

First man to see JUN 25 77 'flying saucers' tells it right

"I have, of course, suffered some embarrassment here and there by misquotes and misinformation," Ken Arnold was saying about the famous incident that took place 30 years ago yesterday in the skies near Mount Rainier.

"I'll tell you, sometimes I think that an editor of a newspaper says to the newsman, 'Now, lookit, I want you to write a story about these flying saucers and make this goofy bastard look silly!'

"You know, that's just the way I think they go about it. They misspell your name, misspell the place it happened, get it all fouled up.

"This one paper in Mexico said the sighting was June 24, 1974! Then they said that the flying saucers were circling my plane and played hopscotch with me in the Cascade Mountains! Well, this is ridiculous! That's not what happened!

"Hell, I bet I could show you a hundred newspaper stories that were written about me that were absolutely untrue. But what the hell can I do about it?"

WRITE A letter to the editor, it was suggested.

"Oh, yeah. But nothin' ever happens. In fact, they use that letter for another story and say that Mr. Arnold is unhappy about this and that. It's impossible, I tell you."

Ken Arnold is 62. If it weren't for him, the term "flying saucers" would not exist today.

It was Ken Arnold, who, in 1947, while flying his small plane near Mount Rainier, saw nine unidentified flying objects the likes of which he never had seen before.

Later, when asked by a reporter to describe the flight of the objects, Ken Arnold innocently replied:

"Well, they flew erratically, like speedboats on rough water. Or, erratically like if you took a saucer and skipped it across the water."

Ken Arnold never meant to say the objects LOOKED like saucers (more like disks, he says). But by then it was too late. Headline machines across the world pounded out the news: "FLYING SAUCERS SPOTTED!"

THIS WEEKEND being the 30th anniversary of those headlines, as well as the annual regional U.F.O. convention (at Cedar Park near Ashford, Pierce County), I was going to recount that incident, using old newspaper clippings.

But since Ken Arnold doesn't think much of their accuracy, I asked him to relive again, in a phone conversation, what happened that summer day (he lives in Meridian, Idaho). I taped it to double-check my notes.

"It was a beautiful day. Just clear as a bell," Ken Arnold began his story. "It was about 3 in the afternoon.

"I was a member of Idaho search-and-rescue. At the time, there was a \$5,000 reward offered for finding a downed C-46 Marine transport that had crashed into the southwest side of Mount Rainier with 32 Marines aboard it.



by
Erik Lacitis

"During the course of a business trip (fire control and mining, in which he often used his private plane), I decided to spend an hour or so in search of the downed plane. At the time, I had something like over 4,000 hours of mountain high-altitude pilot time.

"As I made a turn over Mineral (Lewis County) to make another search of this high plateau, a very bright flash lit up the plane and the sky around me.

"It startled me. I just assumed it was some military lieutenant out with a shiny B-51 and I had withstood the reflection of the sun hitting the wings of his plane.

"BUT THE flash happened again, and that's when I saw where it was coming from. It came spasmodically from a chain of nine circular-type aircraft way up from the vicinity of Mount Baker.

"They were on a 170-degree course, so I knew they were going to approach Mount Rainier. At the time, I was 22 or 23 miles west of Mount Rainier. I was going to be at a right angle as they crossed in front of me.

"I could not find any tails on these things. They didn't leave a jet trail behind them. I judged their size to be at least 100 feet in wingspan. I thought it was a new type of missile.

"I determined to clock their speed because, you know, most of pilots' conversations are about how fast the military are building their planes these days.

"I watched these objects carefully. I had a big sweep second hand on a 24-hour clock on the instrument panel. The nearest I could determine, they covered a distance between Mount Rainier and Mount Adams in 1 minute 42 seconds.

"That figured out to something like 1,760 miles an hour, which I could hardly believe. I know that figure couldn't be entirely accurate, but I'd say it was within a couple hundred miles accurate.

"It was one of the darndest things I ever saw. I was pretty well familiar with most civilian and military aircraft . . . and it wasn't any type of our manufacture."

ARNOLD WAS asked if it bothered him that for 30 years, some people have thought him to be a kook.

"I didn't make my report because I wasn't interested in newspaper publicity or anything else. I can't eat newspaper clippings," he said.

"I made my report because I thought it was my duty. It was the only proper and American thing to do. I saw what I saw."

Ken Arnold said he had read that 15 million people in the world have seen U.F.O.s.

"Now, I don't care whether that many have," he said. "But I know there's hundreds of other pilots who have seen them because they've called me on the phone."

Then Ken Arnold said he had business to take care of and ended the interview.

"Hey, listen," he said. "Make sure you send me a copy of the story. I want to know if you got this right."