

Earth



Aliens On Earth.com

Resources for those who are stranded here

Earth



[UFOs](#) | [Paranormal](#) | [Area 51](#)
[People](#) | [Places](#) | [Random](#)
[Top 100](#) | [What's New](#)
[Catalog](#) | [New Books](#)

Search... for keyword(s)

in Page Titles

Our Bookstore
is [OPEN](#)

[Mothership](#) -> [UFO](#) -> [Updates](#) -> [1999](#) -> [Jul](#) -> Here

UFO UpDates Mailing List

Kenneth Arnold's 'Flying Discs'

From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>
Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1999 12:07:00 -0400
Fwd Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1999 16:53:08 -0400
Subject: Kenneth Arnold's 'Flying Discs'

In response to various comments concerning the recently published proposal that Kenneth Arnold's celebrated, inaugural 'UFO' (not 'flying saucer') sighting of 24 June, 1947, was resolved.

The two main accounts which Arnold gave of the entire incident were in a letter he subsequently sent to the US Air Force and in his much later book, 'The Coming of the Saucers'. It doesn't help matters that both accounts seem to be significantly different.

Established is that Arnold was flying from Chehalis to Yakima, a journey which took him across the Cascade mountains and specifically, near Mt. Rainier. There was a five thousand dollar reward for the finder of a missing C-46 Marine transporter, presumed crashed in the locale and it was common practice for private pilots to take advantage of any opportunity to search for it.

In his letter, Arnold states:

"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.

The sky and air was as clear as crystal. I hadn't flown more than two or three minutes on my course when a bright flash light reflected on my airplane. It startled me as I thought I was too close to some other aircraft".

The anomaly with Arnold's affidavit that it clearly implies he was heading in the direction of Yakima, his ultimate destination, when the sighting occurred.

As I've previously emphasised, it doesn't make obvious sense that Arnold made "a 360 degree turn to the right and above the little city of Mineral, starting again toward Rainer", in a

continued search for the C-46 and was then travelling towards Yakima.

Mt. Rainier is North-east of Mineral and Yakima was to the south of due east.

It could be that at the time of writing, Arnold had somehow confused when his brief sighting transpired, placing the incident at a time after he had abandoned his search and was on course for Yakima.

The account in his later book, 'The Coming of the Saucers', makes no mention that he was on route to Yakima when the spectacle began, Arnold stating, "It was during this search and while making a turn of 180 degrees over Mineral, Washington, at approximately 9200 feet altitude" when events began to unfold.

A further source is the first radio interview he gave, to KWRC in Pendleton, Oregon on June 26, 1947, in which 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".

It's trustworthy, as an audio of the interview still exists and a copy can be downloaded from my web site at:

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/voyager/arnold2.htm>

According to this early, detailed narrative - original witness statements 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 crossing Mt. Rainier.

However, in his letter, he continued, "I looked every place in the sky and couldn't find where the reflection has come from until I looked to the left and north of Mt. Rainier where I observed a chain of nine peculiar looking aircraft flying from north to south at approximately 9500 foot elevation and going, seemingly, in a definite direction of about 170 degrees".

These claims were further elaborated in 'The Coming of the

Saucers':

"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 next (more seconds ticking away) observed, "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".

If the objects were travelling at Arnold's estimated speed of around 1,500 mph, then in the 30 or so seconds which had elapsed since that initial 'flash', they would have been even further north and Arnold is making an astonishing claim that the reflection from an object well in excess of 100 miles away "lit up the surfaces" of his aircraft.

Perhaps an understatement to say this doesn't seem probable.

It's also a sentiment which can be applied to a further aberration resulting from the book's claims.

Arnold maintained that the objects took one minute and forty two seconds to travel the approximate fifty miles 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 and he should 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".

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. 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. Arnold leaves us with so much ambiguity and assertions which are contradictory.

Speed and distance estimates are dependent on his situation in relation to the objects and their respective trajectories.

Although we can't say for certain where Arnold or the nine, undulating objects were, it is proven that Arnold was mistaken in his perception of the objects' altitude.

It's an aspect which conveniently leads us to Martin Kottmeyer's past research into this case.

In his article 'Resolving Arnold', Kottmeyer hypothesised why Arnold's nine objects were possibly birds:

"The absence of a large population of corroborative witnesses near Mount Rainier seems sufficient grounds for wondering if the event was much more localized than Arnold surmised. A critical look at the distance estimate is both warranted and necessary".

"What of distances closer than Mount Rainier's vicinity? It has been pointed out that Arnold spoke of the objects having "swerved in and out of the high mountain peaks." This would seem to put a lower limit to the distance if one could first determine which peaks they swung around and if they were broad enough to have a transit time to regard the observation as secure. Arnold was slightly more specific in later recountings of the event. In The Coming of the Saucers he said they momentarily disappeared "behind a jagged peak that juts out from Mount Rainier proper. In his memoir for the First International UFO Congress he says, "When they turned length-wise or flat-wise to me they were very thin and they actually disappeared from sight behind a projection on Mount Rainier in the snowfield. These are not exactly the same thing, but they give a fair indication of what to look for on the geological survey maps.

Arnold estimated the crafts were at an altitude of 9,200 feet plus or minus 1,000. The task at hand is thus to locate some feature extending above the 8,200 foot level. This yields a neat little surprise. There are no such peaks between Mount Rainier and Mount Adams.

The closest thing I could find was Pyramid Peak which stands only 6,937 feet tall in front of Mount Rainier's base. There is a sharp little projection called Little Tacoma which sticks out around the 10,000 foot level, but it is on the wrong side of the mountain to be seen from Arnold's flight path. It would be badly stretching things to suggest he got either his position or altitude that far wrong.

Normally one prefers early accounts to later ones, but the Congress memoir may provide the clue to what happened here. When the object turned flatwise, the optical thickness likely dropped below the half minute resolution limit and briefly dropped from sight. The rough surface of the mountain provided opportunities for an illusory correlation of the disappearance to some feature of the mountain. The disappearance seemed to be caused by an intervening feature where none in fact existed. With no firm lower distance estimate, the way is opened for the objects being closer to Arnold than he had surmised".

Kottmeyer's suggestion that Swans were a probability is the forerunner of my own proposal that there's a more suitable candidate.

On hearing the conclusions of my ensuing research, Kottmeyer wrote:

"James Easton's thought that pelicans might be a better guess than swans sounds plausible to me at first blush and no objections come to mind. I guessed swans primarily on the points that I knew they flew high enough and were larger, whiter,

faster, and rarer than geese. If pelicans match the flight characteristics better as claimed - cool, I like it".

This was remarked before either of us had seen the recently re-discovered newspaper report from 12 July, 1947, confirming that nine 'discs' sighted in the same area by an airline pilot, proved to be nine White Pelicans.

Martin Kottmeyer's full article can be seen at:

<http://www.reall.org/newsletter/v05/n06/resolving-arnold-part-1.html>

<http://www.reall.org/newsletter/v05/n07/resolving-arnold-part-2.html>

Relative speed and distance is greatly compounded by Arnold's comments that at some point he turned his airplane around and opened the window - accepted this would be his left-hand side window - to get a better look at the departing objects.

When this action occurred is absolutely crucial 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.

It was Kenneth Arnold's description of the objects' distinctive flight attributes which I suspected might be the key to any explanation. A detailed summary of how there was found to be such a notable consistency with a formation of White Pelicans, can be read on my web site at:

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/voyager/saucers.txt>

I would only add a mention of the November 1943, National Geographical article, 'Pelican Profiles', which I recently located. A wonderful historical insight, the author recalls...

"...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".

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, tail-less birds, if first seen 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".

Arguably conclusive, it's a description which features in Arnold's subsequent encounter a few weeks later, 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".

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".

In total, during his flying days, Kenneth Arnold claimed to have had some eight encounters with 'UFOs'.

The more we understand about Arnold's pivotal 'UFO' sighting,

the more we realise can never be understood.

We don't know Arnold's position, the exact direction in which he was travelling, his speed, the trajectory of the objects, where they actually were when he first observed them, when he turned his plane around and significantly, what exactly he meant by 'around' and in which direction he was then heading, plus how fast.

Any one of these is a critical factor and if all of them are open to interpretation, then there will be naturally be different interpretations of how it was possible for Arnold to be deceived by birds, or conversely why that couldn't have happened.

As I emphasised when first raising the prospect that Arnold's nine objects might have been Pelicans in formation, we will never know what he witnessed.

My contention was that in perspective, there were sufficient indications that these objects could have been White Pelicans and that Arnold had demonstrated a capability for errors of judgement.

Of course, the recent highlighting of a newspaper report, dated 12 July, 1947 and which confirms how an airline pilot's investigation of nine 'discs' in the same area found then to be White Pelicans, was unimaginable corroboration of the likely explanation proposed.

Consider if the dates of these two incidents were reversed.

An airline pilot reports that nine 'disc-like' objects were, on further investigation, discovered to be nine White Pelicans.

Subsequently, a pilot encounters nine unfamiliar objects in that region and which have the distinctive characteristics of those same birds.

What are the probabilities that those 'objects' were also White Pelicans, or, nine small, thin, 'bat-like spacecraft' from another planet which somehow made their way here.

Reason would conclude without much, if any, hesitation that the former explanation was infinitely more likely, increasingly so with over 50 YEARS hindsight and no tangible evidence of ET visitations.

The only barrier is Kenneth Arnold's testimony and we already know that his perceptions of the nine objects' distance, their altitude and how they interacted with surrounding peaks have been factually challenged.

That barrier crumbles completely when confronted by Arnold's subsequent tale of how those twenty-five, small, brass coloured objects, which flew like ducks, also "fluttered" and "had the same flight characteristics" of the larger objects previously encountered.

It seems impossible why Arnold couldn't rationalise that these were in fact ducks - the area of his second 'encounter' being prime duck country.

The claim that he, "attempted to make a turn and follow them but they disappeared to the east at a speed far in excess of my airplane", can only be deduced as incredulous.

Furthermore, Arnold's location was an inadequate position to make any judgement of how long it took the objects to travel between Mt. Rainier and Mt. Adams.

Wherever he was exactly, it was relatively much closer to Mt. Rainier, with Mt. Adams being some 40 to 50 miles southwards.

According to the 'Pendleton, Oregon East Oregonian' of June 26, 1947, Arnold acknowledged as much, the newspaper reporting, "Mr. Arnold admitted the angle from which he viewed the objects would make difficult precise estimation of their speed, but insisted any error would not be grave "for that speed"'. .

If the oblique viewing angle was problematic, it's not necessarily a sensible inference that errors would have been insignificant. They could, and arguably would, have been of immense relevance.

This estimation was, after all, the entire basis of the apparent enigma.

Arnold's 'bat-like' alien craft failed to become symbolic of UFO lore and instead, his misinterpreted comment of how they flew "like a saucer would if you skipped it across water", became synonymous with 'flying saucers'.

His account may be a 'classic' - THE classic - yet, as others have surmised, the belief, sometimes a fanatical religious devotion, that subsequent reports of 'flying saucer' shaped objects were 'ships from outer space' couldn't be based on a more specious foundation.

It should be stressed though that there are many 'UFO' cases, notably those not involving 'saucer-shaped' objects, which have no obvious resolution and conceivably merit some kind of formal, recognised study.

Perhaps Arnold's bat-like 'UFOs' truly were nine alien spacecraft, performing death defying stunts by weaving in and out of mountain tops and canyons at 1,500 miles per hour.

For reasons best known to themselves.

Alternatively, having looked at the full picture of Arnold's various reports, inconsistencies and proclivity to make some claims which at times bordered on the absurd, I'm satisfied that overall there's sufficient evidence why a formation of White Pelicans is demonstrably the 'best fit' by a long way for Arnold's nine, perplexing, 'flying discs'.

(C) James Easton
22 July, 1999.

[[Next Message](#) | [Previous Message](#) | [This Day's Messages](#)]
[[This Month's Index](#) | [UFO UpDates Main Index](#) | [MUFON Ontario](#)]

UFO UpDates - Toronto - updates@globalserve.net
Operated by Errol Bruce-Knapp - ++ 416-696-0304

A Hand-Operated E-Mail Subscription Service for the Study of UFO Related Phenomena.
To subscribe please send your first and last name to updates@globalserve.net
Message submissions should be sent to the same address.

[[UFO Topics](#) | [People](#) | [Ufomind What's New](#) | [Ufomind Top Level](#)]

To find this message again in the future...
Link it to the appropriate [Ufologist](#) or [UFO Topic](#) page.

Archived as a public service by [Area 51 Research Center](#) which is not responsible for content.
Software by Glenn Campbell. Technical contact: webmaster@ufomind.com

Financial support for this web server is provided by the [Research Center Catalog](#).