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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Kenneth Arnold's testimony

From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>
Date: Thu, 13 Nov 1997 20:49:42 -0500
Fwd Date: Fri, 14 Nov 1997 09:16:26 -0500
Subject: Re: Kenneth Arnold's testimony

Regarding...

>From: Mark Cashman <mcashman@ix.netcom.com>
>Subject: re: UFO UpDate: Re: Kenneth Arnold's testimony
>Date: Tue, 11 Nov 1997 10:33:22 -0800

Mark,

>When this "explanation" by Kottmeyer was brought to my attention, I
>initially considered writing something about it. Then I decided it
>was a waste of time, since the "explanation" was as ludicrous as
>something Donald Menzel would have put forth.

>But, OK, here it is, lying on the table, so I'll offer a few
>comments:

>1) When was the last time you noticed a specular reflection from a
>goose or a swan - especially when said goose or swan was backed
>by either clear sky or a snowfield?

As a member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, I do indulge in occasional bird watching and have observed both geese and swans on many occasions. Although I've never seen either qualify as reflective, during the summer I did notice some bright objects circling in the sky a mile or so from my house. Having set off the invasion siren, put on my tin hat and double checked through binoculars, it was discovered that the source was some black-headed gulls, which just happened to be catching the sunlight.

It fooled me...

I'm sure it can be quantified that, under certain conditions, many species of birds could be described as reflective.

I'll look into this further, I know some folks in the Washington area who could offer an informed opinion on a couple of points here.

We might never prove what Kenneth Arnold actually witnessed, but we can maybe prove that some possibilities are not in fact a "no way".

>2) When was the last time a goose or swan in flight gave the
>impression of being 20 times longer than thick?

If I may quote from Bruce Maccabee's paper, "The Complete

Sighting Report of Kenneth Arnold, with Comments and Analysis":

"His drawing suggests that the objects were nearly circular overall. He wrote on the sketch that "they seemed longer than wide, their thickness was about 1/20th of their width." His suggestion that their width (or length) was about twenty times greater than their thickness may be an exaggeration. The sketch he drew of how they appeared "on edge" has the dimensions 4 mm wide by 45 mm long (approx.) which suggests a ratio closer to 1/11. (It is typical for people to overestimate length to width ratios.)"

Bruce merely pointing out that Arnold's estimates are subjective.

Also perhaps now worth mentioning Bruce's further observations:

"These statements about how they flew with respect to the mountain peaks are very important because they provide information on the distance from Mr. Arnold. These mountain peaks lie along a wide north-south line extending southward from Mt. Rainier to Mt. Adams. These peaks were about 20 miles east of Arnold at the time. These statements also provide the altitude of the objects. To Arnold they appeared to be approximately at his altitude because they seemed to be "pretty much on the horizon to me." Since he was flying at 9,200 ft, this implies that they were close to that altitude. (Arnold actually stated his letter that they were at 9,500 ft.) However, the mountain peaks south of Rainier generally are 5,000 to 7,000 ft high, with the higher ones being farther away (more to the east) from Arnold. Hence his statement that there were higher peaks on the far side of the pathway indicates that the objects were definitely lower than about 7,000 ft. Furthermore, he stated that they went behind some (or at least one) of the lower, closer peaks. Geological survey maps show that mountain peaks which the objects could have disappeared behind have altitudes of 5,000 to 6,000 ft. Hence it appears that they were lower than 6,000 ft and that Arnold overestimated their altitude".

Again, Arnold's estimates are shown to be subjective and by reference to the survey maps, apparently grossly inaccurate.

Mistaking the altitude of the objects by some 4000 feet, doesn't inspire confidence in any of Arnold's other observations or estimations.

This also of course means the altitude of the objects would not preclude geese as a conceivable explanation.

>3) The shape of the objects as shown in the original drawing >must be regarded as definitive.

Can we apply this rationale to Roswell? :)

>A description can only go so far in suggesting size, shape and >proportion, and a picture created immediately after the incident must >be considered more reliable than one created considerably later.

I would agree. It's certainly a principle which applies to witness testimony.

>The original drawing does not show something which looks like a swan >or goose, or like swan or goose wings, which are invariable held >straight to the side like aircraft wings.

That subsequent sketch has however sprouted wings. On the basis that Arnold apparently didn't initially wish to complicate the story by revealing one object was dissimilar, it's a different issue and maybe more admissible as evidence.

I would share considerable doubts about this sketch. For one thing, the detail shown surely wouldn't have been evident from the distance Arnold reports. The original outline sketches would be more in keeping with expected evidence.

>As Arnold points out: "Even though two minutes seems like a very >short time to one on the ground, in the air in two minutes time, a

>pilot can observe a great many things, and anything within his sight
>of vision probably as many as fifty or sixty times".

And apparently still make significant errors of judgement.

I would recommend reading Bruce's paper for some further insight
into Arnold's calculations.

Not that I'm suggesting for a moment Bruce argues in favour of
Arnold watching a flock of geese.

At present, that's not my argument either, I would simply like to
discuss whether there are grounds for accepting it as a possible
explanation.

James.
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