

1947

Ufologist Jacques Vallee, from whom we shall be hearing later in these pages, once suggested that UFOs could just as well be called the "Arnold phenomenon." While sightings of anomalous aerial objects had been made earlier, it took Kenneth Arnold to bring the mystery to the attention of the world (and, though his name is not nearly so well known, Pendleton East Oregonian reporter Bill Bequette to coin the expression "flying saucers" to describe the things). Here, in his own words, is Arnold's account of a moment in history.

How It All Began by Kenneth Arnold

I think our fundamental desire is to come to some common understanding, to offer some reasonable scientific explanations for the very unusual happenings that have taken place during the last thirty years. Perhaps if we review "how-it-all-began" this will help us.

Prior to and during 1947 I was involved in the manufacture and installation of automatic fire-control apparatus. This is a service that I have rendered to remote rural areas of the West for something over forty years now. It was in the course of this business that I was flying out of Chehalis, Washington, on June 24, 1947. As a resident of Boise, Idaho, I had been one of the founders of the Idaho Search and Rescue Pilots Association and I had probably logged, at this time, something like four thousand hours in mountain flying, in mountain search and rescue. My reason for being in the vicinity of Mount Rainier in particularly close quarters was the fact that about a month and a half before a United States Marine Transport, a C-46, had crashed into the south-west side

of Mount Rainier. It was presumed that thirty-two marines had perished, and the families of these marines had put up a five-thousand-dollar reward for anyone who could locate the crash and recover the bodies.

Being experienced in this type of work and of course familiar with the terrain and mountain search-and-rescue techniques, I decided, after finishing my work at Chehalis, Washington, that I'd take a hand at seeing if I could locate this downed aircraft. And I might have located it if the crash scene had not still been covered with snow, because on that particular day I did fly directly over the Tacoma Glacier, where the transport was found a month later by forestry personnel.

I took off from Chehalis, Washington, about 2:00 P.M. I don't recall whether the twenty-four-hour clock on my instrument panel and my wristwatch were on daylight time, standard time, or mountain time, but according to my instruments I took off at about two. I was planning to spend at least an hour in the search over this high plateau.

I should describe just briefly how carefully and how meticulously you have to plan a search mission, particularly over country of this type, because always in the vicinity of mountains there can be turbulent air. You have to be very sure you have plenty of gasoline and that your aircraft is in perfect condition because you're flying dangerously close and dangerously slow as you search the slopes of mountain areas.

I was flying a Callair. They're made in Afton, Wyoming, which is fifty miles from a railroad. They've sold out now to Aero Commander, I understand. They are primarily a duster type of aircraft, with a high performance standard, modified to have a thirty-foot wingspan. It's a mountain airplane made especially for high altitudes and short field landings and takeoffs. I've spent some nine thousand flying hours in them, and I'm still here.

June 24, 1947, was a beautiful day. There wasn't a cloud in the sky when I took off and the air was just as smooth as silk. It was a real pleasure to be flying that day. I was going to make this search and then continue on to Yakima. I approached Mount Rainier at about eleven thousand feet up over this plateau that extends even

higher than fourteen thousand feet. There I made a turn and of course cut my throttles. I went into an almost stalled type of glide, clearing my engine periodically, but searching the slopes all the way down the mountainside and to the west. I started from the east because the crash had been recorded, I think, by radar or radio, right close to the southwest side of Mount Rainier proper. The altitude of the crash was thought to be in the vicinity of eight thousand feet. As I came out below on this first sweep I passed over the little community of Mineral, Washington. It's in the pine trees there and I knew pretty much where I was. I made a turn over Mineral and started climbing slowly but steadily, to gain sufficient altitude to go back over the high plateau again for another pass.

As I was making this 180° turn and flying directly toward Mount Rainier at about 9200 feet elevation a tremendous flash appeared in the sky. It lit up my whole aircraft, even the cockpit, and I was startled. I thought I was very close to collision with some aircraft I hadn't seen. Or, I thought, possibly a military plane had dived over the nose of my airplane and the reflection of the afternoon sun against his wing surfaces had caused the flash. All this went through my mind in less than a tenth of a second as I began to look around below me and ahead of me. And then the flash came again. This very bright flash, almost like an arc light, was coming from a group of objects far up to the north of Mount Rainier in the area of Mount Baker, which is almost in a line with Mount Rainier and Mount Adams. I saw a chain of peculiar aircraft approaching Mount Rainier very rapidly—I think I described their formation at the time as looking like a tail of a Chinese kite. They seemed to fly in an echelon formation. However, in looking at them against the sky and against the snow of Mount Rainier as they approached, I just couldn't discern any tails on them, and I had never seen an aircraft without a tail! These were fairly large-sized, and there were nine of them. I am good at counting things like this because in the course of my lifetime I have flown missions counting antelope, sheep, cattle, and whatnot. I kept looking for their tails. I was aware that the military are very clever at camou-

flage and, of course, I assumed these were military craft or at least military missiles, but I was puzzled by their echelon formation, which was flying approximately at 170° from north to south, following closely down the Cascade Range.

However, the first craft was at a higher elevation than the rest of the craft, which of course is not conventional military formation at all, either in this country or Russia or Germany, so I just assumed, I guess, that they were some new type of military missile or jet, possibly under remote control. Actually, they didn't fly like airplanes. The brilliant flashes that came from their surfaces, which I at first assumed were from the sun's reflection, would pulsate, and the craft would flutter; they seemed to fly just as readily on edge as they did on a level. As I mentioned before, they seemed to be linked together in a sort of diagonal chainlike formation, similar to geese—but they were not geese!

I especially noted that they were all individually independent. They were flying on their own but every once in a while one of them would give off a flash like this and gain a little more altitude or deviate just a little bit from the echelon formation. This went on among all the nine craft that I was observing, alternating periodically, but not in a regular rhythm, I should say.

When they approached Mount Rainier's north edge I could see they were to the west of it, which was very good from my standpoint because I was at right angles to them. I determined that whatever they were, I was going to clock their speed with my twenty-four-hour clock, which has a big-sweep second hand. It's on my instrument panel.

As the first one put its nose out of the southern edge of the snowfield of Mount Rainier, my sweep second hand was just approaching, if I remember correctly, about one minute to three. They continued flying between Mount Rainier and Mount Adams over the high, rough terrain named "Goat Ridge," which is approximately five miles long. I was approaching Mount Rainier in the vicinity of twenty-three miles away from the craft, and of course I realize my attempt to clock their speed with absolute accuracy was hopeless because I was not only approach-

ing at 9200 feet, at about one hundred miles an hour, but climbing steadily. As the first one actually came to the end of Goat Ridge, the last one seemed to enter above the Ridge, so I made a guess that the whole formation of these peculiar aircraft was approximately five miles long. This is purely an estimate because Goat Ridge is rather irregular; it isn't lying exactly at 170°. The craft seemed to climb a little bit as they were following this 170° heading, and I knew that I was on a level with them because they were on the horizon with me. My altimeter showed a little over 9200 feet, I think, so they were flying at an elevation of about 9200 feet—a little less or a little more, since they sort of undulated as they flew.

As the last of this echelon of strange aircraft passed Mount Adams I looked at my sweep second hand and found they had covered a distance of about fifty miles in one minute and forty-two seconds.

Of course, I knew they were flying very fast. I knew they were faster than our P-51s and any military plane that I knew of. However, I didn't try to figure out how many miles per hour they actually were going. But somehow I had a rather uneasy feeling about it. I judged their diameter to be approximately one hundred feet, and of course I was very puzzled about the fact that they didn't have tails, but I got a good look at their image on the snow. When they gave off this flash they appeared to be completely round. When they turned lengthwise or flatwise to me, they were very thin and they actually disappeared from sight behind a sharp projection on Mount Rainier in the snowfield. But since I knew approximately where I was, in relation to the mountain, I knew where they had passed. I thought my judgment of the distance and my clocking would be a reasonable estimate of how fast they were going. And at this time I felt sure this strange formation of craft was traveling more than a thousand miles an hour.

Now, as they flew past Goat Ridge the second from the last one seemed to turn its rear end toward me. I guess that's the best expression I can use, and I could see that it wasn't round at all. I got the impression they were rather like tadpoles. They had a little sort of peak at the

center of their rear-trailing edges. But I couldn't be positive they were all of the same design as the one that I particularly noticed, or whether that one was a little larger. It seemed darker in color than the others and its wingspan seemed a little bit wider. You would assume the leader of a group of craft would be the first ship. But this was second from the last. I couldn't see the last ship too well because it was fluttering and jerking very rapidly. From the way they performed I thought if there were human beings in them, they would have been made into hamburger at the first turn because the craft were flying very fast and very erratically, and from the way they changed direction almost instantaneously the centrifugal force must have been terrific.

This is one reason I thought they must be robot-guided missiles.

Anyway, I sort of lost interest in my search mission and decided I ought to go to Yakima and report all this. In my craft, in order to save weight so that I can make high-altitude takeoffs from short airstrips, I don't carry a lot of radio gear. I had just a very small radio with which I could contact nearby control towers. So I couldn't call Seattle tower; I couldn't call Tacoma tower or McChord, or anything. I just kept flying in the direction that the craft had traveled, across the Cascade Range and on to Yakima. I felt positive in my own mind that the forestry observers who are stationed up and down the Cascades couldn't possibly have missed seeing these things because they were large, distinct, and there was quite a formation of them. I later found out they did observe them but had made their reports to their superiors, and if the reports went anywhere from there, I guess it was to the Pentagon. I don't know.

I knew the pilots at Yakima, where Al Baxter was the general manager of Central Aircraft. He was a CAA examiner as well and I described all this to him. I said they didn't have any tails; I told him their approximate size; I mentioned their tremendous speed and the acceleration they had. We'd been friends for a long time so Baxter knew I wouldn't make such a report unless it was true. One of the helicopter pilots who was present mentioned,

"Well, Ken, I think you probably saw some of these guided missiles from Moses Lake." I thought, well, maybe that's what it was. I felt satisfied that that's probably what they were. However, I had never heard of a missile base at Moses Lake, Washington.

I gassed my airplane there and continued on to Pendleton, Oregon. I had worked out mathematically how fast the strange craft were going and every time I reworked it, it came out that they were going over 1700 miles an hour. It was mind-boggling! I even measured the base of the mountains—both Mount Rainier and Mount Adams—on my aeronautical charts and took the minimum reading of twenty-nine miles and refigured it; they still clocked out at over 1300 miles an hour.

While I was in Pendleton I kind of felt I ought to tell the FBI because I knew that during the war we were flying aircraft over the pole areas to Russia, and I thought these things could possibly be from Russia. But the FBI office was locked. So then I went over to the newspaper office to talk to the editor of the *Eastern Oregonian*, Noland Skiff. I told him my whole story. I had my charts and everything with me because I had thought I would give the FBI the best description I could. I thought it was my duty to report these things.

Before the evening was over I was besieged. I was asked all types of questions. The newspaper men were so anxious to beat each other to the story that they'd listen to a half dozen words from me, ask me six or seven questions, and then rush off and print the story. Of course, many of these stories were distorted and inaccurate.

The story went out over the wires and pretty soon there were lots of other reports from people who had seen these things. Before the night was over I had long-distance calls from London, England, from religious groups, from people who thought the end of the world was coming!

And all this time I still thought they were some kind of military aircraft, that maybe the military figured this was a good way to break the news!

I was never familiar with the past records of strange things seen in the sky. As a boy I was sent to the Congregational Sunday School and told about Ezekiel, who

had seen strange things in the sky, but I had no knowledge of sightings similar to mine.

After three days in Pendleton, getting no sleep, reading all the stories that were being printed about my sighting and learning of lots of other sightings, I was amazed. I felt this was getting completely out of hand. This was my first experience with newspaper people and the things they put into words! They live very interesting lives!

Meantime, I did call my wife. I was very concerned that she know what was going on because she had expected me home two days before I got there. Finally I went out to the airport, cranked up my ship, took off, and went home.

When I got home there was Dave Johnson, aviation editor of the *Idaho Statesman*, saying that Wright Patterson Field wanted a complete description of my sighting, of exactly what took place. The Associated Press, United Press, and other reporters from other newspapers wanted the same thing. But there wasn't anything new I could tell them.

The real clincher came when on July 4, 1947, Captain E. J. Smith, flying a DC-3 for United Airlines, came through Boise. After he landed somebody yelled at him, "Have you seen any flying saucers?" And he yelled back, "I'll believe them when I see them."

He's a great big guy. He looks almost as big as his airplane. And he's a real nice fellow. Anyhow, believe it or not, when he took off, in nine minutes he saw nine of them over Emmett, Idaho—four in one group, I think it was, and five in another group. He got a beautiful observation. His whole crew saw them. When they left, he said, they left *fast*. He described them as being very similar to what I had seen, except they were quite thin and ruffled on top. As best I could tell, they were circular. Of course, those that I saw were not circular but somewhat crescent-shaped.

In the meantime, a great deal of misunderstanding came about because when Bill Bequette of United Press asked me how they flew I said, "Well, they flew erratic, like a saucer if you skip it across water"—thus the name "flying saucers" was born.

Then I was visited by military intelligence from the Fourth Air Force. Captain Davidson and Lieutenant Brown were very courteous. They were mainly interested in all the mail I was receiving. In total, I received something like ten thousand letters from all over the world. So many people came to visit me that for almost three years our home was like Grand Central Station.

A-2 Military Intelligence absolutely denied that the United States government had any such craft as this. Not only that, they said to their knowledge no other power on the face of this earth had any craft of this type. By now I was pretty well convinced that nobody knew what they were. In fact, A-2 Military Intelligence told me flatly that they had personnel and airplane pilots who had seen them.

Most people today don't realize that back in late '47 and '48 all military personnel, in every branch of our armed forces, were given a directive that anyone who saw any of these things and didn't report them only to public relations in the military was subject to a ten-thousand-dollar fine and ten years' imprisonment. Well, if you want something to deter people's interest in flying saucers or UFOs, this certainly was it. Ralph Blum, who had access to the military files, made this directive public in the January 1975 issue of *True* magazine. I knew about such directives way back in 1948 and I couldn't understand why the general public was not given the benefit and support of the hundreds of military witnesses and accounts of these strange flying objects.

Anyhow, my sighting in 1947 changed my life. I have not only been fascinated with the subject, I have spent a great deal of money and time making recordings with other pilots and responsible people who have had similar sightings. And I have noticed that, accompanying these flying-saucer or UFO sightings, there are other associated phenomena. All sorts of strange things occur. People somehow are displaced from where they were—they find themselves in different areas of the country, not knowing how they got there.

I think military intelligence was more interested in the people who came to visit me than in my sighting. Many of these people were very sympathetic with my

particular position because I had stuck my neck out. I was stuck with my report. I couldn't hide anyplace even if I didn't like the way some of the press treated me. So these people came to me and told me their stories because they knew I would listen. And I recorded many of these stories. And the thing becomes more and more complex.

In the more than thirty years that have passed I haven't tried to convince anybody of UFOs or flying saucers. In fact, I always say, "When you see one yourself, then you'll know." Of course, I would like to see substantial physical, nuts-and-bolts proof that we are not seeing illusions, that we are not having psychic experiences. These things are something that is real, something that is physical, something that, if it dropped on your toe, you'd yell.

I remember one particular case that was related to me. It happened to a young family in Tacoma, Washington. Their twelve-year-old boy turned up missing, and after a very extensive search they found him in Lusk, Wyoming. They didn't have relatives there and the boy, when he was found, didn't know how he got there. It was a completely baffling case.

I have heard other stories of this type; however, there are so many varieties of the phenomenon that no one knows what is taking place.

An Ellen Jonerson over in Canby, Oregon, a University of Oregon graduate and a very intelligent person, actually saw a little man. She was stunned to see this little man walk across their breezeway and, standing straight up, pass underneath the running board of a '37 Dodge car. He couldn't have been more than nine inches tall and he had features like a man. He wasn't threatening. He was very dark-skinned; he had on a type of little romper and a sort of plaid shirt. She got a good look at him and when I asked her if she didn't feel like she'd like to get closer to him, she said, "I think I should have run over and grabbed the little fellow." But he walked out into the grass and she never saw him again.

Some of my recordings are with people who have seen flying men. Now, this kind of shakes me up.

There are cases, of course, in the records of Charles

Fort of persons in Louisville, Kentucky, I think about one hundred years ago, who saw a man who had machinery on his back and who went flying through the air all over town—without an airplane, without wings or anything! I ran into a lady up here in Washington, Mrs. Viola Johnson, who saw three men in flying suits, and she described them beautifully. They flew a little higher than the telephone wires, and other people saw them, too. I think a lot of other people have experiences like this but think it over and decide maybe they'd better not say anything because newspaper people can do some awful things to people who are perfectly sincere and perfectly honest.

Another lady, a Mrs. Zaikowski, saw a flying man up in Chehalis, Washington. He had long silver wings and flew about two hundred feet over her barn. A lot of small schoolchildren also saw the flying man and asked to go into her backyard to get a better look at him. He just flew slowly off down the valley and they never saw him again.

Responsible people report these experiences and we have to believe them. But some of these experiences happen to people we wouldn't think of as very responsible and they probably are just as authentic. The whole thing is sort of senseless; it doesn't seem to have rhyme or reason. But these things keep happening to lots of people, all over the world.

A Boeing test pilot I know told this story: He was flying one of the test planes for Boeing from Seattle to Mexico City, then turning around and flying back to Seattle, all before noon. That's how fast the plane was—it flew something over 1500 miles an hour, twice the speed of sound, and he said that while he was flying over California, I think it was, at 67,000 feet, he observed a group of saucers or UFOs. They were all different colors; he said some of them were red, some of them were yellow, some were dense and some were opaque, but one large black one left the group and flew right off his wing tip, about ten feet from his canopy. He said it looked like a giant rayfish with no tail. He said it had a glow around the edge of its wings and was bigger than his ship. He could see the wing ripple the way a ray's wing ripples in

the ocean. This black "thing"—he thought it was alive—stayed with him for five or six minutes and then took off. It left him as if he were standing still! He couldn't believe it—his indicators said he was doing over 1500 miles an hour and it just left!

This is the same sort of impression I got after seeing these same things again in 1952. Two of them flew under me at Mount Lassen. I got a movie of these, and one was just as solid as a Chevrolet car. But you could see the pine trees right through the other one that was following it. I too got the feeling that here was something that was alive, rather than that they were machines. By this I mean that if you see a horse walking down the street and you also see a car on the street you can say, from a chemical standpoint, that they're both made up of atoms and molecules and so on, but one is an entity in itself and the other is not. This makes me think that whether this type of craft is actually alive or whether it is a robot operated by some kind of intelligence, it does not have the ability to change its density without losing its *identity*.

When you get to compiling these cases there seems to be a pattern to it all. What the pattern means I don't think anybody knows. I'm sure the military doesn't.

My experience with Samuel Eaton Thompson is too long to go into here. But I've got a tape recording that covers most of what he had to say during the day and a half I spent with him. Samuel Eaton Thompson is a man from Centralia, Washington, who professed to have been aboard a ship from Venus. His experience was on March 26, 27, and 28, 1950 (three days) and the reason I interviewed this man was that as I was flying to Seattle in late March, 1950, Toledo radio tower called me—they knew the number of my ship—and told me that the military had been swarming all over the place, that a very strange thing had happened and they thought I'd like to check it out. It was a physical happening and had occurred in the middle of the night. One of these globe-shaped things had come over Centralia and actually landed in a vacant lot at 3:00 A.M. Samuel Eaton Thompson became acquainted with these space people and spent

some time in their ship with them (approximately three days).

It's a very unusual story—the man is very sincere. He said he met these people from Venus and he told me all about them and described what their craft looked like. He lived on their craft for a time, he said. A lot of what he said sounded very sound and sensible. He was not a religious fanatic or anything. I took him out to dinner and my wife and family met him. I think maybe his story is real; I don't think he could imagine a ham sandwich unless you shoved it in his face. He told me just what happened to him and that's all I know about it.

I can only vouch for the things that I have seen and what has happened to me.

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compiled and edited by

Curtis G. Fuller

and the editors of

FATE Magazine—

Mary Margaret Fuller,

Jerome Clark,

Betty Lou White

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