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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Kenneth Arnold's 'Flying Discs'

From: Bruce Maccabee <brumac@compuserve.com>
Date: Fri, 23 Jul 1999 00:30:16 -0400
Fwd Date: Sat, 24 Jul 1999 04:08:03 -0400
Subject: Re: Kenneth Arnold's 'Flying Discs'

>Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1999 12:07:00 -0400
>From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>
>Subject: Kenneth Arnold's 'Flying Discs'
>To: UFO UpDates <updates@globalserve.net>

>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.

<snip>

.....Dear Jim,

We've heard all this before. Nice that you are now very confident that the Pelican Theory is not for the birds.

Do us a favor, Jim.

Draw a map showing how pelicans can explain the sighting so we, too, can be confident that the sighting is explained.

Shouldn't be too hard.... pick starting locations for Arnold and the pelicans. We don't know exactly where they were so you have lots of freedom. Allow Arnold to be flying a slowly as 100 mph if you like, although 110, 120 mph would be more likely. Allow pelicans to be flying as fast as 50 mph. Demonstrate that they could appear to come from a location north of Rainier and last be seen appearing to pass by Mt. Adams (be in the same direction as Mt. Adams) while not getting so close to Arnold's plane that he would recognize them. Explain wat he meant by turning and opening the window to get an unobstructed view. Specify which window he opened and which way he turned the plane.

This is a challenge you should accept and answer publicly if you expect to maintain your own credibility.

You wrote:

>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".

From Arnold's statements one gets the definite impression that
the sighting lasted about 2.5 -3 minutes. So, how do we handle
his statement that he first saw them almost 100 miles north near
Mt. Baker? What is more likely to be wrong: that his time
estimate is too short or his estimate of initial distance is
wrong? I vote for the initial distance estimate.

Interesting that if you take a 170 degree azimuth path that
passes close to Mt. Rainier, and you project it northward, and
then start at an estimated initial location of Arnold's plane
and draw a line toward Mt. Baker, then Arnold's sighting line
crosses the 170 azimuth path (of the objects) about 50-60 miles
from his plane. Still a large distance, but not 100 miles. The
distance of this sighting line crossover point is about 50 miles
from Rainier. If the initial sighting line were north of the
direction to Rainier but also south of the direction to Mt.
Baker, the initial distance from Rainier would be less. For
example, assume the initial distance was 40 miles from Rainier, with
the objects traveling southward at 1700 mph (0.47 miles per
second). The objects would pass Rainier about 85 seconds
after Arnold's initial observation. Now add this to 102 seconds
Arnold measured as the time until they disappeared near Mt.
Adams and get 187 seconds...or a little over 3 minutes. This
time can be further shortened by assuming that the objects were
even closer to Rainier, and closer to Arnold, at the beginning
of the sighting.

>The more we understand about Arnold's pivotal 'UFO' sighting, the
>more we realise can never be understood.

Yes, but the more we understand about Arnold's sighting the more
we understand than the bird/swan/pelican hypothesis is, shall we
say, strained?

>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.

Oddly enough, the exact values of these quantities are not
needed to test the pelican hypothesis. Draw A Map!

At the same time, the key observations Arnold made of the objects passing Rainier, seeing the apparent shape, traveling in and out of the mountain peaks, timing the flight, turning the airplane to fly parallel, are reasonably independent of his exact initial position (within a few miles is good enough), the exact direction he was traveling (roughly eastward), his speed (certainly over 80 mph, probably over 100 mph), the trajectory of the objects (roughly southward), where they were when he first saw them (what really counts is where they were when they passed Rainier; estimate of the initial position is based on a possible initial direction... wherever that may have been north of Rainier) when he turned his plane "around" (which does not mean 360 degrees or even 180; pilot's refer to bringing the plane "around" onto a new heading); how much he turned his plane (understood to be about 90 degrees to the right since his window is on the left side of the plane)

>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.

Each of these can have a certain amount of "slop" and not negate the sighting. At the same time, each of these is well enough known to test the Pelican hypothesis. DRAW A MAP.

>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.

Perhaps not. But was can decide with reasonable confidence what he did not see. Draw A Map.

>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.

Fine. Prove pelicans are a logical explanation. DRAW A MAP

>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.

Yeah, the pelicans were going so slowly compared to him he was able to get very close for identification. Arnold should have been able to do the same. Draw A Map.

>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.

Based on the reflective properties and speed if nothing else Arnold likely would have detected no similarities to pelicans.

>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.

Says who? You?

>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.

And your analysis as credulous?

>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.>

Wrong. His position was quite good for estimating when the
objects passed Rainier (went between him and Rainier) and then
Adams. Certainly his position was not as good for estimating how
close they got to Mt. Adams.... but so..... maybe they didn't
travel all of 47 miles in 102 seconds. Maybe they were only
going 1200 mph as Arnold publicly stated to be on the "safe
side."

>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"'.>

Arnold was correct. By comparison, he would have to make BIG
errors to mistake the speed of pelicans for 1200 mph objects a
long distance away.

>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.

Even more immense for pelicans.

>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.

Can you name one such case with "no obvious resolution"?

>Perhaps Arnold's bat-like 'UFOs' truly were nine alien
>spacecraft, performing death defying stunts by weaving in and out
o>f 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.

Well, it's nice to be satisfied.

I won't be satisfied (and perhaps a chorus in the wings could speak up at this point) until you prove pelicans could at least marginally explain the sighting by Drawing A Map.

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