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## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### Re: Kenneth Arnold Sighting

From: David Rudiak <[DRudiak@aol.com](mailto:DRudiak@aol.com)>  
Date: Fri, 18 Jun 1999 00:52:12 EDT  
Fwd Date: Fri, 18 Jun 1999 15:28:59 -0400  
Subject: Re: Kenneth Arnold Sighting

>From: James Easton <[pulsar@compuserve.com](mailto:pulsar@compuserve.com)>  
>Date: Mon, 14 Jun 1999 21:44:13 -0400  
>Fwd Date: Wed, 16 Jun 1999 00:23:10 -0400  
>Subject: Re: Re: Kenneth Arnold Sighting

>In his report for the Air Force, Arnold wrote, in full:

>"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".

>Ashford is to the north-east of Mineral and if he made a "360  
>degree turn to the right" and was "starting again toward  
>Rainer", which is also north-east of Ashford, I'm not sure how  
>he was also travelling in the direction of Yakima.

Rainier is a BIG mountain. To fly to Yakima, which was almost  
due east of his position (actually a little south of due east),  
Arnold would want to skirt the southern flank of Rainier by a  
few miles and pass over the much lower Tatoosh Range to  
Rainier's south.

As far as I can see, that's all Arnold meant by "starting again  
toward Rainier." Stop being so literal minded. What makes more  
sense: flying directly at the center of Rainier because he was  
suicidal and stupid, or flying in the general direction of  
Rainier and skirting it to the south on a course toward Yakima?

The 360 degree turn seems like a "slip of the tongue" by Arnold.  
What he obviously meant was a 180 degree turn. After searching  
in a westward direction, he reversed course by turning 180  
degrees and headed towards Yakima to the east.

>The account in his later book is also different, making no  
>mention of 'heading towards Yakima' and stating, "It was during  
>this search and **\*\*while making a turn of 180 degrees over**  
>Mineral\*\*, Washington, at approximately 9200 feet altitude" when  
>he first noticed a 'bright flash'

Only nitpickers have any problems with this. In his book he properly describes it as a 180 degree turn (a 360 turn makes no sense as it would simply bring him back on his original course to the west -- a pointless exercise). It was indeed "during this search." He had just finished searching westward down a canyon -- right? -- and then turned around. I've never seen anybody make such issues out of nothing.

>The direction he was actually travelling in relation to the  
>objects is crucial

Develop a little reading comprehension, use some logic and common sense, and its obvious from his own words and general context that he was definitely heading pretty close to due east and first saw the flashes north of his trajectory.

>and I would have to be dubious about his 'perfect' sighting  
>conditions, as outlined in the Air Force report.

Why is that? It seems you are arbitrarily dismissing this perfectly plausible detail for no other reason than debunking bias. Are you suggesting Arnold could not have seen anything 20 to 25 miles away?

For those of us who have actually been up in the Seattle area, both Rainier and the Cascades can be easily seen from ground level\_ on a clear day from 50 or 60 miles away.

>That aside, whether Arnold was coming out of a 180/360 degree  
>turn, or 'cruising' due east,

It's very simple. He had just completed a 180 degree turn and was flying east. Whether he was heading back to Yakima at that point or planning to continue his search doesn't even matter.

>he was still in 'search' mode, so what was his airspeed likely  
>to have been?

>Would he be undertaking a search at close to maximum speed, in  
>treacherous terrain, or would his airspeed be much less, giving  
>him time to hopefully spot the missing aircraft and earn an  
>instant ten thousand dollar fortune?

If he went too slow, he would stall his plane and go into a nosedive. Don Ledger is far more knowledgable than I on this, and if you read his post, he estimates that anything under 90 mph would have been dangerously slow for Arnold's plane, especially on turns.

Even so, stall speeds are still faster than "pelicans."

>Which was, after all, why he was there in the first place.

Yes, but not do die by diving into the ground or flying into Rainier.

>Some further comments re the respective figures you had quoted:

>Altitude: As you may have noticed, I mentioned to Don Ledger  
>that I had seen a reference to pelicans being known to migrate  
>at over 14,000 feet, considerably higher than your estimate  
>(although it maybe makes no difference).

Not really. Had "pelicans" really been that high (5000 feet above his altitude) and within only a few miles, they would have had an angular elevation well above Arnold's horizon. No way could Arnold have perceived them to be skimming the mountain tops, which would have placed them at a slight downward angle of about 2 degrees.

>Visibility: I'm not sure if I've highlighted this before. Glider  
>pilot Mike Havener, who wrote an article 'Soaring with Pelicans'  
>describing his extraordinary experiences being joined in flight  
>by these gregarious birds, was asked if he could offer an  
>experienced opinion on this point. He replied,

>"Visibility depends on several factors. The one having the most  
>effect of course is how much 'haze' or other particulate matter  
>is in the air (i.e. smog, smoke). At low altitudes, visibility  
>is lowered because of this.

>Myself, (a pilot with average eyesight) I can distinguish the

>basic shape (a body with wings) of these pelicans from about 4  
>miles when flying above the haze.

A 10 foot wingspan at four miles subtends 1.7 minarc; a 4 foot body .7 minarc. These are just barely resolvable with normal vision of 20/15 to 20/20 acuity. (.75 minarc to 1.0 minarc gap acuity.

This is actually a very similar situation to Arnold saying he could see the motors on a DC-4 at 15 miles and make out the distance between them (insofar as comparing them with the size of the unknowns). In this case the space between the inner motors would be about 2.4 minarc, and between cabin and inner motors about .9 minarc. Arnold, like Havener, would be down near the limits of detectability.

You can't make out any details, just that something is there. In Havener's case, he would basically make out an ill-defined line (wings) with a thickening or darkening in the center, which he interprets as being the body. For Arnold's DC-4, he would see an ill-defined line (wings) and darkenings in the positions of the engines and cabin.

If you accept Havener's ability to make out such things, is there really any reason a priori to question Arnold's account (other than whether he may have had normal vision without a spectacle correction)?

> From 4 to maybe 6 miles they  
>become small dots. Beyond that, I'd say they would probably not  
>be distinguishable other than some sort of relative motion that  
>may catch your eye".

>Presumably we keep in mind that Arnold noted how perfect the  
>visibility was that day.

Your point???

>Speed: It might be a mistake to underestimate just how fast  
>these birds can fly.

Nobody's underestimating their speed, just noting that even at the upper range that you assume, it would still be much slower than Arnold's plane at any likely speed that he would be flying.

> Although awkward on the ground, with that  
>10 feet wingspan they are majestic in the air and I've already  
>provided wonderful evidence from Mike Havener that a flock of  
>pelicans were comfortably flying with him at 52 m.p.h. Mike also  
>writes in his article that, "I reluctantly sped up to 80 m.p.h.  
>to put some distance between us".

So at 80 Havener zips past them. But at 100+ mph, they zip past Arnold? Is that what you are saying.

>There's maybe another factor to consider. If any formation of  
>birds observed a larger object flying towards them, it seems  
>reasonable that they're likely to accelerate and get out of the  
>way, possibly reaching their top speed if necessary.

Maybe you think this is a factor, but you also seem to be arguing that the "pelicans" were several miles away so that Arnold couldn't clearly make them out. Why would they get spooked by Arnold at several miles?

>So what if - and we are only considering 'what if' calculations:

>Arnold's airspeed was closer to 60 m.p.h. and our conceivable  
>birds were travelling at 30 m.p.h., or some identical ratio  
>where Arnold's speed is twice as fast - say, 80/40.

According to Don Ledger, around stall speed. Arnold in nosedive. Boom!! No Kenneth Arnold report to debate 50 years later.

Besides, what difference does it make? Even with these extremely lowball "what if" numbers, Arnold is still flying twice as fast as the birds. Nothing has really changed.

>Plus, the 'objects' are first sighted four miles away

>At 60 m.p.h., Arnold's approaching them at 1 mile per minute  
>After 1 minute, if said birds remained stationary, they are  
>still three miles away.

>Except that they are moving towards Arnold's flight path at 5  
>mile per minute.

I think you mean 0.5 miles per minute. 5 miles per minute would be 300 mph.

>At what angle though?

Assume they are somewhere in direction of Rainier proper, as per Arnold's report, though it's kind of hard to understand how he could see white birds against a snow white background under such circumstances, especially as flashes of light. But never mind.

Rainier's peak was 10 miles north of Arnold's position, and to keep things simple mathematically, 24 miles away as the pelican flies. If the "pelicans" were 4 miles distant initially, than the scaling factor is  $24/4 = 6$ . Divide 10 miles by 6, and the boirds would be 1.67 miles north of his position. To keep it simple and maximally advantageous to the pelican hypothesis, call it 1.5 miles. Similarly Arnold would be 3.6 miles from the intercept point if they were flying due south. Call it 3.5 mile for simplicity.

>Anyway, at some point, they theoretically pass Arnold's flight  
>path, heading in the approximate direction of Mt Adams.

Under your assumptions, Arnold would be practically right on top of them. Assume they are flying 30 mph and Arnold 60. It would take them 3 minutes to fly 1.5 miles south to the intercept point (the entirety of Arnold's sighting BTW with no time left for Arnold's 100 second timed observation afterwards). Arnold would have flown 3 miles east in this period, taking him within .5 miles of the pelicans when they flew past his course heading.

If Havener can recognize these pelicans at 4 miles as still being boirds, do you think Arnold might have similar abilities at only 1/2 mile?

>They're also still heading away from Arnold and if he turns his  
>airplane \*\*due south\*\*, they will continue to travel further  
>away.

No they won't! Arnold is moving twice as fast as they are, isn't he? If he goes into an immediate 90 turn to the south to follow and to keep from flying right past their course within half a minute, he is going to continue to draw closer. Say it take him 30 seconds to make his turn. The boirds have gone another 1/4 mile south. But Arnold has gone about another 1/4 mile east and 1/4 mile south since he is moving twice as fast. So by the time he completes his turn, they are due east and only 1/4 mile away

>Arnold will eventually make some headway towards them, however,  
>he can practically pluck out their pin feathers.

>if he has already decided these objects are much further than  
>they truly are, there's no point in him pursuing them.

I just see the usual Eastonian mathematical and logical witlessness at work here. Arnold is so close at this point, it's virtually impossible for him not to recognize them for what they are, even if they hypothetically spook and pick up speed. He will hardly perceive them as being way off in the distance. While they might appear to be dots at the very beginning of this scenario, they are clearly looming larger in size at every moment as they approach on an intercept course. Translation: Arnold sees that he is quickly getting closer to them all the time.

By the time they cross his path and Arnold turns on a parallel course, they are no longer dots but clearly defined objects full of details like beaks, flapping wings, and the like. At a quarter mile, their wings subtend an angle about equal to that of the full moon.

>So far as I can see, there's no evidence that he did.

Yawn. There's nothing to pursue. He's already flown past them

and left them in his wake.

>We do know that after one minute and forty seconds, he's  
>determined they are already at Mt Adams and distant, hardly  
>visible objects.

No, no! What we DO know, under your stated assumptions, is that your pelicans would be on an intercept course with Arnold, would be quickly growing in size and discernibility, and would be EASILY recognizable by the time they flew past his initial heading, even with the most generous of assumptions imaginable to the pelican hypothesis. He could hardly perceive them as being way off in the distance and getting further away.

Furthermore, when Arnold turned to follow, he would overtake them very quickly, in much less time than a minute and forty seconds, again even using extremely generous assumptions. After a minute and forty seconds, Arnold would have flown well past them. They would not be in front of him to the southeast in the direction of Mt. Adams, but in BACK OF HIM to the northeast somewhere.

>Does this scenario allow the possibility that these were not  
>distant 'objects' - only some 4 miles away, yet sufficiently far  
>and moving fast enough to always be illusory against the snow  
>covered mountains?

Nope, not even close.

>If not, for the sake of a best/worst scenario, let's finish off  
>the discussion by upping the bird's airspeed to 50 m.p.h. -  
>which they can do - drop Arnold's "coming out of turn and  
>searching" to 60 and put the 'objects', in 'perfect visibility',  
>initially five miles away.

>Do you reckon it's still an untenable (if unpalatable)  
>possibility?

Even if Arnold was going at a death-defying 60 mph and the pelicans sped up to 50 mph (after Arnold presumably spooked them by getting too CLOSE -- hint, hint), Arnold is going to see them rapidly looming up initially as he approaches their position. As they cross in front of him, about 1/2 mile away, and at all times thereafter, they will be easily recognizable. After his turn at only 60 mph (which, says Don Ledger, would actually send him crashing to earth) he will continue to catch up with them. These will not seem like objects continuing to move forward of his position and out of sight. They will start to move backward and continue to grow in size. Arnold will never lose sight of them at such close range.

James, the fact that you even have to pose such questions publicly, instead of just doing something simple like taking out a piece of graph paper and figuring out the plausibility of the scenario on your own, indicates that you have no idea what is involved here. Bruce Maccabee has tried to lead you through exactly such a scenario 2 or 3 times before, pointing out, as I have, that Arnold would fly right into any birds on the intercept course described, that he would get so close the birds would be easily recognizable, and that he would still zip right past them once he made his turn onto a parallel course.

Pelicans, geese, swans ... it doesn't matter. The bird hypothesis is completely untenable no matter how one tries to massage the numbers.

David Rudiak

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