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## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### Re: Kenneth Arnold's testimony

From: Don Ledger <dledger@istar.ca>  
Date: Fri, 14 Nov 1997 16:53:54 +0100  
Fwd Date: Fri, 14 Nov 1997 14:39:43 -0500  
Subject: Re: Kenneth Arnold's testimony

> Date: Thu, 13 Nov 1997 20:49:42 -0500  
> From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>  
> Subject: UFO UpDate: Re: Kenneth Arnold's testimony  
> To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalseve.net>

> 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.

Hello James and Mark and List,

I'm sure that you are aware James that all waterfowl and seabirds  
have an oily protective coating on them which "waterproofs" their  
feathers. It gives the feathers a sheen if you will. I have on  
many occassions, while flying, seen ducks, geese and seagulls  
reflect sunlight. Particularly toward sundown with the sun at a  
low angle the bird in question will regflect in a really

beautiful fashion, taking on a golden hue. In most cases I was above the flights in question. They flicker because of wing motion, but I always recognized them as flights of geese or ducks. Segulls to my knowledge, fly in flocks but not in formation.

> 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."

There is a very important point to consider here which Maccabee seems to have missed and most pilot don't even know, though they should, because of the way they are trained. Pilots are trained to pick a spot on the windscreen or just above the nose of the aircraft and use that as a reference point to the horizon then trim the aircraft to that point. The nose might be slightly low in relation to the flightline with the wing slightly above this line so as to maintain angle of attack. If every pilot picked a point on the horizon and then flew to it they would eventually crash into the ground. Think about what Arnold said. The mountains (he would have meant peaks) were on the horizon, or background, the horizon being the background surface, a point probably thirty or forty miles behind the peaks. If you draw a line from his supposed altitude (remember this "altitude" because it comes up at the bottom of the next paragraph and I'll deal with it there) to the peaks and then to the horizon you are going to have a ramped line as opposed to a level line of sight. This is also considered by Maccabee in the paragraph following the one below. (See depressed angle)

> 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.

Pilots don't fly by survey maps, but VNC (Visual flight rules, Navigation, Charts) maps if you will. They are to scale, 1-500,000. In those days that was pretty much all that the private pilot flew by (no Loran C or GPS), using reference to the ground and I would say that Arnold was one hell of a fine pilot to find his way around in that maze of peaks and valleys using only maps. I flew over that area commercially only days ago at 40,000 feet and man that is a scary area to contemplate a forced landing. I have said this before, that Arnold would have known down to one or two miles where he was because not knowing and having limited fuel is a recipe for disaster. Grossly inaccurate don't wash here James.

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

I mentioned the ramp effect earlier, now I will tell you something else you might not be aware of. When Arnold took off from Chehalis, Washington he set his altimeter by bringing up the altitude of the airport he was departing. This would be the "station pressure" at that airport, and that airport only. You may have noticed from watching movies etc. that whenever a pilot calls into a tower or other attendanted locations that the persons on the ground always give the altimeter setting in inches of mercury. That is because the barometric pressure changes from locale to locale.

This is important, because Arnold was flying without a radio (despite what the movie 'UFO' says) and so was reading his altimeter near Mineral, Washington with a setting from Chehalis because he had no way of updating his altimeter.

Since Arnold took off in a relatively warm area in a valley at about 300-400 feet above sea level and then made his sighting at 45-50 miles away to the east and at altitude in a much cooler area, his altimeter could have been off by as much as a thousand feet or more. Arnold even said that his estimate of the objects altitude could have been out as much as 1,000 feet one way or the other. Factor in the possible faulty horizon, not flat but definitely mountainous and you would probably have a discrepancy in altitudes. You can't know if you don't have the data at hand.

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

My Canadian Airman's Information Publication -AIP- indicates that migrating Canada Geese have been encountered as high as 32,000 feet. (One wonders how do the little suckers breath way up there?)

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

<snipped>

> >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.

My guess is that birds as an explanation is way off the mark. At fifty miles, even if geese for example were mirror plated, their small size would make it extremely difficult to see them, and hardly enough to flash in the cabin if Arnold's Bellanca Cruiseaire. The size of 80 feet in diameter estimated by Maccabee would give a rough square footage of 400 square feet and it helps to have that square footage concentrated in a disc shape rather than strung out as in a wing. Gliders for example quite often have wing spans of 50-60 feet but are very narrow (high aspect ratio) and are very hard to see in the air even though they are usually white due to their construction of glass fibre.

Just a few thoughts on the above.

Regards,

Don Ledger

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