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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Kenneth Arnold sighting

From: **Jerome Clark** <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
Date: Tue, 15 Jun 99 10:19:15 PDT
Fwd Date: Wed, 16 Jun 1999 11:04:42 -0400
Subject: Re: Kenneth Arnold sighting

>Date: Sun, 13 Jun 1999 18:34:00 -0500
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>From: Dennis Stacy <dstacy@texas.net>
>Subject: Re: Kenneth Arnold sighting

>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
>>Subject: Re: Kenneth Arnold sighting
>>Date: Fri, 11 Jun 99 20:06:44 PDT

Dennis,

>>The point remains. You said there is no corroboration for
>>Arnold's account, beyond his own -- to most of us who don't
>>quack like anti-UFO ducks -- impressive testimony. You were
>>wrong. Johnson was at the right time and the right to place to
>>see Arnold's UFOs. He thought that he saw Arnold's UFOs, and an
>>FBI interviewer characterized him as "a very reliable
>>individual." (No doubt you know better and will let us know
>>what a fruitcake and/or sociopath the man was.) The rest of you
>>may be interested in a useful discussion of the relationship of
>>Johnson's testimony to Arnold's; see Bruce Maccabee's article in
>>IUR, May/June 1995.

>Again, you're a post short. I've already retracted, qualified,
>amended, however you want to put it, any previous statement of
>mine which you continue to interpret as my calling Arnold a
>fruitcake. The original statement was made in the context of:
>one does not necessarily know when one is dealing with a
>fruitcake or not. Now you're adding sociopath to what I said.

Arnold would have been lying about an incident that would make a
mark in history (probably an even larger one than we can know
now) and that would adversely affect his family, which suffered
mightily because of the resulting notoriety and controversy. He
stuck to this lie all his life, so that nobody, including
friends, family, and associates, ever suspected he was telling
it. He wrote a book about it. He spoke over time in any number
of public forums about it. This sounds more like a sociopath
than a prankster to me. I'll take your word for it that you
haven't thought through the implications of what you're saying,
but I don't think my paraphrase is inaccurate or unfair.

>But here's the point: no journalist or historian would say
>"Johnson was at the right time and the right to place to see
>Arnold's UFOs," unless they were present with him at the time.
>They would say Johnson said, stated, claimed, declared,
>insisted, allowed, alleged, vowed, vouchsafed, or whatever.
>However much you might wish it otherwise, Johnson's letter and
>FBI interview are ultimately evidence of just that -- not the

>claimed contents. They are two different and distinct things.

Of course, if a reporter had been right next to Johnson at the time he was watching Arnold's UFOs, that reporter's testimony would be dismissed as merely anecdotal, and likely mistaken besides. Or maybe we'd hear speculation to the effect that the guy was lying, and those who doubted the accusation would be challenged to prove otherwise. Anybody who needed a conventional explanation for the incident would revise the reporter's testimony so that it fit whatever conventional explanation the would-be debunker was proposing. Just like what's being done to Arnold himself right now, and for that matter to thousands of other witnesses over the long, sorry history of the UFO controversy.

>Before you get on your indignant high horse again, that's not to >say, ipso facto, the contents of any statement are false by >definition, as you seem to think (and persist in claiming that) >I'm always saying. It's simply to say that an allegation of >events is not the event itself. Never has been, never will be.

>That said, Johnson said the objects passed over him at a >thousand feet. I'd like to see you put a telescope on an object >a thousand feet overhead going 1200 mph (or more) an hour. As >with your own UFO Encyclopedia article, Maccabee's IUR article >is also replete with its fair share of qualifiers as to the >number of objects Johnson reported, their size, etc.

Apparently you're reading something into what I wrote that, as far as I can see (after two rereadings, one just now), I didn't put there. The fact remains that you claimed there is no independent verification for Arnold's sighting. There is. (There is also, of course, the huge summer 1947 that was building around the time Arnold saw his UFOs. It's not as if [as one who didn't know better might think reading the discussion on this list] Arnold's experience occurred in a vacuum.) You may not like it, but it's time to admit that you were mistaken. Not the worst thing in the world to do. We're all wrong from time to time (remember, I once was a true believer in psychosocial ufology), and none of us will think the less of you for it.

>Yes, the FBI interviewer characterized Johnson "as a very >reliable individual." But based on what? A 30-minute telling of >his story? Again, the FBI statement is a subjective assessment, >not a God-given or determined fact. But since you grant the FBI >inviolable objectivity (and higher authority) in this case, >presumably that means you support all other recorded FBI >statements regarding the UFO phenomenon and its many >witnesses? Or is it just a case of the ones you support?

I have no idea what you're talking about, unless it's your desire to dismiss any testimony you don't want to hear. I have not the least doubt that if the FBI interviewer, based on an interview with Johnson, had judged him dishonest, you would consider that the final word on the subject. And, ironically, I suspect that I'd feel the same way.

>>>Moreover, ufology is replete with cautionary tales.

>>Ufology is also replete with puzzling, well-investigated cases >>which continue to resist explanation. One of them is Arnold's. >>The sorts of stories you cite below are notable in being so >>rare, if one puts them in the context of UFO-reporting >>generally. On the other hand, if one considers that they are >>both photographic cases -- which long experience has taught us >>are far more likely to be bogus than other sorts of UFO reports, >>where hoaxing is relatively infrequent -- they're not rare at >>all. To the contrary, the negative resolution of these claims >>should not surprise any sophisticated observer.

>You overlook one significant fact: photographic cases are much >easier to disprove than anecdotal ones. In fact, it's extremely >difficult to disprove an individual anecdote.

Let's see now. You've gone beyond implying that Arnold was a liar to intimating that hoaxing may be some significant part of UFO-reporting. Not even Blue Book would have agreed with you there. One thing ufologists ought to have learned five decades into the game is that while hoaxing certainly occurs, it is a

still relatively infrequent cause of UFO reports. I can't believe we're having to have a discussion like this in 1999.

So many "UFO" photos are hoaxes for some simple, obvious reasons: (1) they're easy to do and (2) they attract attention in a way that few nonphotographic cases do. Perhaps you could add a third reason: they seem to add authenticity to the testimony. And there's a fourth, if the hoaxer is smart enough to look ahead: you can keep making money at it for years as the photo gets recopied in magazines, books, and TV shows.

>You're still a post short. But here's my answer: Neither of us >_knows_ whether Arnold is a hoaxer or not, just as we don't >_know_ how much (or whether) he may have exaggerated his first >sighting (without hoaxing). Point is, you can't eliminate either >possibility with absolute certainty, as you seem to think you >can. You're the one that's always arguing we have to turn away >from a b&w world and confront ambiguity. Well, here's your >chance.

And I can't eliminate with absolute certainty the possibility that in your private life you're a serial killer, and you can't prove I'm not one either. Or anybody reading this. The simple fact of the matter is that not an iota of evidence has emerged since June 24, 1947, to suggest that Ken Arnold was a hoaxer. Nothing ambiguous about that.

Why are we even discussing this?

Jerry Clark

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