winter.

Suddenly he saw what appeared to be nine shiny objects that flew flat, sideways and upside down at "fantastic speeds" he estimated at about 1,700 mph. They were circular, he would say later, and the centers pulsed like fireflies.

When he landed in Pendleton, Ore., Arnold told his story to a United Press reporter, describing the objects as flying erratically "like speedboats on rough water, or as if you skipped a saucer on water." From Arnold's words, the reporter coined the expression "flying saucers."

(In later years, Arnold said the objects were "more like a crescent or half-moon with a slight polliwog tail and a pulsating-type thing in the center" he presumed was their power unit.)

Newspapers containing Arnold's report hardly had hit Pacific Northwest porches when UFO sightings from Tukwila to White Salmon, from Woodland to Bellingham were reported.

A state official in Olympia saw bright objects in the sky "going like the devil." A mother and her young son in Bremerton saw two

objects, "very shiny, that seemed to be fluttering in the wind." Two Tacoma patrolmen chased "a red-and-silver colored fleet of flying saucers."

In the next 25 years, according to a Gallup Poll, millions of people around the world would claim to have sighted UFOs, some as pulsating discs, others as cigar-shaped devices with flashing lights. Fifty-one percent of the American public would say they believe UFOs exist.

On the 36th anniversary of his sighting, the one-time University of Minnesota football player and unsuccessful Republican candidate for lieutenant governor and congress in Idaho, told The Seattle Times he was tired of having UFO-sighters treated as if they had lost their senses.

Since his original sighting, he said, he had seen UFOs seven more times. Twice he took in-flight movies of them. Each time, he said, he noted similarities: a center spot in the UFOs that gave off pulsations, "as if it were alive;" the incredible speeds (1,000 miles an hour or more), and the swift and erratic maneuverings.

But the most remarkable thing about the UFOS he saw, Arnold said, was their apparent ability to change density at will, like jellyfish in the sea. While

photographing them over Lassen Peak, he said, "a pine tree on the ground shows right through one of them." And yet, he added, moments later they all appeared to have solidified.

Finally, Arnold said, all the flying saucers he saw were in groups — the largest, 23 or 24 in a string, resembled a flight of birds. Unlike regular military aircraft formations, the "leader" always was higher and the others followed in a descending pattern.

Arnold never claimed to have seen any little men on the UFOs — "I leave that to others." Nor did he believe that he was the first to sight them, saying they were mentioned in the Bible (Ezekiel) and that the logs of English sea captains hundreds of years ago contained detailed notations and even drawings of UFOs.

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SCOTT PARKER via COUD—I