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Kenneth Arnold's Claims

From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>
Date: Sat, 17 Jul 1999 23:47:17 -0400
Fwd Date: Sun, 18 Jul 1999 08:41:50 -0400
Subject: Kenneth Arnold's Claims

In response to various comments re the suggestion that Kenneth Arnold's pivotal sighting report was possibly of White Pelicans...

In his report for the Air Force, Arnold wrote:

"I had made one sweep of this high plateau to the westward, searching all of the various ridges for this marine ship and flew to the west down and near the ridge side of the canyon where Ashford, Washington, is located.

Unable to see anything that looked like the lost ship, I made a 360 degree turn to the right and above the little city of Mineral, starting again toward Rainer. I climbed back up to an altitude of about 9,200 ft.

The air was so smooth that day that it was a real pleasure flying and, as most pilots do, I trimmed out my airplane in the direction of Yakima, which was almost directly east of my position and simply sat in my plane observing the sky and terrain".

Ashford is to the north-east of Mineral and if he made a "360 degree turn to the right" and was "starting again toward Rainer", which is also north-east of Ashford, how he was also travelling in the direction of Yakima?

Although his ultimate destination was Yakima, Arnold was still engaged in the search for a missing, presumed crashed, C-46 'Marine transporter' and a five thousand dollar (ten thousand according to one newspaper report) reward.

Yakima was not directly east of his position and if instead he was travelling due east, 'almost in the direction of Yakima', it makes a significant difference to the interaction between Arnold and the objects, should they have been much closer than he realised.

I note from the 'Pendleton, Oregon East Oregonian' newspaper article of 26 June: "Mr. Arnold reported he was flying east at 2:50 p.m. Tuesday toward Mt. Rainier when the objects appeared directly in front of him 25-30 miles away at about 10,000 feet altitude".

The further due east he was actually travelling, the more he was heading in the direction of the objects and they sooner they would cross his path.

The account in his later book, 'The Coming of the Saucers', is also different, making no mention whatsoever of 'heading towards Yakima' and stating, "It was during this search and while making a turn of 180 degrees over Mineral, Washington, at approximately 9200 feet altitude" when he first noticed a 'bright flash'.

Back in time, in what seems to be the first radio interview he gave, Arnold explained:

"I had made one sweep in close to Mt. Rainier and down one of the canyons and was dragging it for any types of objects that might prove to be the Marine ship, uh, and as I come out of the canyon there, was about 15 minutes, I was approximately 25 to 28 miles from Mt. Rainier, I climbed back up to 9200 feet and I noticed to the left of me a chain which looked to me like the tail of a Chinese kite, kind of weaving and going at a terrific speed across the face of Mt. Rainier. I, at first, thought they were geese because it flew like geese, but it was going so fast that I immediately changed my mind and decided it was a bunch of new jet planes in formation".

According to this earliest full account - original witness testimonies often proving to be more reliable - the first thing which Arnold noticed was a chain of objects that flew like geese and were crossing the face of Mt Rainier.

Further documented at the time, were the following:

"Mr. Arnold reported he was flying east at 2:50 p.m. Tuesday toward Mt. Rainier when the objects appeared directly in front of him 25-30 miles away at about 10,000 feet altitude".

Source: Pendleton, Oregon East Oregonian - June 26, 1947

"Arnold said the strange aircraft were skittering across the southwest slope of Mount Rainier when he first sighted them".

Source: Norman, Oklahoma Transcript - June 26, 1947

"Arnold, general manager and owner of the Great Western Fire Control Company, said he first saw the objects when they flashed in the sun low over the slopes of Mt. Rainier.

'Then I saw them, weaving and ducking in and out as they came south not more than 500 feet over the plateau"'.

Source: Oregon Journal - June 27, 1947

There's no evidence here that Arnold saw the objects before they were perceived to be crossing Mt. Rainier.

However, when his book, 'The Coming of the Saucers', was published, it was literally a different story with Arnold claiming:

"It was during this search and while making a turn of 180 degrees over Mineral, Washington, at approximately 9200 feet altitude, that a tremendously bright flash lit up the surfaces of my aircraft. I was startled. I thought I was very close to collision with some other aircraft whose approach I had not noted. I spent the next twenty to thirty seconds urgently searching the sky all around--to the sides, above and below me--in an attempt to determine where the flash of light had come from.

[...]

Before I had time to collect my thoughts or to find any close aircraft, the flash happened again. This time I caught the direction from which it had come. I observed, far to my left and to the north, a formation of very bright objects coming from the vicinity of Mount Baker, flying very close to the mountain tops and travelling at tremendous speed.

At first I couldn't make out their shapes as they were still at a distance of over a hundred miles".

In this final account, Arnold submits:

1. A "tremendously bright flash lit up the surfaces of my aircraft".
2. He spent, "the next twenty to thirty seconds urgently searching the sky all around".
3. There was a further flash.
4. He then (some more seconds having elapsed), saw "a formation of very bright objects coming from the vicinity of Mount Baker", which was to the north of Mt. Rainier.
5. Even then, the objects were "still at a distance of over a hundred miles".

So, how far distant were they when that first flash "lit up the surfaces" of his aircraft, some 30 seconds before?

If the objects were travelling at Arnold's estimated speed, as he later timed them, some 1,200 mph, then in that 30 seconds they would have been even further north.

Let's call it an even hundred miles from that initial 'flash' and say it's 50 miles (probably slightly less) from Mt. Rainier to Mt. Adams.

Arnold claimed the objects took one minute and forty two seconds to travel southwards between Mt. Rainier and Mt. Adams, therefore, they should have taken about twice as long to first of all reach Mt. Rainier from their starting position 100 miles northwards.

Bottom line, Arnold would have had the objects in view for around three minutes before they even arrived at Mt Rainier.

Now we know that simply isn't correct, Arnold previously having clarified in his letter to the Air Force that the total duration of his sighting only lasted for, "around two and one half or three minutes".

A further uncertainty is that in the early radio interview, he stated differently: "the whole observation of these particular ships didn't last more than about two and a half minutes".

Worse still, in one of the first newspaper reports, the 'Chicago Daily Tribune' of 25 June, quoted Arnold as confirming he "checked off one minutes and forty two seconds from the time they passed Mount Rainier until they reached the peak of Mount Adams" and that, "All told the objects remained in view slightly less than two minutes from the time I first noticed them".

This could be a more accurate recollection, corroborating that Arnold first saw flashes from objects which were between his location and Mt. Rainier and which were already passing the mountain's slopes.

There seems no doubt that Arnold did observe bright flashes from the objects, although whether they were so brilliant as his evident elaborations, is questionable.

Is it really sustainable that his aircraft was 'set alight' from the reflection of an object which was more than 100 miles away?

Yet, that's what Arnold claimed in his book and apparently didn't consider a problem.

In conclusion, there's sufficient documented evidence to accept some innocent exaggerations along the way, as we might expect.

That may be acceptable in other circumstances, but not when we are dealing with purported evidence of objects which could be extraterrestrial spacecraft.

By any default, there can be no tolerance for so much ambiguity.

Speed and distance estimates are of course still dependent on

where Arnold was in relation to the objects and their respective routes.

As we appreciate, it's greatly compounded by Arnold's comments that at some point he turned his airplane around and opened the window - accepted this would be the right-hand side window - to get a better look at the departing objects.

When this action occurred is absolutely critical and we simply don't know as he never explained it in context.

Is there maybe a clue when he did this?

Unfortunately, the only references seem to be:

"Well, uh, I uh, it was about one minute to three when I started clocking them on my sweep second hand clock, and as I kept looking at them, I kept looking for their tails, and they didn't have any tail. I thought, well, maybe something's wrong with my eyes and I turned the plane around and opened the window, and looked out the window, and sure enough, I couldn't find any tails on 'em".

Source: Radio interview.

"I observed these objects not only through the glass of my airplane but turned my airplane sideways where I could open my window and observe them with a completely unobstructed view. (Without sun glasses.)"

Source: Letter to the Air Force.

However, both indicate that Arnold recognised his observational difficulties before too long and not in the latter stages.

Pointedly, in his letter to the Air Force, Arnold strives to affirm that he had the objects in sight for some time after having altered course for a clearer view.

Theorising the probabilities with Arnold's exact location and direction, the nine objects' initial location and direction, plus when Arnold changed course, is like a game of chess, when each side has only three equitable pieces left on the board. You can move them around continually without ever reaching a resolution.

Evidence why Kenneth Arnold's description of the distinctive flight characteristics of those enigmatic objects was consistent with a formation of White Pelicans, has previously been cited in detail.

For those suffering from Pelicanitis, I would only add a mention of the National Geographical article, 'Pelican Profiles', which I recently located in the November 1943 issue and records:

"I recall the day in the early thirties when a companion and I, sight-seeing among the bubbling mud geysers on the eastern side of the [Salton] sea, observed a hundred white birds manoeuvring majestically in the sky. They played follow the leader.

Then they soared into the blue until only the sun, glinting on white feathers, flashed their location".

As I've said, this is proof these birds were reflective from a considerable distance, even 'out of sight'.

Perhaps how they 'flashed their location' is comparative to Arnold's comments, from the early radio interview:

"I could see them against the snow, of course, on Mt. Rainier and against the snow on Mt. Adams as they were flashing".

"They seemed to flip and flash in the sun, just like a mirror"

"I could see them only plainly when they seemed to tip their wing, or whatever it was, and the sun flashed on them".

Bruce Maccabee, in his paper, 'The The Complete Sighting Report of Kenneth Arnold...' states:

"It is important to notice how Arnold's attention was first drawn to the presence of strange flying objects because his initial observation rules out any explanation that is based on things in the sky which are not shiny (reflective, like a mirror) such as, for example, birds".

Demonstrably not so and once these birds are 'ruled in'...

Notably, the 1943 article records how, "Descending, they 'snapped the whip' and performed other acrobatic feats".

It further corroborates that these massive birds were seen to be flying in formation similar to how a whip would uncoil, or comparatively, as Arnold described, "a chain, which looked to me like the tail of a Chinese kite".

"The white pelican is a giant seaplane of the bird world...it is a master of graceful formation flying".

Documented in the early 1940s, it confirms what I had been emphasising - that these birds are rarely recognised as being majestic formation flyers - Arnold's nine enigmatic objects also "flying diagonally in echelon formation".

The point about Pelicans... is that they are unlike other birds and when migrating have a long, motionless gliding action, interspersed with 'flapping.'

To an unfamiliar observer, these bat-like (Arnold's objects of course being bat-like), tail-less birds, if at first seen to gliding at speed, could appear to be 'aircraft'.

If this is what Kenneth Arnold briefly observed, there should naturally be some clues and he did describe how the nine objects, "fluttered and sailed, tipping their wings alternately and emitting those very bright blue-white flashes from their surfaces".

What type of 'craft', terrestrial or otherwise would conceivably 'flutter'?

Arguably conclusive, it's a description which features in Arnold's subsequent encounter, as he relates in 'The Coming of the Saucers':

"I recall looking at my instrument clock which read about five minutes to seven. As I looked up from my instrument panel and straight ahead over the La Grande valley, I saw a cluster of about twenty to twenty- five brass coloured objects that looked like ducks.

They were coming at me head on and at what seemed a terrific rate of speed.

The sun was at my back and to my right. These objects were coming into the sun. I wasn't sighting through the viewfinder on my camera but was sighting along the side of it. As the group of objects came within 400 yards of me they veered sharply away from me and to their right, gaining altitude as they did so and fluttering and flashing a dull amber color.

They appeared to be round, rather rough on top, and to have a dark or a light spot on top of each one. I couldn't be absolutely positive of this because it all happened so suddenly. I attempted to make a turn and follow them but they disappeared to the east at a speed far in excess of my airplane. I knew they were not ducks because ducks don't fly that fast".

What could these "twenty to twenty- five brass coloured objects that looked like ducks", and which were "fluttering and flashing", possibly have been?

Arnold noted, "I was a little bit shocked and exited when I

realized they had the same flight characteristics of the large objects I had observed on June 24".

Err... in other words they were birds?

Trusting it can be accepted that a critical evaluation of Arnold's overall claims is demonstrably long overdue.

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