

Echoing Arnold

by Martin Kottmeyer
Arnold Reveals Secret Weapons,
Bomber Surpassing All Others

The story was page one. The paper carrying it, the New York Times. UFO buffs are yawning already. Talk about old news. We have all long known that Arnold thought his flying saucers were secret weapons. It's in his official report to the Air Force after all. He also mentioned it in his book and all later accounts. Okay, maybe there are a few people who need to be brought up to speed that Arnold didn't initially have any thoughts about there being extraterrestrial vessels, but most of us don't care to be bored with travelling this road again.

Let's finish the introduction, however. The date of this issue of the Times is Aug. 18, 1945. That's no misprint; this isn't 1947. This headline appeared almost two years before Arnold's report and the great saucer flap. And the Arnold in the headline isn't referring to Kenneth Arnold; it's referring to General H.H. Arnold, the head of the Army Air Forces.

The Times story tells how the general has disclosed that new weapons were on the drawing board which were so terrible that there may not be any more wars. These included a monster bomber outmoding B-29s and "robot, jet-propelled atomic bombs which will be guided by television and find their targets by radar." Refinements of V-2 and V-1 technology developed by the Nazis during the war would be able to target guided missiles within a square mile or less of any part of the world. There also would be improved atomic bombs, "destructive beyond the wildest nightmares of the imagination." Another war and the use of these scientific weapons would mean the destruction of civilization. "These Buck Rogers things I'm talking about are not so Buck Rogerish as you might think," he warned.

Gen. Arnold's concerns were given even wider exposure in the Nov. 19, 1945, issue of Life magazine. The article was titled, "The 36 Hour War: Arnold Report Hints at the Catastrophe of the Next Great Conflict." Illustrations luridly showed Washington, D.C. being annihilated in an atomic bombardment, a shower of rockets descending on other key U.S. cities, plans for an underground A-bomb factory, and a depiction of New York's Fifth Avenue in ruins. The text tells readers it is better to use bombs for peace now rather than for war later. The destruction would be swift and terrible.

Henry Harley "Hap" Arnold (1886-1950) was a greatly respected man. He was largely responsible for the Army Air Forces becoming a separate branch of the military. He racked up more flying time than any other pilot of his time and held many records and awards. His knowledge of aviation was unequalled, and a story is told that when a team of designers assured him a 500-mile-per-hour plane was an impossibility, he proceeded to show them exactly how to do it. "He couldn't get another argument out of those designers today if he ordered a 5000 mile per hour ship." And, indeed, in his final report he was predicting that within 30 years 3,000-miles-per-hour rocket bombs would be able to be launched from spaceships operating outside the earth's atmosphere. (McGraw Hill Encyclopedia of World Biography)

Gen. Arnold's talk of great speeds is intriguing inasmuch as Kenneth Arnold's secret weapons were newsworthy precisely because of their unbelievable speeds. We can also add that Kenneth Arnold expressed concern that the aircraft he saw might be "used as an instrument of destruction in combination with our atomic bomb" with effects that could "destroy life on our planet." I think it is fair to suggest that the odds that one Arnold makes page one for predicting such a thing are remote enough to strain the use of the word "coincidence" here. But how do we explain it?

It would be easy to slip into a mystical mode. The first temptation would be to bring back John Keel's theory of the reflexive nature of the UFO phenomenon. As soon as an idea is formed, the phenomenon creates experiences to reinforce the belief. This, however, seems to be stretching things - in part because "Hap" Arnold wasn't theorizing about UFOs or spirits and so seems outside the range of application Keel intended, but mainly because it smacks of animism.

A second temptation would be to wonder if Jerry ("The Panicky Guy") Kroth's theory of psychohistorical oracles might apply here. (See Martin Kottmeyer's review of Kroth's book, *Omens and Oracles: Collective Psychology in the Nuclear Age*, in the Sept. 1994 issue of *The Reall News*.) "Hap's" prediction was a numinous big dream foreshadowing the flying saucer mystery, one of this century's great events. Such a notion seems strangely recursive. As soon as Kenneth Arnold's report made news, a Texas preacher proclaimed it a harbinger of doomsday and said he was getting his flock ready for the end of the world. Saucer entities have persistently acted as oracles for future events. An oracle heralding oracles seems a pit pointless. They should be reserved for predicting wars, famines, kings and such. And to consider this an oracle makes a fool of it; "Hap's" prediction comes vaguely true, but makes the literal prediction false and cry-wolf annoying in the near term assessment.

A more rational notion would be to try to interpret the two Arnold reports as repetition phenomena associated with a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), only on a collective level rather than at the individual level. The causal nexus is formed around the trauma of Hiroshima. This involved a weapon also created in secret by our government. It was once only Buck Rogers stuff, but now was terrifying reality and responsible for the deaths of whole cities at a time. It is one of the criteria of PTSD that there is a re-experiencing of the trauma in one of several ways, such as recurrent or distressing dreams, a sense of reliving it, or psychological reactivity to cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the trauma. That might work.

One of the fundamental diagnostic criteria of PTSD is a numbing of general responsiveness. This was noticed by certain observers. David Lang in a 1946 *New Yorker* piece spoke of people simply refusing to think about the atomic threat. Lewis Mumford described a glassy calm and blotting out of reality which if had happened in a single individual would demand psychiatric treatment. Franz Alexander spoke of a deadening psychic effect associated with the period. (Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Pantheon, 1985, chapter 23.)

Another sign of PTSD is sometimes a sense of a foreshortened future. This is present in the apocalyptic nature of both Arnolds' speculations, though it needs to be said that this is not so irrational in their cases. It is, however, fair to add that more irrational world destruction fantasies were widely prevalent in the era. Nearly every UFOlogist and contactee of the Fifties suspected some kind of cataclysm was impending. Many were not directly concerned with nuclear war but with such things as natural disasters on an Atlantean scale.

Then there is the matter of an exaggerated startle response. One could point out that Kenneth Arnold's sighting was triggered by his reaction to a flash of light. In his report, he says, "It startled me as I thought I was too close to some other aircraft. I looked every place in the sky and couldn't find where the reflection had come from until I looked to the left and north of Mount Rainier ..." There he found some rapidly travelling objects which were responsible for the flash of light. It would be easy to interpret the whole 1947 saucer flap as a collective equivalent of a startle response. People everywhere were overreacting to what were usually just flocks of birds and thinking they were secret superplanes. The Fifties also saw the Seattle Windshield Pitting Epidemic which sociologists noted was an overreaction to normal windshield damage caused by people looking at their windshields suddenly instead of through them.

There are other PTSD signs or symptoms for which we find no evidence, such as sleep difficulties and impaired social functioning. These are not absolutely essential diagnostically, nor are they things we can be sure people would have looked for or volunteered as relevant for everyone to know.

Though these factors provide a reasonably firm context for our Arnolds being the collective equivalent of repetitive nightmares or flashbacks, there is an obvious objection. "Hap" Arnold and Kenneth Arnold were real people, not hallucinatory phantoms or imaginal props. How can a population of PTSD sufferers make a real Arnold its numinal star? How specifically is Kenneth Arnold forced into being the person to experience "Hap's" super-plane nightmare and how does he end up on page one? The questions seem unanswerable and the objection fatal to the idea.

The next idea would be that Kenneth Arnold was fascinated to learn at some point that he had a celebrity namesake heading up military aviation and identified with him. He fixated on "Hap's" technological dreams and his apocalyptic fears, but they never found expression until 1947 when his near-collision experience provided the right setting. These beliefs skewed his interpretation of the sighting to such an extent as to border on a hallucinatory confirmation of derived

expectations.

The problem with this idea is that it does not jive with the actual sequence of events reported by Arnold. During the actual experience, Arnold thought he was just watching an unusual jet plane that lacked a tail and made unusual dipping maneuvers. In the report, he states, "Their speed at the time did not impress me particularly, because I knew our army and air forces had planes that went very fast." It was only after doing some calculations afterwards that the impossible nature of the speed implicit in his observations arose. While Arnold explicitly thought the aircraft he saw were unconventional, he attributes the idea of there being a jet or rocket-propelled ship in the process of being tested by our government or a foreign government to an Army Air Force pilot stationed in Pendleton, Oregon. Additionally, if the experience was hallucinatory, why imagine the objects as flying with dipping motions and being in a formation made up of nine objects? The expectation would be for either level or parabolic flight and the object flying alone.

One might try to get around some of the difficulties by thinking the Pendleton pilot's speculation was triggered by Arnold's name. The speed calculations, however, couldn't be influenced this way, and that, after all, was the factor that made the story page one. Alternatively, one might hypothesize that people were generally fixated on the idea of superplanes, but only Arnold got on page one because of the coincidence that his name was an echo of "Hap's." Nobody, however, commented on the coincidence. As for there being a pool of less interesting superplane tales prior to Arnold's, there is no evidence for it, and newsmen would have reported rumors like that, with or without the Arnold name.

Somehow, all this skepticism leads us into a cul-de-sac. We are left with no acceptable explanation for why our two Arnolds are echoing each other. There seems to be no satisfactory causal mechanism. That apocalyptic, super-secret superplanes should arise in the post-Hiroshima cultural environment as a repetitive anxiety may be a perfectly natural expectation. But to have two Arnolds getting page one treatment for different versions of the same concern has no clear meaning. It's a very weird coincidence, but maybe that is all it is. If you've got a better explanation, let's hear it.

[Martin Kottmeyer is a frequent contributor to The REALL News.]

From the Editor

Bob Ladendorf

Because August is the 50th anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bombs, we're featuring this month another article by prolific writer Martin Kottmeyer, a frequent contributor to The REALL News. His article deals with the legacy of the bombings in Japan and the subsequent predictions of future "superweapons" in relation to ... UFOs! Is it real or is it a coincidence? Check out "Echoing Arnold."

Of special interest to our readers is the recent connection of a local psychic with the search for the body of a murdered boy in upstate Illinois. Not only do we plan to discuss the connection in our August meeting, but also a more in-depth look into the matter will be featured in an upcoming newsletter.

I hope you enjoy the issue and, as always, I look forward to hearing from you.

/s/ Bob Ladendorf

From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

For the past couple of months, I've related how my busy schedule has interfered with the time I had to write and do other things for REALL. This month, it was exactly the opposite. With "psychic" (or, as she now calls herself, "parapsychologist") Greta Alexander grabbing up free air time on WICS and WCIA after her predictions supposedly led police to a missing boy's body up in Will County, I've been pretty busy trying to do what I can to get the facts out. On the night it happened, my wife thought I had gone nuts. I was pacing around the house, calling people, skimming books, and putting together good quotes. The reason? A reporter from the State Journal-Register called me for comments about

Greta's claims.

As regular readers of The REALL News know, one of our main purposes is to disseminate information to our members, the public at large, and the media. Up until now, we have had to do this in a reactive mode: when a newspaper prints a story without getting all the facts straight, we write to them; when WICS airs a well-known urban legend as if it were true, I send them E-mail with the correct information (and they ignore it). This was the first time a reporter has called us while working on a controversial story, and we had to make sure we had good information to give them. The result was a nice quote from both myself and another REALL Board Member, Professor Steve Egger. In fact, the article came out so well that somebody sent a letter to the editor complaining about it being too skeptical!

The next day, REALL Patron Member Bob Smet called WMAY radio to complain about their one-sided coverage of the Greta story, and WMAY took him up on his suggestion that they call me for more information. That evening's news broadcast had a story on it focusing on the skeptical aspects and again quoting me. Apparently, they continued to air portions of my interview through the weekend.

Since this is a hot topic, it will also be the focus of our September meeting this Tuesday, Sept. 5, at the Lincoln Library. Bruce Walstad appeared on a Chicago cable call-in discussion show and discussed this issue -- Greta called in and said some very surprising and interesting things; we'll feature that video as part of the overall discussion. I'll also discuss some of Greta's earlier adventures as skeptically investigated in a chapter of the book *Psychic Sleuths*.

Illinois Science Teachers Association

Don't forget about the upcoming Illinois Science Teachers Association convention coming up at the end of this month! I need people to help man the booth, and we need to send in names so we can have badges waiting, so please let me know as soon as possible if you can make it!

/s/ David Bloomberg

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

The biggest news on the media front is the Greta Alexander claims (see "From the Chairman"). I will go out on a limb and predict that there will be a longer article on that particular case and other similar ones in an upcoming issue, so I won't go into it any further here.

The Other Side of Skepticism

As you may recall from the May issue of this newsletter, the former host of NBC's half-hour talk show, *The Other Side*, left because he was tired of the sleaze on the show. I also mentioned then that if the show followed him and went off the air, it would restore some of my faith in the general public. Well, my faith remains in the basement, I'm afraid.

The show is going on, with a new, even less skeptical host. TV Guide's Couch Critic, Jeff Jarvis, reviewed the show in the August 19 issue, and he called it like he saw it: "TV's latest low." He also pointed out how "pathetic and cruel" one show was in which a supposed psychic was passing along messages to a mother from her dead daughter.

I especially liked his tone of skepticism - so often missing in many journalists these days - as he points out that *The Other Side* has no other side; the show is for True Believers only. One quote that bears repeating: "It's amazing enough that they can fill a week with these eccentrics. But it's even more amazing that they could find a host gullible enough to nod at all the claptrap..."

Alternative to Health

Dateline NBC once again tackled the issue of alternative medicine, this time (8/22) looking at a story which isn't exactly new, but is important nonetheless.

Several years back, L-tryptophan hit the market as an alternative "health food." Because it was labeled as such, it didn't

have to go through the FDA testing process necessary for drugs, and was simply shipped into stores for people to buy. It was billed as a wonder product, one that could supposedly cure all sorts of problems.

Unfortunately, at least one company's version of this "health food" turned out to be a killer. Over 5,000 people have become ill, and at least 36 have died because their brand of L-tryptophan apparently contained an impurity which caused their immune systems to turn on the body.

This is a health food?

Dateline pointed out that the FDA still doesn't need to approve these "supplements," and, in fact, they must prove it unsafe in order to get it removed. Even if it has no effect at all, the company can still market it and make money off of people who wrongly assume that if a product is on the shelves, it must be OK and the claims must be true. In the worst case, we'll have another L-tryptophan on our hands sooner or later.

Skip This if You're Squeamish

You can't say I didn't warn you - skip this portion if you get easily grossed-out.

Newsweek (8/21) reports that there is a new alternative medicine trend: people drinking their own urine.

I know what you're thinking: YUCK! That's my thought too. But Vedanta Saraswati, a London yoga teacher, says that we're just being silly. "Westerners in general are awfully funny about things that come out of orifices," he said. Yeah. Silly me. I happen to agree with what Dr. Marc Micozzi was quoted as saying: "If the body is trying to eliminate something from the system, that would be a sign that it's not a good idea to ingest it."

Once again, I say: YUCK!

Masthead Information

Electronic Version

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land (REALL) is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL not not reject paranormal claims on a priori grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Membership information is provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

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