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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Voyager Newsletter, Mogul Parchment Parachutes

From: James Easton <pulsar@compuserve.com>
Date: Wed, 9 Jun 1999 23:18:12 -0400
Fwd Date: Thu, 10 Jun 1999 05:22:39 -0400
Subject: Re: Voyager Newsletter, Mogul Parchment Parachutes

Regarding:

>Date: Tue, 08 Jun 1999 21:29:44 -0300
>From: Donald Ledger <dledger@ns.sympatico.ca>
>To: updates@globalserve.net
>Subject: Re: Voyager Newsletter, Mogul Parchment Parachutes

Don wrote:

>I'm not going to go over this point by point but just make a few
>observations.

>The first is an obvious disregard for one simple fact and that
>is the stated Callair altitude that Arnold gave as 9,200 feet.
>I've brought this up before with James who seems to want to
>ignore it.

Don,

If I had seen this mentioned before, I certainly wouldn't have
ignored it. Your comments are a helpful insight.

>The fact is Arnold did not know what his true altitude was
>because he had no way of verifying it. He looked at his
>altimeter and saw 9,200 feet and gave that as his altitude. That
>could have been out as much as two or three thousand feet [don't
>say it can't happen, it's happened to me] from the station
>pressure at take-off in the warm lowlands to the cool temps a
>couple of hundred miles away in the mountains. Note Well that
>pilots are constantly updating their altimeter settings.

That's interesting and I don't recall Bruce taking this into
account in his Arnold 'paper'.

>Observation: If Arnold turned his aircraft to get a better look
>he would have turned [banked] his plane to keep the objects on
>his side [the left] for better visibility. In this case he would
>have turned right about 90 degrees. However he probably would
>have lost sight of the objects for the few seconds it took to
>accomplish the manouver because his left wing [the Callair is a
>low wing] would have come up, obscuring his vision.

I haven't see this useful information before.

>I've been a bit put off by the impression being floated, by
>some, that Arnold was some kind of dolt who was frittering
>around the mountains with no particular idea of where he was,
>didn't know birds from jets, couldn't estimate distances or work
>out a speed/time problem, despite the fact that he would have

>done them dozens of times during each flight.

Very much appreciated. It doesn't follow that Kenneth Arnold was an idiot if he made an exited, two minute, error of judgement.

>I believe that it was Bruce that wondered if birds could fly at >6,000 or was it 9,000? feet. My Flight Supplement cautions >pilots to watch out for Canada Geese at 32,000 feet when they >are migrating. If I remember correctly a DC-3 struck a bird over >Mount Everest during WW II while flying the "hump" as they >called it.

I had checked out the altitude probabilities for migrating American White Pelicans long ago and it seems they're known to reach 14,000 feet during migration.

One reference featuring airplanes came from Ann Johnson: "When they come migrating through, there are frequently flocks that literally disappear from view as they bank and the sun is no longer reflecting directly on them. Put the binocs on them and there they are. But being a lousy judge of distance, I have no idea how high they are. Much higher than the airplanes on approach and they are still 10 miles out. You can put the numbers on that".

>Another observation. We'll probably never know what Arnold saw >that day as is true of many other cases..

Of course, that's exactly what I said in the newsletter.

>.. but I think you are drawing a long bow if you stick with your >bird theory James.

As I've also said before, it's not really my theory, although I do think it's a better conceivable explanation than meteors, 'earth lights', mirages, 'billowing snow clouds', etc.

What probably isn't saying much as none of these are tenable.

It's also of course merely an expansion of Martin Kottmeyer's theory.

The difference is that if birds were the explanation, there are distinctive similarities between the flight characteristics of American White Pelicans and what Arnold described, much more so than with Swans, as Kottmeyer proposed.

He's quite happy with the new suggestion as are many others who embrace some scepticism. Doubtless the resident 'Roswell/MJ-12/saucer' zealot is not. ;)

As I wouldn't bother to even read what's a fair bet to be the usual diatribe, I'm not in the least interested, even if there's some meaningful material amongst the standard drivel.

Although I hadn't intended to post the following on the UpDates list, this was an addendum to the last newsletter and contains some background which hasn't been published here before:

Realising that Arnold's long out-of-print book was crucial evidence I hadn't seen, I was subsequently able to acquiring a copy on loan. It was only on reading this, that the full significance of Arnold's later sighting became apparent.

I also undertook some further research, which isn't mentioned in the newsletter as it was already lengthier than intended.

What follows are relevant findings and additional background, some of which is being published here for the first time. It will hopefully assist in the understanding the rationalisation behind the premise offered.

Indigenous to Washington state, the American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) is the largest bird in North America and amongst the biggest in the world. A predominately white bird, with black primaries and outer secondaries, it weighs up to 15 kg, (33 lb) and it's massive wingspan can extend to 3 m (10 ft) or more.

The clue to possibly identifying the enigmatic objects remains in Arnold's description of their flight characteristics. Often, birds have a distinctive signature, the "jizz" as it's known, and from this a bird's probable identity can be determined, even if the sighting was inconclusive.

Don Baccus, an ornithologist, also commented to Michael Price [see the newsletter for details of Michael's comments]:

"Michael, my first thought when I started reading your analysis was white pelican. Several years ago, when training a good birder in the finer details of splitting migrating hawks into species, age, etc. at long distances at the beginning of the fall migration season (i.e. training him to run our count), we saw distant white 'blurps' fading in and out of visibility many miles north. This was at the Goshutes, i.e. on the Utah/Nevada border. It was near sunset. It was obvious that the sun was reflecting on their underwings. They'd disappear momentarily and then reappear in sequence. They were flying east-to-west and we first spotted them somewhat to the northeast. I pegged them as white pelicans almost immediately, as the whole cadence of the thing matched the way white pelicans will soar in line (in this case - they'll also 'V' up), and rather than flap all at once, often will each begin to flap as each reaches the position where the previous bird began to flap. Same with turning, etc. Of course, they'll also do this in more of a synchronized formation, too, but I'm sure you've all seen white pelicans flap and glide in the kind of pattern I'm describing.

I couldn't think of any bird that would show such a cadence and literally twinkle white while switching from soaring to flapping".

Investigating this suggestion further, there are notable correlations with Arnold's observations.

Arnold claimed, "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 numbered nine. They were flying diagonally in echelon formation..."

In 'Birds of the World', by Oliver L. Austin Jr. p 42, he states:

"Pelicans fly in long lines, sometimes in a V formation, sometimes abreast, sometimes in single file directly behind one another. Most often they form a wide echelon, each bird slightly behind and to one side of the next".

Arnold also mentions, "They were flying diagonally in echelon formation with a larger gap in their echelon between the first four and last five". Discussing this with Michael, he agreed with my assessment that this is standard behaviour in a flock and wrote, "all line-abreast, diagonal and astern flocking birds develop gaps and fill them in randomly".

A further, distinctive connection, is Arnold's claim, "They didn't fly like any aircraft I had ever seen before. In the first place their echelon formation was backward from that practiced by our Air Force. The elevation of the first craft was greater than that of the last".

This is a typical feature of American White Pelicans flying in formation.

Consider also his statements that:

"I observed the objects' outlines plainly as they flipped and flashed against the snow and also against the sky".

"They fluttered and sailed, tipping their wings alternately and emitting those very bright blue-white flashes from their surfaces".

In 'The Birds', by Roger T. Peterson (Time-Life International), he writes:

"Much the simplest form of flight, certainly much less complicated than flapping or hovering, is gliding flight".

"Swallows employ gliding flight, - several strong wing strokes and a glide. So do pelicans travelling in formation...".

"Gliding saves energy, but gravity and air conditions determine how far a bird can skim before it must flap again".

The parallel between Arnold's objects in echelon which "flipped and flashed", "fluttered and sailed", and a formation of pelicans in echelon "beating and gliding", as 'Birds of the World' describes their flight, seems evident.

As Don Baccus remarked, "I couldn't think of any bird that would show such a cadence and literally twinkle white while switching from soaring to flapping".

Michael Price also confirmed, "Assuming he was looking at birds, the flipflop appearance of these birds would be visible whether higher, same altitude, or lower as the sun might be reflecting strongly and directly off white upper and/or underwing surfaces".

Kenneth Arnold was perhaps after all on the right track when he stated:

"They flew in a definite formation but erratically. As I described them at the time their flight was like speed boats on rough water or similar to the tail of a Chinese kite that I once saw blowing in the wind. Or maybe it would be best to describe their flight characteristics as very similar to a formation of geese, in a rather diagonal chain-like line, as if they were linked together".

Very similar to a formation of geese, but based on the above evidence, remarkably like a formation of American White Pelicans.

It would have been an uncommon, if not rare, sighting, especially with the birds flying south and a possibility which Arnold is most unlikely to have examined.

If that should be the answer and Arnold mistakenly concluded the objects must be distant airplanes, it plays havoc with his estimated calculations.

It's these estimates of speed and distance which are open to dispute and Arnold's 'second coming of the saucers' encounter must surely be considered critical evidence that he was capable of mistaking the distance and airspeed of birds.

American researcher and writer Martin Kottmeyer had previously reached a similar conclusion and more details can be found at:

Resolving Arnold - Part 1, by Martin Kottmeyer
<http://www.reall.org/newsletter/v05/n06/resolving-arnold-part-1.html>

Resolving Arnold - Part 2: Guess Again, by Martin Kottmeyer
<http://www.reall.org/newsletter/v05/n07/resolving-arnold-part-2.html>

Kottmeyer thought that Arnold may have been deceived by a flight of swans.

British researcher and author, Peter Brookesmith, asked for an opinion on the results of my investigations and 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.

The people asking we take Arnold's testimony of the distances at face value naughtily ignore the reasons I gave why we can't. If

real, the objects had to be huge and visible to scores of people. They also had to be supersonic and generating sonic booms that thousands should have heard. The guys arguing about the trigonometry keep putting the birds and the planes on perpendicular paths, but overlook that Arnold explicitly turned the plane to get a better look out the side window. The paths were parallel. Once you put that straight, the angular sizes and velocity implicit in Arnold's report can fit coherently those of a swan. I'm not sure if the speed or size of pelicans would materially change the math, but if the flight characteristics are a valid signature I wouldn't sweat such details.

Give Easton my appreciation for offering the alternative".

Any proposition that the American White Pelican was responsible for Arnold's reported sighting, must be able to substantiate that these birds are known to fly relatively fast and at high altitude.

The ideal person to offer an informed opinion would be a pilot who has encountered pelicans in flight and Mike Havener is a glider pilot who wrote an article on his experiences.

He told me, "The birds I was soaring with were at about 3000 - 4000 feet MSL. We were flying in a continuous band of lift, so we were continually climbing. I have seen pelicans at higher altitudes when the lift is really good (maybe 6000 feet MSL)".

"The glider I was flying has a 38 mph stall speed... as a matter of fact, I was flying at 52 mph between thermals, and these birds were staying with me".

So, it seems whilst still not quite supersonic, pelicans are no slouches and under ideal flying conditions, could show a surprising turn of wing.

Mike added, "Since writing the article, I have received several letters from other glider pilots who have shared the same experience. Though none of them mentioned their flight profiles, these reports have come from various locations around the world". [End]

There's more evidence than this, however, that covers the gist of it.

Don't forget, these are no ordinary birds, they have a massive, up to 10ft wingspan, all white, except for the black wing tips.

We could put it this way; supposing that any pilot encountered a small formation of migrating AWP's at high altitude, had never seen this unusual sight before and as such, didn't recognise these as birds at all.

What would he be likely to observe in perfect conditions?

Say..a formation of reflective, bright objects, flying in a diagonal echelon, with maybe some of the 'objects' slightly ahead of the others. They would occasionally 'flutter' and 'sail' as they flapped and then glided. From distance, it would look something like a 'kite's tail' (he might even describe their motion in flight as 'bobbing', skimming, or looking something like a stone skipping across water :)).

If this was also in a post-war era of aviation development, especially military and when it would be no real surprise to see new airplanes, especially ones which were still 'secret', would the pilot ever realise, or would anyone suggest, that he had seen a formation of AWP's?

If this did apply to Kenneth Arnold, how could he not realise these were birds and believe the 'objects' were much further distant and considerably faster than they truly were.

It would have to be that there was evidence these could not have been birds, or his overall perception was somehow in error.

Although that's another matter and this is already too long, one

question which needs to be resolved is how far, maximum, could any bright, reflective object of approx. 10ft by 5ft, be visible from the air?

Peter Kingsmill is a naturalist and Director General of The Redberry Pelican Project (Canada) Foundation. I had also asked Peter for his assessment and he replied, "Everything in Arnold's description that you quoted points to the strong possibility he saw a flock of AWPs... the formation, the allusion to the tail of a Chinese kite, etc".

"I have also been baffled by optical illusions of distance when these birds are against a backdrop (hills)".

Kathleen Andersen, who lives in the Mt Rainier area and has written about the Arnold case, recently asked some good questions about the factual existence of any AWPs in that area, as she had never known of this.

Peter was one of the relevant experts I contacted and he confirms, "In general, American White Pelicans breed in the mid-west USA and prairie and northern Canada (as far north as Fort Smith, NWT). So indeed, they could be around Washington state, where, incidentally, they also nest in small quantities".

I'm hopeful of shortly receiving some further substantiation about this and details going back to the 1940s.

All irrelevant of course if the answer lies elsewhere!

James.
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