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## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### How We Were Saved From Flying Speedboats

From: **UFO UpDates - Toronto** <updates@globalserve.net>  
Date: Sat, 17 May 1997 12:35:35 -0400  
Fwd Date: Sat, 17 May 1997 12:35:35 -0400  
Subject: How We Were Saved From Flying Speedboats

The Toronto Star  
Saturday, May 17, 1997

Arts Section  
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How we were saved from flying speedboats

Late afternoon, June 24, 1947. At the airport in Pendleton, Oregon, Kenneth Arnold was struggling to find the words to describe to reporters what he'd seen flying "very rapidly" in the direction of Mount Rainier in Washington a couple of hours earlier.

The 32-year-old rescue pilot and businessman had been using his single-engine plane in an effort to find a downed U.S. Marine transport plane when he saw what he described as a "chain of nine peculiar looking aircraft."

Striking out after what he first assumed were jests, he quickly lost the crescent-shaped objects as they zoomed away in formation at a speed the pilot calculated at 1,656 mph.

Whatever they were, he decided they weren't airplanes.

The reporters, who'd been alerted to the incident after Arnold had refueled a couple of hours earlier in Yakima, Washington, traded furtive glances. They pressed the young man, by all accounts a community pillar, to describe exactly what he'd seen.

Struggling for an image, Arnold first likened the objects to speedboats on water, then to the swooping tail of a Chinese kite. The scribes still weren't getting the picture. Then Arnold said it: "They flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water."

Bingo. Before running out to file, Bill Bequette scribbled two words that would effectively launch (so to speak) one of the more persistent and perplexing pop culture phenomena of the postwar century. According to the reporter, Arnold had seen "flying saucers".

Nothing new about people seeing high strangeness in the wild blue yonder, of course. In the anxiously atomic year of 1946, unsettling reports began appearing in Scandinavian newspapers about an outbreak of sightings of rocket-like objects "spook

bombs" -- flaming across the sky, occasionally crashing spectacularly in lakes.

During the war, pilots from all sides had reported mysterious balls of light -- nicknamed 'Foo Fighters' after a comic-strip gag --- that would pursue and dart around planes in flight.

In the last years of the 19th century, when the science-fiction writings of Jules Verne triggered a worldwide explosion of interplanetary-themed dime novels, people reported seeing giant illuminated, cigar-shaped airships in the skies.

As one travels across time and cultures, the objects reported my change, but their airborne status remains: the 'floating cities' of the early 19th century, the flying dragons of the Middle Ages, the swooping 'silver shields' that attacked Alexander the Great in 329 B.C., the deadly flying 'Vimanas' described in an Indian text written in 5th century B.C.

For the Romans, they were 'flying chariots' and for the ancient Chinese 'flying carts'. For Ezekiel, the Kenneth Arnold of the Old Testament, it was a "wheel in the middle of a wheel" that fired lightning bolts during ascent.

Since 1947, thanks to Bequette's economical turn of phrase, it has been flying saucers. Within months after the Arnold affair, UFO sightings (ahem) skyrocketed across the continent, but people weren't seeing missiles, cigars or luminous gremlins much any more. They saw saucers.

Indeed, less than a month after Arnold landed in Pendleton, when the single-most controversial incident in UFO lore happened -- the allegedly hushed-up crash-landing of an extraterrestrial craft near the airbase at Roswell, N.M. -- the banner headline in The Roswell Daily Record confirmed the entry of a new fixture to the popular lexicon. It read: "RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch Near Roswell Region."

By the early 1950s, flying saucers were, like cars and teenagers, everywhere -- if not hovering silently above the desert highway somewhere, then on magazine and paperback covers, in comic books and cartoons and, of course, at the movies: 'It Came From Outer Space', 'Earth Vs. The Flying Saucers', 'It Conquered The World', 'The Day The Earth Stood Still', 'I Married A Monster From Outer Space', 'Invaders From Mars'.

By the time Eisenhower became president, aliens were plummeting from the heavens like prairie hailstones, their favoured method of conveyance being the flying saucer.

Fifty years after the Arnold incident, it still is and it makes one marvel at the pure, sublime serendipity of the thing.

Had those reporters not pressed the poor pilot for a more evocative image, we might have endured a half-century of attack by flying speedboats.

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