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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Voyager Newsletter, Kenneth Arnold

From: David Rudiak <DRudiak@aol.com>
Date: Tue, 8 Jun 1999 19:34:14 EDT
Fwd Date: Wed, 09 Jun 1999 17:42:53 -0400
Subject: Re: Voyager Newsletter, Kenneth Arnold

>From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>
>Date: Sun, 6 Jun 1999 22:01:40 -0400
>Fwd Date: Tue, 08 Jun 1999 00:13:19 -0400
>Subject: Re: Voyager Newsletter, Mogul Parchment Parachutes

>In the 'Pendleton, Oregon East Oregonian, of 26 June, 1947, it's
>reported of Kenneth Arnold that, "He said he could estimate the
>distance of the objects better because an intervening peak once
>blocked his view of them. He found the peak was 25 miles away,
>he related".

>Perhaps we can still clarify further whether it could have
>"blocked his view", or, if it's more likely that he simply lost
>sight of the objects against this intermediate 'peak'.
> It's important if his perception that the objects 'vanished'
>behind a distant peak, was a main reason Arnold believed they
>were some 25 miles distant.

Also because they appeared to be skimming and snaking around
other peaks of the southern Cascade range. If you look at a
topo map, there isn't anything between Arnold's position and the
Cascades that could have obscured his view.

>In 'Resolving Arnold - Part 2: Guess Again', Martin Kottmeyer wrote:

>"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.

Not really. Not only is the area of the sighting very
sparsely populated even today, the sighting took place midweek
instead of a weekend, so that potential vacationers from nearby
cities like Seattle and Tacoma would be less likely to be there.

Add to this the fact that the region is extremely rugged, and
that from the ground the views are extremely limited by such
things as surrounding mountains and trees. I took a detour off
the interstate last year while driving home from Seattle, drove
south on Highway 7, which takes you past Mineral, where Arnold's
sighting took place. That's about 30 miles of mountain road,
where you are about 25-30 miles from Rainier and the Cascades at
all times.

I thought the views of Rainier and the southern Cascades would
be magnificent -- right? Wrong! The road follows mountain
valleys and fir trees line the road the entire way. I saw
Rainier only once the entire time, through one valley that

happened to penetrate the mountain barrier to the east.

Even if somebody had been closer to the Cascades and directly under the flight path of the objects; high speeds would have limited the chance for observation to a few seconds at most. They could whiz right over your head and be gone before you even knew they were there. E.g., if some camper was at the 3500 foot level, the objects were flying directly overhead at around the 5000 foot level (see arguments below on altitude), and they were flying at Arnold's calculated speed of 1200+ mph, or 20+ miles/min, or 1 mile every 3 seconds, or 1700+ feet/sec, the objects would cover a 60 degree arc of sky in only a second. Whoosh -- they're gone!

On a clear day, Rainier is easily seen from from Seattle and Tacoma; in fact it dominates the horizon. However, it's also further away and it would have been harder to see anything. Arnold thought he lost sight of them near Mt. Adams, 50 miles away. Seattle is about 40 miles from Rainier.

I did find one newspaper report from the "Tacoma News Tribune," June 30, which weakly corroborated Arnold's sighting. "Mrs. Mary Hartwell, Rt. 1, Box 531, Spanaway [southeastern Tacoma] said Friday [June 27] she had seen 'nine planes' very high in the air 'two or three days ago.' She said they had the appearance of geese, but definitely were silver colored planes."

Like I said, pretty weak and also vague. The date might be right but the time isn't given. "Very high in the air" also isn't very clear. No impression of speed is given either. Rainier would have been about 35 miles southeast of Mrs. Hartwell. Arnold would have been 20 miles SSE of her position. If Hartwell saw the same 9 objects as Arnold, they should have been low to the horizon from her vantage point. If "very high in the air" meant high angular elevation, then she was reporting something else, maybe even geese, heaven forbid!

There was also prospector Fred Johnson's close-up report from Mt. Adams which started at the same time Arnold's ended when Arnold lost sight of the objects near Mt. Adams.

We also have corroboration in the form of other multi-object sightings, but at other times and places, such as the well-known United Airlines sighting of July 4 over Idaho, in which 9 objects were sighted by a crew of 3 for around 10 minutes before vanishing in an instant. Clearly not birds, unless birds could keep up with a DC-3 for 10 minutes.

> A critical

>look at the distance estimate is both warranted and necessary.
>One must almost certainly accept the objects passed in front of
>Mount Rainier's snow field as Arnold claimed. The angular
>velocity of the objects indicated by Arnold's clocking of the
>objects between Mount Rainier and Mount Adams is .8 degrees per
>second. At that speed it would take nine seconds to cross the
>face of Mount Rainier at the 9,200 foot level indicated by
>Arnold's report.

I basically agree with this, and just want to add that if they were actually down around 5000 feet as they crossed the face of Mt. Rainier, the width is closer to 10 miles, and it would have taken closer to 30 seconds to cross the face.

> This is too long for a spurious observation
>related the fleetingness of the phenomenon. This would rule out
>explanations based on distant sky phenomena like a train of
>meteors, Campbellian mirages, or density-shifting space animals.

OK, no problems with this. Basically Arnold had sufficient time to make some unhurried observations as they passed the face of Rainier.

>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."

The earliest quote I can find on this was in the Portland Oregonian, July 11, 1947: "I reckoned the saucers were 23 miles away, because they flew behind one of the peaks of Mt. Rainier, I can show on the map exactly where the peak is and where I was."

>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".

>This seems to concur with Bruce Maccabee's assessment:

Pyramid Peak is a possibility, but is extremely narrow, only a quarter mile wide at most. That means that at the speeds Arnold was reporting, they would have disappeared from view for maybe a maximum of 3/4 second. That might be hard to observe reliably.

Directly below Pyramid about 1 mile to the southwest is Iron Mountain, about 1800 m or 5900 feet high and with a wider concealing base approaching 1 mile. The saddleback behind the peak is down at around the 1600 m or 5000 foot level. Here they could disappear possibly up to 2-3 seconds. That would be easier for Arnold to observe. This elevation also fits in better with them coming off the slopes of Rainier and appearing to skim the southern Cascades, which are at about the same elevation.

>"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.

The important point here is that the taller peaks tend to be further away. There were no mountains between Arnold and the lower portions of the Cascades to obscure his view. If he did see them disappear behind some of these peaks, they were at least 25 miles away.

> 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".

But overestimated their angular elevation relative to him only slightly -- an important distinction.

>In the early, detailed radio interview, Arnold states, "I could >see them against the snow, of course, on Mt. Rainier and against >the snow on Mt. Adams as they were flashing, and against a high >ridge that happens to lay in between Mt. Rainier and Mt. Adams".

>If the objects were seen against the snow of Mt. Rainier, Mt. >Adams and a high ridge that was between the mountains, what

>'peaks' could they have gone behind?

This is covered in detail below, and places the closest possible approach of the objects at about 15 miles.

>In a related point, the 'Chicago Daily Tribune', of 25 June, >quoted Arnold as saying, "I counted nine of them as they >disappeared behind the peak of Mount Rainier".

>Could the objects have gone behind the mountain, when they were >also supposed to be travelling across its slopes, e.g., "low >over the slopes of Mt. Rainier" and "not more than 500 feet over >the plateau", according to statements attributed to Arnold in >the 'Oregon Journal' of 27 June?

>Aside from this earliest 'Chicago Daily Tribune' report, did >Arnold ever claim the objects "disappeared behind the peak of >Mount Rainier"?

Not that I know of. It sounds like an instance of where the reporter misunderstood Arnold and misquoted him. Arnold probably said the objects disappeared behind ONE OF the peaks of Mt. Rainier, as he said and wrote elsewhere.

>Also in that radio interview, Arnold states, "due to the fact >that I had Mt. Saint Helens and Mt. Adams to clock them by, I >just thought I'd see just how fast they were going".

>Did Arnold ever mention again that he used Mt. Saint Helens as a >reference point, or was this probably an error and he meant Mt. >Rainier?

St. Helens and Adams are both about 50 miles south of Rainier and equidistant from it, St. Helens about 20 miles west and Adams about 20 miles east. For objects on a southerly trajectory, both were potential landmarks that Arnold could use when he first started timing. St. Helens would have been due south of Arnold's position, whereas Adams was more to the southeast.

As it was, the objects' trajectory took them in the line-of-sight vicinity of Adams where Arnold saw them disappear. St. Helens dropped from the report since it wasn't involved thereafter.

>In his letter to the Air Force, he claimed, "I watched these >objects with great interest as I had never before observed >airplanes flying so close to the mountain tops, flying directly >south to southeast down the hog's back of a mountain range. I >would estimate their elevation could have varied a thousand feet >one way or the other up or down, but they were pretty much on >the horizon to me which would indicate that they were near the >same elevation as me.

And that's how Arnold made his mistake in elevation, by assuming the mountain tops were on the same level as he was, instead of about 2 degrees below.

>They flew like many times I have observed >geese to fly in a rather diagonal chain-like line as if they >were linked together. They seemed to hold a definite direction >but rather swerved in and out of the high mountain peaks. I >could quite accurately determine their pathway due to the fact >that there were several high peaks a little this side of them as >well as higher peaks on the other side of their pathway".

>This is a much clearer explanation.

>There were mountain peaks between Arnold and the nine objects >and further, higher, peaks beyond. The objects flew in-between >this range of high peaks and ridges.

>However, it seems these features weren't nearly so high as >Arnold thought and the objects were flying much lower than he >perceived, something that Arnold never checked.

>In which case, is it agreed Arnold had no idea, not then, not >ever, that he was observing from what seems to have been some >4,000, maybe 5,000 feet above the objects?

The only thing that can be agreed on is that Arnold reported the

objects flying across the snowfields of Rainier, seeming to disappear behind one of the subpeaks, and then seeming to skim and weave around the peaks and ridges of the southern Cascade range.

Collectively this means their angular elevation relative to Arnold was very close to Arnold's true horizon (0 degrees at 9200 feet). If we assume the typical absolute elevation of the southern Cascades is around 5000 feet and they were indeed flying over the Cascades, then they were flying at around 5000 feet, or about 2 degrees below true horizon. The actual error that Arnold made was not in estimating absolute altitude, as James Easton perpetually thinks, but in determining his true horizon. He thought it was at distant mountain peak level, which if true would have placed the altitude near that of his plane.

Now exactly how high the objects were in absolute (not angular) elevation, depends on how far away they were. If they were James Easton "birds," only a few thousand feet away, then they would have been only a few hundred feet below his plane's altitude, (not 4000 to 5000 feet below). E.g., at 2500 feet distance instead of 25 miles, they would have been 100 feet lower than the plane, or at 9100 feet. That's the same small angular down angle as 5000 feet at 25 miles.

>If it's argued that this **couldn't** have directly affected his
>subsequent judgement of distances between himself and the
>objects, plus where they were flying in relation to the peaks,
>what is the basis of that argument?

If I understand this convoluted statement properly, Easton is arguing that the objects were much closer and flying behind peaks and ridges that were also much closer. Once again Easton obviously doesn't understand the simple distinction between angular elevation (degrees, radians) and absolute elevation (feet, meters). If the objects were James Easton birds 2500 feet away, they would not be 5000 feet below him. That would be a downward angle of over 60 degrees. Arnold would be looking at the tree-covered ground, not watching the objects fly across the ice fields of Mt. Rainier.

No, instead they would be flying 100 feet below him at 9100 feet so that they could appear to fly across the Rainier ice fields and skim the Cascades. In order for them to appear to disappear behind some mountain peaks, there would have to be one taller than 9100 feet between Arnold and the nearby birds.

As you can see, this is getting ridiculous. There aren't any tall mountains like that in Arnold's immediate vicinity. If there were, Arnold's most immediate concern would be to avoid plowing into them.

Let's consider something further away. The critical observation here is the one where Arnold said he saw the objects silhouetted and flashing against the backdrop of Rainier's ice and snow fields. The edge of Rainier's permanent ice field drops to about the 1500 meter or 5000 foot level. If we assume there was still some unmelted winter snow, then maybe the snowfields came down to around the 4000 foot level, at which point one is maybe still 20 miles from Arnold's position. Any intervening mountains have to be higher than this to obscure the view, and the closer they are to Arnold, the taller they have to be (because Arnold is flying above them and looking slightly down).

Looking at a topo map, the absolute closest mountain to Arnold that I can find capable of doing this is called Mt. Wow, with an elevation of 1800 m or 5900 feet. It was about 15-17 miles from Arnold's position (or about 9-10 miles from Rainier's peak).

This is the closest possible mountain to Arnold's position that could have obscured any part of the ice or snow field. If Arnold correctly perceived the objects being momentarily obscured as they passed over the ice field, then this sets the lower limit as to how far away they could have been.

That, among many other things, certainly eliminates Easton's "birds." And at 15 miles or more, it practically eliminates any jet plane of the day. Using Arnold's conservative calculation of 1200 mph and scaling to the closer distance, the objects would still have to be flying 700-800 mph, faster than any jet

of the day. The speed record at the time, set only 5 days before at Muroc AAF, California in a P-80, was 624 mph. It also established this speed record by flying at a much higher elevation where the air was thinner. Jets couldn't fly nearly that fast down around 5000-9000 feet.

>The Pendleton newspaper article also states, "The Boise flyer >said they flew on the west sides of Rainier and Adams, adding >that he believed this would make it more difficult for them to >be seen from the ground".

>Is this 'west side story' of any relevance in understanding the >overall perspective?

Not that I can think of. Both sides are very rugged and sparsely populated, so I'm not sure what Arnold meant by the remark. Maybe somebody else more familiar with the area could tell us more. In any case, it seems to be a very minor point.

David Rudiak

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