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Some out-of-date notes on Kenneth Arnold's flying saucers¹

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Not so very long ago, subjects like sorcery were relegated to the ranks of studies of human stupidity. It took all the energy of researchers like Jeanne Favret-Saada to show how partial this judgment was, and how in effect it revealed the researchers' prejudices.² The anthropology of flying saucers is in the same state as the analysis of fortune tellers before J. Favret-Saada. Despite a few, all too rare, attempts by sociologists, historians or folklorists, most of the profession shelves the phenomenon away as irrational.³ This makes the subject a sociological 'untouchable'. My problem, then, is to contribute to a sociology of the flying saucer (or more specifically of ufology) without reducing it to a sociopsychological phenomenon. The trap to avoid is an obvious one: that of leaving the sociology to one side and concentrating only on the ufology, or inversely of abandoning the ufology by smothering it with a sociological 'explanation'. But the most obvious traps are often the most deadly. My method in this article will consist above all in using the accounts of the witnesses *to furnish their own explanations*. I have chosen as a case study the 'first' observation of a flying saucer made by Kenneth Arnold, in 1947, and by a few others who came after him. I will not presuppose any one actor as a priori more significant, or more true, than any other. On the contrary, I will attempt (to the limit of my available sources) to show how the actors themselves reach their conclusions, and by what mechanisms they define who is right and who is wrong, who is off the rails and who is credible. Instead of imposing these differences myself, or of simply telling the story, I will construct my account so that the actors themselves will *create the differences*. In other words, the different protagonists will do the sociology, rather than myself.

If no-one doubts the 'correspondance with reality' in the case of texts on endorphines or on interstellar gas, their is no reason to introduce such doubts for Arnold's saucers. We will, then, need to see how, in the 'circulation' of the story, the saucers themselves go from hand to hand. The reality or the falsity of the saucers is not a prize awarded by the external observer at the end of the process, it is the very thing at stake for all the protagonists while they dispute. It is this dispute itself which will, gradually, construct and deconstruct the phenomena. At one moment, the narrative may collapse under the weight of certain actors, at another it may 'regain' its reality. It is not for the analyst to decide in advance if the saucers are 'real' or not. S/he must follow Arnold's tribulations.

¹ A shorter version of this paper has been published by John Spencer and Hilary Evans in the book *Phenomenon* (London, Futura Books, 1988, pp. 26-45). A totally revised and expanded version of the same text will be published soon (probably in the journal *Social Studies of Science*, Sage Publications).

² J. Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1980.

³ See for example, R. Westrum, 'Social Intelligence about Anomalies: the Case of UFOs', *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1977, 271-302; D.M. Jacobs, *The UFO Controversy in America*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1975; L. Dégh, 'UFOs and how Folklorists should look at them', *Fabula*, Vol. 18, 1977: 242-248.

IN THE BEGINNING

How a narrative becomes, through a change of course, something different

On Tuesday 24 June 1947, Kenneth Arnold - a business and private pilot¹- took advantage of a trip in his own plane between Chehalis and Yakima so as to spend some time in the region around Mt Rainier looking for a C-46 that had disappeared in that area.² A little earlier in the afternoon, while installing fire-fighting equipment for the Chehalis Central Air Service, he had talked with 'chief pilot' Herb Critzer "among other things, about the possible location of a lost C-46 Marine transport which had gone down in the mountains."³ A reward of \$5000 had been offered by the victims' families for the discovery of the wreck.

Let him tell the story.⁴ The sky was clear, it was 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Arnold had set his course for Yakima, and "(I) simply sat in my plane observing the sky and the terrain(...)when a bright flash reflected on my plane".⁵ The astonished Arnold believed that he was too close to another plane.

"I looked every place in the sky and couldn't find where the reflection had come from until I looked to the left and the north of Mt. Rainier where I observed a chain of nine peculiar looking aircraft flying from north to south at approximately 9,500 foot elevation and going, seemingly, in a definite direction of about 170 degrees."⁶

His first idea was that they were jet aircraft. The reflection came from them, for "two or three of them every few seconds would dip or change their course slightly, just enough for the sun to strike them at an angle that reflected on my plane".⁷ The craft were at some distance and it was hard to make them out clearly. But, when they passed in front of snow-covered Mt Rainier, Kenneth Arnold could clearly see their outlines. He was amazed: "I thought it was very peculiar that I couldn't find their tails but assumed they were some type of jet planes".⁸ What is more, he had never seen a plane flying so close to mountain peaks.⁹ And to top it off, "when the sun reflected from one or two or three of those units, they appeared to be completely round".¹⁰ He reckoned that the objects were about 20 to 25 miles away.¹¹ Thus they had to be fairly large in order to be visible. Using a bonnet-fastener, he compared them in size to a DC-4 to his left. The craft appeared to him to be smaller: "their span would have been as wide as the furthest engines on each side of the fuselage of the DC-4".¹² He decided to calculate their speed by timing their passage between Mt Rainier and Mt Adams.

¹ For biographical elements on his personality, see Brad Steiger (ed.), *Project Blue Book*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1976, pp. 26-27, and Kenneth Arnold et Ray Palmer, *The Coming of the Saucers*, Boise & Amherst, privately published, 1952, pp. 5-6.

² K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *The Coming of the Saucers*, *op.cit.*, p.9. The remains of the C-46 were recovered on 28 juillet of the same year. Cf. K. Arnold, *The Flying Saucer as I Saw it*, Boise, privately published, 1950.

³ K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁴ I am referring here to the first report addressed by Arnold to the Wright Field base (Dayton, Ohio), early July, 1947. Cf. Brad Steiger (ed.), *Project Blue Book*, *op.cit.*, 1976, p.26 sq.

⁵ B. Steiger, *op. cit.*, p.28.

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

¹² *Ibid.*, p30.

"As the last unit of this formation passed the southern most high snow-covered crest of Mt. Adams, I looked at my sweep second hand and it showed that they had travelled the distance in one minute and forty-two seconds. Even at the time this timing did not upset me as I felt confident after I would land there would be some explanation of what I saw."¹

The whole observation took some two and a half to three minutes.²

Turning the narrative over to other people in an attempt to find an explanation ...

Kenneth Arnold continued his search for the C-46 for 15 or 20 minutes, but "while searching for this marine plane, what I had just observed kept going through my mind. I became more disturbed, so after taking a last look at Tieton Reservoir I headed for Yakima".³ The \$5000 reward suddenly seemed a lot less important to him.⁴ The pilots at Yakima airport, he thought, would be able to explain his observation. "Around airports pilots are continually arguing about how fast our army and Navy jets and missiles really can go".⁵

At about 4 o'clock, Kenneth Arnold finally arrived at Yakima. He went straight away to see Al Baxter, "general manager of Central Aircraft", to whom he told his story in private. His impression of this interview a few days later was that Baxter had not really believed him.⁶ Furthermore, one of the pilots that Al Baxter called in to hear the story had remarked that the craft were bound to have been Moses Lake guided missiles. Arnold recalls that: "I felt satisfied that that's probably what they were. However, I had never heard of a missile base at Moses Lake, Washington."⁷

Having filled up his plane's tank, he headed back to Pendleton. During the flight, he laid out his maps of the area as best he could in the cockpit so as to begin "figuring mathematically miles per hour"⁸ on the basis of the distance between the mountains. But "figuring and flying my airplane at the same time was a little confusing, and I thought my figures were wrong and that I had better wait until I landed at Pendleton to do some serious calculating".⁹

... who take it up and alter its course themselves

On landing, Arnold learnt that his story had arrived ahead of him. The people he talked with at Yakima had taken the story up themselves so as to turn it over to others.¹⁰ The Yakima pilots had telephoned Pendleton in order to notify Arnold's arrival, and had spoken of his adventure. Thus our pilot comments that

1 *Ibid*

2 *Ibid.*, p.31.

3 *Ibid*

4 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.12.

5 *Ibid*

6 B. Steiger, *op.cit.*, p.32. In the work he was to co-sign with Ray Palmer, he wrote, however: "I recall that he looked at me in a rather puzzled way, but seemed quite positive that I hadn't gone crazy and wasn't seeing things" (K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 13).

7 K. Arnold, "How it all began", in C. Fuller(ed.), *Proceedings of the First International UFO Congress*, New York, Warner Books, 1980, pp. 23.

8 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.13.

9 *Ibid*

10 Loren Gross, *Charles Fort, the Fortean Society, and Unidentified Flying Objects, a survey of the unidentified flying object mystery from august, 1895, to august, 1947*, Fremont, Ca., privately published, 1976, p. 77.

"when I landed at the large airfield at Pendleton, there was quite a group of people to greet me. When I got out of my plane no one said anything. They just stood around and looked at me."¹ But: "before very long it seemed everybody around the airfield was listening to the story of my experience".²

During the discussion, Arnold mentioned the speed he had calculated for the craft, "but (I) assured everybody that I was positive that my mathematics were lousy".³ The people around started discussing the incident. Arnold spread out his maps, and displayed again, in front of them all, the actions of his mysterious craft. Those gathered around recalculated the speed with him.

"When it kept coming out in excess of seventeen hundred miles an hour I thought, 'Holy smoke, we're taking the measurement of distance far too high up on both Mount Rainier and Mount Adams.' So we took a measurement of the very base, as closely as it could be determined, and which I knew from the map was far below the snow line. The distance was 39.8 miles."⁴

Despite this, "we still had a speed of over thirteen hundred miles per hour".⁵ On the basis of the verdict arrived at together, our witness concluded that the craft were "guided missiles, robotly controlled"⁶ - in any case they were not manned, for, as Arnold says: "the human body simply could not stand [such speeds], particularly considering the flipping, erratic movements of these strange crafts".⁷

Having reached the conclusion that these missiles were something out of the ordinary, Arnold - "armed" with his maps and calculations so as to give "the best description I could"⁸ - repaired to the local FBI office. "I thought it was my duty to report these things"⁹. "I kind of felt I ought to tell the FBI because I knew that during the war we were flying aircraft over the pole to Russia, and I thought these things could possibly be from Russia".¹⁰ He found the office shut.

OF JOURNALISTS AND SAUCERS:

Turning towards the journalists ...

Not having had any luck with the F.B.I., Arnold decided to look up the journalists from the *East Oregonian*. One consideration in particular seems to have pushed him there. As he explained to them, he had met while walking in Pendleton a man from Ukiah in the Oregon who had said that he had seen there a similar formation of craft.¹¹ Before leaving Pendleton, then, he went to the offices of the *East Oregonian*. There he met Nolan Skiff, editor of the 'End of the Week' column. He told Skiff about his adventure. Thinking of

1 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.13.

2 *Ibid*, p.13-14.

3 *Ibid*, p.14.

4 *Ibid*.

5 *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

7 *Ibid*. The calculation of the speed of the craft and the result obtained seem to have been important elements in the acceptance of the story by others - notably by the journalists. Capt. E.J. Ruppelt, who was for two years director of the army's Project Blue Book, says that he had the opportunity of talking the matter over with Arnold in 1952 in the company of a journalist-pilot who "had worked on the original Arnold story". Apparently this latter told him that - apart from Arnold's personality - the journalists were convinced by his reasoning about the speed of the craft. This is what lead the reporters, who at first - still according to Ruppelt - believed in a mystification to feel that the story was credible. Cf. Edward J. Ruppelt, *The Report on UFOs*, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1956, pp. 34-35.

8 K. Arnold, "How it all began", in C. Fuller(ed.), *op.cit.*, 1977, p.23.

9 *Ibid*

10 *Ibid*

11 L. Gross, *Charles Fort...*, *op.cit.*, 1976, p.78.

the motion of objects, Arnold described them "like a saucer if you skipped it across the water". Nolan Skiff, sceptical to start with, was rapidly convinced of Arnold's honesty.¹

... who take up the narrative, translate it, and change its course themselves

Another journalist who was present, Bill Bequette, sent off, as he always did with local news, an Associated Press despatch.² Here is the text of this despatch, which was to have so many repercussions:

PENDLETON, Ore., June 25 (AP)—Nine bright saucer-like objects flying at 'incredible' speed at 10,000 feet altitude were reported here today by Kenneth Arnold, Boise, Idaho, pilot who said he could not hazard a guess as to what they were.

Arnold, a United States Forest Service employee engaged in searching for a missing plane, said he sighted the mysterious objects yesterday at 3 p.m. They were flying between Mount Rainier and Mount Adams, in Washington State, he said, and appeared to weave in and out formation. Arnold said he clocked and estimated their speed at 1,200 miles an hour.

Inquiries at Yakima last night brought only blank stares, he said, but he added he talked today with an unidentified man from Utah, south of here, who said he had seen similar objects over the mountains near Ukiah yesterday.

'It seem impossible,' Arnold said, 'but there it is.'³

It seems that it is largely as a result of this despatch that the story was to be so generally taken up and commented on by the press.⁴ From this moment on Kenneth Arnold was dispossessed of his story, which now followed other paths and came back to him through journals or in the form of other reporters who wanted more information. In the same way as those who had heard his story from the Yakima pilots had gathered round waiting for his plane's touch-down, Arnold found himself under seige from reporters who, without ever having heard his story in detail would, he claimed, extract a few details from him that were rushed immediately into print.⁵ "Of course many of these stories were distorted and inaccurate", complains Arnold.⁶

"I didn't share the general excitement. I can't begin to estimate the number of people, letters, telegrams, and phone calls I tried to answer. After three days of this hubbub I came to the conclusion that I was the only sane one in the bunch".⁷

A UP despatch from Pendleton dated 27 June makes reference to Arnold's dispiritedness.⁸

The multiplication of saucers:

As soon as Arnold's story was known, "flying disk" sightings proliferated. As we have seen, the first AP despatch was dated 25 June (towards the end of the morning).⁹ On 26 June, the *Chicago Tribune* reported, as well as Arnold's story, another sighting made on

1 *Ibid*

2 *Ibid*

3 Herbert J. Strentz, *A Survey of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966.*, Ph. D. thesis in journalism, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University, 1970, edited by Arcturus Book Service, New York, 1982, p. 24.

4 In fact it is difficult to know if there were journalists among the people who were awaiting Arnold's arrival at Pendleton airport. Unless I am wrong, Arnold does not mention any. Further, if we are to believe Loren Gross, everybody except Arnold had forgotten about the saucers before the AP despatch of 25 June. (L. Gross, *Charles Fort...*, op.cit., p. 78).

5 K. Arnold, "How it all began", in C. Fuller(ed.), op.cit., 1977, p. 23.

6 *Ibid*

7 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, op.cit., p.14.

8 Herbert J. Strentz, *A Survey of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966.*, op.cit., p.25.

9 H. J. Strentz, op.cit., p.24

24 June by a Pendleton couple.¹ On the same day, the *Phoenix Arizona Republic* and the *Baltimore Sun*, drew on an AP despatch of 25 June (?) to publish a sighting by a prospector called F. Johnson from Portland, who claimed to have seen five or six disks in the region around the Cascade Mountains on the morning of 24 June.² Again on 26 June, the *Oklahoma City Times* reported an observation by a certain Byron Savage dating from 17 or 18 May,³ while the *Kansas City Star* reported another sighting by a certain W. I. Davenport.⁴ And these are only a few examples (too) briefly presented. Starting from the 26th and over the days following there are hundreds, even thousands, of newspaper articles devoted to these "flying disks".⁵

Commenting on this avalanche of reports, Arnold remarks ironically:

"From then on, if I was to go by the number of reports that came in of other sightings and of which I kept close track, I thought it wouldn't be long before there would be one of these things in every garage. In order to stop what I thought was a lot of foolishness and since I couldn't get any work done, I went out to the airport, cranked up my plane, and flew home to Boise".⁶

The New York Times and the saucers:

We will concentrate on a few articles drawn from the American press - from the *New York Times* in particular - in order to look for the translations that Arnold's incident and the sightings that followed submitted, and thus to get an overall idea of the debate sparked off by these phenomena.

On reading the articles in the *Times* for the period, the first thing one notices is that there were no reports of saucers before 4 July. The paper made no reference to them between 25 June and 3 July, despite the fact that numerous reports of sightings had emanated from the press agencies in the form of AP or UP despatches. And on 4 July, what we find in the first article on the saucers (on page 26) is the army's position on the question. According to the Army Air Forces spokesperson in Washington, the sightings reported to date had "not produced enough facts to warrant further investigation".⁷ The same spokesperson went on: "we don't have a thing that would give any realism" to the sighting, characterised by the journalist as: "a report made last week by a flying Boise (Idaho) business man".⁸ In any case, no military craft could account for the sightings.

"He (the spokesman) said Air Forces people are inclined to believe either that the observers just imagined they saw something, or that there is some meteorological explanation for the phenomenon".⁹

¹ Ted Blocher, *Report on the UFO Wave of 1947*, Privately Published, 1967, Appendix 'Sources', Cases No. 39 and 44.

² *Ibid.*, p.IV-3, listing Case No.30, Appendix 'Sources'.

³ *Ibid.*, p.I-1. Dépêche AP, Oklahoma City, 26/6. Cf. also H. J. Strentz, *op.cit.*, p.26.

⁴ T. Blocher, *op.cit.*, p.II-1. Strentz (*op.cit.*, p.26) is referring to an AP despatch from Kansas City, le 26/6, on the Davenport sighting.

⁵ Ted Blocher, going through the local U.S. press for summer 1947, has collected 850 press clippings devoted to the saucers (T. Blocher, *op.cit.*). There are undoubtedly far more. For California alone, Loren Gross has gone through 102 local papers in place of Blocher's ten, and has thereby found twice as many observations for this state. Blocher had found 109 cases, Gross found 146 more. Cf. Loren Gross, "The UFO Wave of 1947, California: June 25-July 16", in Nancy Dornbos (ed.), *Proceedings of the 1976 CUFOS Conference*, 1976, pp. 80-88.

⁶ K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.14.

⁷ Anonymous, "Flying Disks' Fail to Stir Air Forces", *New York Times*, Friday, July 4, 1947, p. 26, col. 2-3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

The reporter went on that the Wright Field base had added that the Air Material Command had begun an enquiry. Furthermore, the Washington spokesperson gave the journalists some possible explanations for the phenomenon that had been proposed by a Langley Field meteorologist that the Army had consulted. The reporter paraphrased the expert:

"solar reflections on low-hanging clouds produced spectral 'flashes' which might have appeared like moving objects. (...) a small meteor might have broken up. (...) icy conditions in high clouds produced 'large hailstones which might have flattened out and glided a bit'".¹

Arnold, given his name this time, is mentioned again in the edition of 6 July on the first page, in the same breath as sightings by "such reliable men as Capt. E. J. Smith of United Airlines (and) co-pilot Ralph Stevens" (see below). The writer of the article mentions another sighting, made by some picnickers, and also the first photo, taken by coastguard Frank Ryman on 4 July. After this, the floor is given to "Military and civilian experts in the weather", who, it is said "shrugged their shoulders when first asked for an explanation". Four-fifths of the article are taken up with explanations of the sightings in terms of natural phenomena. Thus the reporter, one T.R. Kennedy Jr., cites an observation of "dozens of the missiles over the city (Augusta, Maine) travelling northerly", and following this gives a tentative explanation by "Gordon A. Atwater, curator of astronomy of the Hayden Planetarium", which

"was inclined to believe that the first reports of the strange sights were 'entirely authentic', but that most subsequent ones were brought on by a 'mild case of meteorological jitters', with some 'mass hypnosis' thrown in".

The planetarium had received numerous requests for explanations, and so when the reporter went back there, its astronomer suggested that: "ice crystals, formed by nature high in the sky, could be as good an explanation as any until we discover the true facts". Furthermore, such crystals had been obtained under laboratory conditions, notably by the scientists of the General Electric Company ("motion pictures of the forming crystals can be seen daily in the planetarium", adds the journalist). And natural crystals, much larger than those obtained in the laboratory, could reflect the sun's rays like a small mirror and make the phenomena visible". The article quotes the astronomer again:

"some have suggested that the flying saucers might be meteorites, but we are inclined to believe they are neither meteorological or astronomical in origin. (...) No meteorites are disk-shaped, and they vary from a pinhead in size to one weighing thirty-six tons".

The *New York Times* reporter also gathered several other opinions. The astronomer Dr Jan Schilt, a professor at Columbia, who he telephoned, said he was more inclined to believe the true answer would be found from some phenomena seen during the two last wars, when speeding airplanes churned up the atmosphere and caused distortions of light rays which passed through soon afterward. He said this effect might be largely electrical in nature, due to the turmoil of the propeller and wings causing something like 'smoke-rings'. Unless perhaps birds had caused the phenomenon; or even the reflection of headlights on clouds. In any case, the researcher was:

"inclined to believe a very simple explanation for the flying saucers will thus be found, (...) and that some who blamed it on more profound and strange things will be more carefull in the future about spreading half truths or badly observed things of nature".

Another series of sightings, made in states as distant as Oregon, Michigan or even New Orleans and Philadelphia, was the occasion for a researcher from "the US Weather Bureau's division of synoptic reports and forecasts" to register his scepticism. "I'll have to see one before I make a guess what they are". As for Newbern Smith from the National Bureau of Standards in Washington: "it is like one of these Loch Ness Monster stories. Once the reports get about, everyone thinks they see it".

Following up this statement, the *New York Times* journalist specifies that an object found near an Ohio farmhouse and of unknown origin: "was declared by the Army Air Forces to be a radiosonde", part of an observational balloon. The article finishes with two AP despatches, which illustrate this orchestration of the debate by the press - actors who have never seen each other meet in its pages and quarrel in this roundabout way. The first despatch, from Los Angeles, refers to the opinion of an "unidentified 'scientist in nuclear physics' at the California Institute of Technology" - who the head of "Caltech's nuclear physics department" denies to be a member of his group - that the saucers "might be the result of 'transmutation of atomic energy' experiments". This hypothesis is refuted by another AP despatch, from Denver, in which David Lilienthal, "chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission" avers that the phenomenon is in no way linked to atomic tests. To which he adds: "of course, I can't prevent anyone from saying foolish things".

A second article on the saucers can be found in this same edition.¹ Its author, referring to the Seattle Coast Guardsman photograph which shows "bright little specks in perfect formation", comments that: "the only trouble with the photograph is that it was taken at 5:30 P.M. on July Fourth. Bright little specks are apt to appear in the sky almost any time on the Glorious Fourth". The author continues:

"We have no disposition, however, to laugh this phenomenon off. A lot of people have seen the disks, and one and all dismiss the thought that they were sun-spots -- not the whirling spots on the sun itself but the after-images of light on the human eye. The flying saucer could be real."

And he goes on to enumerate the different hypotheses put forward to date, including the extraterrestrial hypothesis, which is however not thought too highly of: "They may be visitants from another planet launched from spaceships anchored above the stratosphere".

The edition of July 7 publishes an AP report emanating from San Francisco.² Armed with cameras and associated photographic equipment, military planes had gone looking for saucers. These missions had been flown in Oregon and in California amongst other places. According to the despatch, they have not borne fruit. We also learn that, despite the caution that marks military and scientific proclamations on the subject, the Air Force has decided to take an interest. According to Captain Tom Brown, an Air Force public relations representative, the Army did not know what the saucers were. "But we don't believe anyone in this country, or outside this country, has developed a guided missile that will go 1,200 miles an hour as some reports have indicated". This is patently a reference to Arnold's sighting. The rest of the article summarises the principal sightings of recent days, notably by pilots and by a policeman, and refers in passing to Kenneth Arnold.

On 8 July, the readers of the *New York Times* learn that the saucers are gaining ground.³ "The Associated Press said that thirty-nine states, plus the District of Columbia and a part of Canada were playing host to the heavenly disks". Further, as the title of the article indicates, the flying disks are changing colour:

"Despite the humorous skepticism of scientists and military experts, the latest flock of rumours showed increasing imagination. No longer, for example, were the disks just white. In some cases they were in technicolor, with orange the predominant hue".

¹ Anonymous, "Those Flying Saucers", *New York Times*, Sunday, July 6, 1947, section 4, p. 6, col. 3.

² The Associated Press, "Military Planes Hunt Sky Discs With Cameras in Vain on Coast", *New York Times*, Monday, July 7, 1947, p. 1, col. 6-7.

³ Murray Schumach, "Disks' Soar Over New York, Now Seen Aloft in All Colors", *New York Times*, Tuesday, July 8, 1947, p. 1, col. 2-3, p. 46, col. 1.

And in the same article, a professor of physiology from Sydney is credited with an experiment aiming to show: "how simple it was to see the 'flying saucers' play tag among the stars". He asked 450 students "that, in the interest of science, they stare fixedly at a point in the sky about a mile distant". Result: "Within ten minutes twenty-two students were back with findings. They even drew pictures to prove that they had seen 'flying disks'." The physiologist comments: "Just as I thought. It was all due to the effect of red corpuscles of blood passing in front of the retina. This is well recognized and anybody interested can draw his own conclusions". As soon as this explanation was published, the reporter notes, other explanations were proposed. One saucer which had collided with a plane turned out to have been a small publicity balloon. An object that fell noisily into a courtyard in Chicago "turned out to be a circular saw". Its discoverer has notified the FBI. For other sightings, as it turns out, the Army claims ignorance, but gives out that enquiries are under way. The next day, 9 July, a saucer that had been brought in as having crashed near to an atomic test site becomes a balloon-probe.¹

From these early days in July we see the setting-up of a newspaper debate about the phenomenon. Everywhere there are actors giving their opinion -the reporters orchestrate the meetings. The reporters seek out the actors, report their observations, and bring them together. It is the readers at the other end of the process who must draw their own conclusions from the debate. Clearly we do not know much about what the readers thought. It can be assumed that the saucers had a certain popularity. It could even be said that they were certainly popular. A Gallup poll taken on 19 August, 1947 revealed that if only one out of two Americans had heard of the Marshall Plan, nine out of ten had heard about the saucers.²

Fleeing the journalists who come charging back, ...

Just as the debate was hotting up in the press, Arnold returned home. No sooner had he arrived than "aviation editor of the Idaho Statesman" Dave Johnson, who he already knew as a "man of respected ability and intelligence in matters related to military and civilian aviation",³ turned up. The discussion that he had with the journalist, the fact that the latter did not know about anything that came close to these craft, led Arnold to consider that perhaps they were not American. A few years later he recalls: "It was then that I really began to wonder".⁴ Further, Dave Johnson told him that the Wright Field base wanted the complete story of what happened. Press agencies and reporters also did.⁵ These latter laid siege to Arnold's home. The Pendletonian crush had been transported to Doris and Kenneth Arnold's Boise homestead. "We began to feel like we were living in Grand Central Station", Arnold remarks.⁶

... all the better to come back to the saucers

This all gets to them to such an extent that on the arrival of family friend Colonel Paul Wieland, back from Europe, they decided to get away from it all and go fishing. This fishing expedition would in fact in several ways bring Arnold back to his saucers.

¹ Murray Schumach, " 'Disk' Near Bomb Test Site Is Just a Weather Balloon", *New York Times*, Wednesday, July 9, 1947, p. 1, col. 4-5, p. 10, col. 4-5.

² H. J. Strentz, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ K. Arnold, "How it all began", in C. Fuller (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.24. In the beginning of July, Arnold sent his report to the base at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, cf B. Steiger(ed.), *op.cit.*, p.26-33.

⁶ K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.15

First of all, Arnold, even if he was fleeing the journalists and their telephone calls, did not leave the saucers behind him at Boise. During the flight to Sekiu, Arnold and Wieland discoursed on human capacities for distinguishing distant craft that are moving fast (some of the arguments put forward against Arnold's sighting mentioned the fact that craft flying at some 1200 mph should have been, given their size, undetectable to the naked eye).¹ According to Kenneth Arnold:

"Colonel Paul told me definitely that artillery shells could be seen quite easily traveling at six or seven hundred miles an hour if you are in the right position, and they are quite small compared to a plane".

For him this confirmed: "that my calculation and timing were not nearly so inaccurate as some newspaper experts were leading people to believe".² Furthermore, when they arrived at the fishing site, Arnold and Wieland discovered that the water was "as red as blood".³ "Red tides" had caused the death of thousands of fish - and even of a man who has eaten one of the fish, according to the villagers.⁴ The astonished Arnold returned to his suspicions: "even though the scientists had a name for it, I admitted red tides into my collection of phenomena along with flying saucers".⁵ Why this connection? Because on looking at the rivers from his plane as he left the area: "it looked to [Arnold] rather like a gob of something had fallen out of the sky".⁶

A third event also brought Arnold back to his saucers. On 5 July, Arnold and Wieland went from Sekiu to Seattle. When they landed, they learnt that a United Airlines team had sighted some flying disks the night before, after their plane had taken off from Boise airport.⁷ Arnold went off to buy the papers to find out what was going on. In one of them, he found a photograph - the first photograph of a flying saucer, taken by coastguard Frank Ryman.⁸ Paul Wieland totally forgotten, Arnold: "rushed madly uptown to the Seattle offices of the International News Service to see the blown-up prints of the picture".⁹ The journalist there that he asked for the photograph asked him who he was. Despite his reluctance to get too involved, Arnold could not withhold his name. Once he realised who he was talking to, the journalist took him to a nearby room containing Captain Smith and Ralph Stevens, the two United Airlines pilots who had made the sighting the day before. We retain from this meeting, apart from Arnold's account, a very widely distributed photograph taken by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reporters present.¹⁰

The photo taken, Arnold headed off with Smith and Stevens. They repaired to a local coffee shop. Once there, Smith retold the story of their sighting. First of all, he recounted that just before taking off, someone had asked him if he believed in flying saucers and he had replied that he would believe in them the day that he saw one.¹¹ Eight minutes later, going over Emmet in Idaho, he and his crew managed to see not one, but nine. First a group of five, then a second group of four. The objects were circular, with a flat

1 *Ibid*

2 *Ibid*

3 *Ibid*, p. 16.

4 *Ibid*

5 *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

7 *Ibid*

8 *Ibid*, p. 17.

9 *Ibid*

10 *Ibid*, p. 18. The photo is reproduced on p. 162. Cf. also L. Gross, *Charles Fort...*, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

11 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 18. L. Gross, *Charles Fort...*, *op.cit.*, p. 85. Gross cites the *Saint Petersburg Times* for 6 July, 1947.

underbelly, were rough on top and seemed to them about as big as their DC-3.¹ Arnold, hearing this story, was staggered.

"When Big Smith got through telling me this, and in spite of my own experience, I kept repeating to myself, "It's just amazing--simply amazing! Positively amazing!" Big Smithy's sighting somehow made mine small and insignificant."²

Arnold suddenly realised that he had totally forgotten about Paul Wieland. He quickly took his leave of Smith and Stevens ("I (...) said jokingly that I'd see them on Mars or someplace ") and ran off to rejoin the Colonel.³

Arnold spent the next week going through the abundant correspondence that had sprung up following the news of his sighting.

"Not one letter that I recall, and I have most of them still in my files, he wrote in 1952, had even a note of criticism. This, to me was rather surprising since most of the newspapers were having a terrifically good time trying to make the public believe we were crazy, seeing visions, or recording corpuscles on the retina of our eyeballs."⁴

Also, on 7 July, Arnold and Johnson flew over the sites of the sighting of 24 June. James L. Brown, general manager of the Statesman Newspapers, had, it turns out, asked Dave Johnson to try to catch sight of and photograph one of these saucers. The trip was unsuccessful.⁵

THE MILITARY ENQUIRY

The reader will recall that one of Kenneth Arnold's first actions on making his sighting was to try to report it to the FBI. Wright Field base's request for a report gave him the opportunity to pursue this course. He produced a written report detailing his sighting for them. We are already familiar with its details. In it, Arnold went beyond a simple biographical account - he gave the feelings about his sighting expressed by his fellow pilots. Thus he asserts that pilots who had served in the war had assured him that he had not been seeing things. They themselves had been warned that they might see such craft during their missions. Arnold also cites another veteran military pilot who, he said, assured him that the flying disks were experimental craft being tested by the American government or some other country. Moreover, Arnold makes it clear that he does not want, as others have done, to take what he saw lightly.⁶ He did not go looking for the publicity that came his way. According to him: "I reported something that I know any pilot would have reported".⁷ Indeed, he says that he is rather surprised that the Army or the FBI - "these two important protective forces of our country" - have not yet seen fit to hold an enquiry.⁸ He even says that he is prepared to sit a mental and physical

¹ K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 18-19. For a detailed account of the sighting by Smith, Stevens and the stewardess Marty Morrow, see the "interview report" made 9 July by the FBI, which has since been declassified and published in Lawrence Fawcett et Barry J. Greenwood, *Clear Intent, The Government Coverup of the UFO Experience*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984, pp. 151-153.

² K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19-20.

⁵ David N. Johnson, "Statement", in B. Steiger (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 37-38.

⁶ B. Steiger (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 33.

examination¹ "for any determination they (the military) might wish to make as to the capabilities of my five senses."²

The work of the military enquiry: seeking out the witnesses ...

A few days later, Kenneth Arnold received a visit from two members of the military enquiry who came from Hamilton Field in California. "I was very happy to see them, he recalls. I couldn't figure out why such an efficient body as Military Intelligence hadn't called on me before."³ The two enquirers, Lieutenant Frank M. Brown and Captain William Davidson, invited Arnold and his wife to dinner. Kenneth learnt that the soldiers did not know any more than him about the flying saucers.

"They said, frankly and openly, they didn't know what the flying saucers were. They had never seen one, they told us, but ever since my first report they were practically bug-eyed from watching the sky themselves."⁴

After dinner, Arnold suggested to the two soldiers that they should meet E.J. Smith, the United Airlines pilot, who could give his testimony about the sighting of 4 July. The enquirers were delighted to take the opportunity, Smith having being on their list of people to interrogate. Arnold, his wife and the two enquirers left, then, for the Boise Municipal Airport to meet E.J. Smith.⁵ Arnold was surprised to run into Dave Johnson of the Idaho Statesman there. "I wondered how he knew", he remarks.⁶ Brown and Davidson had wanted to meet him as well, as he had made a sighting of some saucers on 9 July.⁷ After the discussion, during which, says Arnold, "everybody was talking at the same time", and so as a consequence, "none of us found out much", "Doris and I invited Davidson and Brown to come out to our home where we could talk under quieter circumstances."⁸ Our witness responded to the enquirers' questions. "I stuck absolutely to the facts. I didn't consider my opinion important. I drew pictures for them and recounted my original observation as accurately as I could."⁹ Before leaving, the two military enquirers looked over the mail that Arnold had received. They looked particularly closely, notes Arnold, at letters from the various groups who had asked for a copy of his written report of the sighting. "I was happy they did go through my mail, he says, as I didn't feel capable of evaluating much of the contents of the letters I had recieved."¹⁰ And, as Arnold was taking the soldiers back to their hotel, they told him that he could contact them if anything strange should turn up. Further, they advised him not to talk too much about his sighting.¹¹

... to bring in reports of sightings ...

Let us skip a few stages in our chronology. What happened to Arnold's report on his sighting when it left his hands and arrived on the desks of first the military enquirers then the scientific experts? Brown and Davidson's aim was to bring back an account from and an opinion about the observer they had observed. To this end the enquirers, on returning to their base, edited their report on what they had gathered. This report consists notably of

1 *Ibid*, p. 33.

2 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

3 *Ibid*, p. 21.

4 *Ibid*, p. 21-22.

5 *Ibid*, p. 22.

6 *Ibid*, p. 22.

7 Cf. the report by David N. Johnson (addressed to military information, 12 July) in B. Steiger(ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 37-43.

8 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

9 *Ibid*

10 *Ibid*, p. 23.

11 *Ibid*

details of the sightings and their impressions of the personalities of the witnesses.¹ Thus, before meeting Arnold, they had questioned Dave Johnson over the telephone, who had told them: "that as far as he was concerned anything Mr. Arnold said could be taken very seriously and that he, Mr. Johnson, actually believed that Mr. Arnold had seen the aforementioned flying disks".² After they had in turn met Arnold, their opinion was the same as Johnson's.³

On the other hand, Arnold's report landed on J. A. Hynek's desk, Hynek being an astronomer the Air Force had asked to study the reports so as to avoid any possible confusion with astronomical phenomena. As far as this went, Hynek quickly concluded that: "there appears to be no astronomical explanation for this classic incident, which is the prototype of many of the later flying saucer stories".⁴ But he does not stop there. He cannot explain the phenomenon, he says, but he has picked up "certain inconcistencies" in Arnold's report:

"Arnold made drawings of objects showing definite shape and stated that objects seemed about 20 times as long as wide, estimating them as 45-50 feet long. He also estimated the distance as 20-25 miles and clocked them as going 47 miles in 102 seconds. (1700 MPH). If the distance were correct, then in order for details to be seen, objects must have been of the order of 100 x 2000 feet in size. If we adopt a reasonable size, Arnold's own estimate, in fact, of 50 feet long, hence about 3 feet wide, the objects must have been closer than a mile, obviously contrary to his statement. If we adopt a reasonable limiting size to the objects of 20 x 400 feet, objects must have been closer than six miles to have shown the detail indicated by Arnold. At this distance, angular speed observed corresponds to a maximum speed of 400 MPH. In all probability therefore, objects were much closer than thought and moving at definitely 'sub-sonic' speeds".⁵

Hynek's conclusion was that what Arnold had seen was some aircraft.⁶

RAY PALMER

Amazing Stories, but true ...

Towards 28 or 29 June, Arnold found in his mail a letter from a certain Raymond A. Palmer. Since the Arnold-Palmer alliance was to be a long-lasting one, and so as to understand Palmer's contribution to these stories about flying saucers, it seems appropriate to give some presentation of this new actor.

In 1947, Raymond A. Palmer was 37 years old. He was from an early age attracted to science fiction - following his reading of the very first "pulp" magazines like *Amazing Stories* (published by Hugo Gernsback)⁷ he became an active member of "fandom" from 1930. In particular, he was in at the foundation of one of the very first groups of SF

¹ Franck M. Brown, "Memorandum for the Office in Charge: 16 July 1947", in B. Steiger(ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 36-37.

² *Ibid*

³ The military enquirers' opinions are published notably in *The official guide to UFOs*, compiled by the editors of *Science and Mechanics*, New York, Ace Book, 1968, p. 140.

⁴ B.Steiger(ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35-36.

⁶ In fact, the army also seems to have seriously considered the hypothesis of a mirage. Cf. Lt. Col. Lawrence J. Tacker, *Flying Saucers and the US Air Force*, Princeton, New Jersey, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1960, pp. 58-59. Furthermore, as Ruppelt recalls, there were two camps at ATIC - those who thought that Arnold's estimations were correct, and those who followed Hynek's line of thought. Cf. E. J. Ruppelt, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-34.

⁷ Harry Warner, Jr., *All Our Yesterdays, an informal history of science fiction fandom in the forties*, Chicago, Advent: Publishers, Inc., 1969, p. 75.

enthusiasts, the Science Correspondance Club, which was supported by H. Gernsback.¹ Thus Palmer took on the task of launching *The Comet* - the first SF 'fanzine' - which was edited by the club. Also in June of the same year (1930), he published his first SF short story in a professional review.² In 1938, he became editor-in-chief of *Amazing Stories*, which the Ziff-Davis press group had just bought up. The magazine was moribund at the moment of its purchase, it attained its highest-ever circulation under Palmer's general editorship. But Ray Palmer is also well-known for what is now generally called the Shaver Mystery. From 1945 on, Palmer published, after some reworking, numerous texts by Richard Sharpe Shaver,³ who claimed to have visited subterranean kingdoms in which dwelt the Deros and the Teros, two warring races. Presented in the same setting as SF stories, but as documents that reflected real experiences, these texts were the origin of an important controversy that reached to the heart of fandom.⁴ The *Amazing Stories* issue of June 1947 was, moreover, entirely consecrated to Shaver's narratives, and as soon as the first flying saucers appeared towards the end of June, Palmer saw the confirmation of Shaver's stories in them. In effect, this latter said that it should be possible to see the craft of these subterranean races flying in the heavens, as well as spaceships coming from other planets colonised by descendants of the people of Atlantis (who had emigrated at the time of the destruction of Atlantis some 12,000 years before). In the October 1947 issue, Palmer, in an editorial that was probably (taking production and printing delays into account) written during the summer, wrote:

"A part of the now world-famous Shaver Mystery has now been proved! On June 25th (and subsequent confirmation included earlier dates) mysterious supersonic vessels, either space ships or ships from the caves, were sighted in this country! A summation of facts proves that these ships were not nor can be attributed to any civilization now on the face of the earth".⁵

Actors who were ready for the saucers

An interesting observation can be made here. As L. Gross⁶ and J. Keel⁷ have remarked, the arrival of the saucers did not surprise everyone. As we have just seen, the readers of *Amazing Stories* had already had the chance to read accounts of sightings of strange flying vessels in the sky. Palmer had in his time introduced them to the European series of "ghost rocket" sightings in 1946. And the June 1947 issue, to take but one example, contains, on top of an editorial by Palmer full of references to Charles Fort⁸ (the pioneer in the area) and to unusual aerial phenomena

"such as the mysterious 'air raid' suffered by Los Angeles during the war, and which the army now reveals has never been explained, except that it was no private or military plane of our own, and none of the Japs

¹ Brian Ash, *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, London and Sydney, Pan Books, 1977, p. 16.

² "The Time Ray of Jandra", in *Wonder Stories*, vol. 2, n° 1, June 1930. Cf. H. Warner, Jr., *op.cit.*, p. 76.

³ Cf. Donald H. Tuck, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 2: Who's Who, M-Z*, Chicago, Advent: Publishers, Inc., 1978, p. 385; Bernadette Bosky, "SHAVER, Richard S(harpe)", in Curtis C. Smith (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Writers*, New York, Saint-Martin's Press, 1981, p. 484.

⁴ For the details of this controversy, see in particular: H. Warner, Jr., *op.cit.*, pp. 180-185; B. Ash, *op.cit.*, pp. 336-340.

⁵ "The Observatory", *Amazing Stories*, October 1947, vol. 21, n° 10, p. 6.

⁶ L. Gross, *Charles Fort...*, *op.cit.*

⁷ J. Keel, "The Man Who Invented Flying Saucers", *Fortean Times* n° 41, Winter 1983, pp. 52-57.

⁸ For Charles Fort, see in particular: Damon Knight, *Charles Fort, Prophet of the Unexplained*, London, Gollancz, 1971; Jean-Louis Brodu, *Charles Fort, Précurseur Excentrique du Domaine Anomalistique*, Mémoire de maîtrise en littérature américaine, Univ. Paris VII, 1982; L. Gross, *Charles Fort...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21sq.

or any foreign power, but was certainly tracked by radar, and observed by many people to 'appear to be rocket ships' from three to five in number".¹

On top of all this then, the number contained an article by Vincent Gaddis entitled "Visitors from the void", a collection of accounts of sightings of "strange aeronefs" during the 1930s and 1940s.²

Furthermore, there were already groups in existence that compiled lists of unusual phenomena, from spiritualist and metapsychological occurrences to phantom planes. The "Borderland Science Research Associates" kept their readers informed of these through their bulletin *Round Robin*.³ But the nerve-centre was above all occupied by the Fortean Society, a society dedicated to the memory of Charles Fort and presided over by Tiffany Thayer. This society's bulletin, *Doubt*, had for a long time given over a large space to celestial manifestations. It is not surprising to find that the 19th issue, the one following the summer of 1947, was almost entirely devoted to the "flying disks".

Furthermore, magazines regularly published columns on the unusual, where one often finds aerial manifestations. Thus, a certain R. De Witt Miller published in the same year, 1947, a collection of articles that had appeared in the magazine *Coronet*⁴ - thus continuing on the tradition of a Boaistuau or of a Belleforest, sixteenth to seventeenth centuries chroniclers of prodigies. Part of the work is devoted to flying ships, under the heading "Enigma out of space"; in this the connection is made with questions about extraterrestrial life.⁵

Attempts to enrol Arnold

On 28 or 29 June, then, Kenneth Arnold received a first letter from Ray Palmer, using the letterhead of The Venture Press - a company he had not heard of. Recalling the event, Arnold wrote in 1952:

"At the time, had I known who he was, I probably wouldn't have answered his letter. It wouldn't have been because he wasn't a sincere or a good man, but later I found he was connected with the type of publications that I not only never read but had always thought a gross waste of time for anyone to read".⁶

The man making this recollection is one who had come to co-sign a work with Palmer about the saucers, before which he had published several articles on the subject in a review founded by the same man.⁷ What, then, were the reasons that tied Arnold to Palmer, despite the fact that the latter remained an editor of SF? How can we explain this continuing association other than by the habitual recourse to the irrational and to error?

¹ Ray Palmer, "The Observatory", *Amazing Stories*, vol. 21, n° 6, June 1947, pp. 6, 8-9, 175-177; (here p. 175-176).

² Vincent H. Gaddis, "Visitors From The Void", *Amazing Stories*, vol. 21, n° 6, June 1947, pp. 159-161.

³ J. Keel, "The Man Who Invented Flying Saucers", *Fortean Times*, op.cit., p. 54.

⁴ R. De Witt Miller, *Forgotten Mysteries*, Chicago, Cloud Inc., 1947. Re-edited under the title *Impossible, Yet it Happened*, Ace Books, nd.

⁵ R. De Witt Miller, op.cit., chap. 9. His second chapter is also devoted to 'phantom armies' during the last two world wars (as well as to a vision of Christ being crucified in the sky in eastern England in 1944) - all phenomena familiar to sixteenth and seventeenth century chroniclers. Cf. Jean-Pierre Seguin, "Notes sur des feuilles d'information relatant des combats apparus dans le ciel (1575-1652)", *Arts et Traditions Populaires*, 1959, n° 1-2, pp. 51-62, and 1959, n° 3-4, pp. 257-270.

⁶ K. Arnold and R. Palmer, op.cit., p.20.

⁷ "I did see the flying disks!", *Fate*, vol.1, n°1, Spring 1948, pp. 4-10. "Are space visitors here?", *Fate*, vol.1, n°2, Summer 1948, pp. 4-21. "Phantom lights in Nevada", *Fate*, vol.1, n°3, Fall 1948, pp. 96-98.

When he got the first letter, Arnold found that: "far from being anything sensational, ... it had a tone of softness and sincere interest that appealed to me".¹ In the end, he replied to Palmer's letter. He also questioned his friends. No-one had heard anything about Palmer or his Venture Press. The only way to get to know anything more, then, was to get in touch with Palmer himself. In his reply, Palmer asked Arnold if he would, for a fee, put his account down in writing. Arnold had already received several offers, which he had refused, but as Palmer seemed to him to be genuinely interested, he sent him a carbon copy of his report for Wright Field. In his next letter, Palmer referred to a sighting of some saucers in the port of Tacoma made by two patrolmen, who had contacted him to tell him their story.² According to Palmer, the two men not only saw the saucers, but had some fragments from them in their possession. Palmer, intrigued by the affair, proposed to Arnold that, for a fee, he should go and make enquiries about the case during one of his trips in the area. And in particular he should try to bring back some of the fragments for him to see. Arnold could not decide: "I just let the letter sit for a few days to think it over."³

ARNOLD, ENQUIRER AND AUTHOR

Under the initial impulse of Palmer, Arnold followed up his examination of the origin of the saucers through several enquiries into other sightings. Our witness' trips, which to date had sought the solution to the problem of his own sighting, now took on board the question of what others had seen. Arnold found witnesses and collected their accounts. The first enquiry that Arnold undertook was of the Maury Island affair.⁴

Ray Palmer had sent him \$200, to convince him to make the enquiry, and, feeling bound thereby to bring back an account, Arnold went to Tacoma. There, he met the witnesses, one of whom - Harold Dahl - at first refused to talk to him. But our enquirer persisted, and Dahl paid him a visit and gave him the following account: on 21 June, at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, he was patrolling in the bay area east of Maury Island, this latter being a practically uninhabited region of Puget Sound. Then he and his team noticed six 'doughnut shaped' craft. One of these craft was immobile, the five others were revolving on their own axes. Everybody on board the boat kept their eyes fixed on the spectacle. Dahl took the patrol boat away from the area, for fear that the craft would crash. While so doing, he took three or four photos. All of a sudden, the saucer which seemed to be in difficulty gave vent to an explosion, and its lower part shattered into thousands of metal fragments, which fell into the sea. A few fell on the boat and damaged it, hurting Dahl's son and killing his dog. After this, the six craft disappeared into the sky. Dahl also told our enquirer that afterwards he had not breathed a word to anyone about the affair, and yet that he had received the next day a visit from a man who had advised him not to tell anyone what he had seen.⁵

Arnold was not convinced by this account, nor by the fragments that Dahl showed him a little later ("Why, Harold, that's only a piece of lava rock!", he exclaimed⁶). It is only when he discovered in the press a similar case of material falling after the passage of some saucers that Arnold got interested Dahl's story - which had between times been confirmed by Crisman.

1 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 94. J. Keel, "The Man Who Invented Flying Saucers", *Fortean Times* n°41, winter 1983, p. 55. Cf. also J. Keel, "The Maury Island caper", in Hilary Evans and John Spencer (ed.) *UFOs, 1947-1987. The 40-Year Search for an Explanation*, London, Fortean Tomes, 1987, p. 41.

3 K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

4 This is a very brief account. For more details, see K. Arnold and R. Palmer, *op.cit.*, pp. 25-84.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 31-35.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

"Right then and there I became inwardly excited about the fragments I had seen the night before. I wanted some immediately and even though our meetings had been entirely in the talking stage I put a great more credence in Dahl's and Crisman's stories of their experiences. I seemed all of a sudden to wake up and wanted to get to doing things. I told Dahl I would like to see the photographs he had taken, even if they were bad, and asked Crisman for some of the white metal as well as other fragments he had stored in his garage".¹

So as to get the bottom of the story, he decided to appeal to his allies for help. First of all he called on Captain Smith, who had become a friend. He turned to Smith because he thought that: "he was much more qualified to determine the authenticity of Dahl's and Crisman's stories than I was".² The latter agreed to come to Tacoma, and once he had arrived, interrogated the witnesses and generally gone over the same ground as Arnold, decided to stay until the end of the enquiry.

Our two actors appealed in turn to further allies - Brown and Davidson, the two soldiers who had advised Arnold to contact them if he heard anything interesting. For the story was beginning to get complicated. The press had, despite Smith and Arnold's discretion, got wind of their presence in Tacoma - apparently through anonymous calls, that were to continue during their stay in Tacoma and which lead Smith and Arnold to think that they were under surveillance. Also: "We thought if there was any hoax in these stories the prospects of being interrogated by Military Intelligence would cause Crisman and Dahl to show their hand."³ The two military enquirers did in fact come, but after they had heard the account that Crisman gave them of the sighting (Dahl having refused to see them) they refused to stay any longer in Tacoma.

"All of a sudden, Brown and Davidson lost all their enthusiasm. They weren't interested any more. They got up to leave. Captain Smith and I invited them to stay the rest of the night with us. The room we had was large and we proposed having two fold-down beds brought in. They would have none of it. They were flying back at once."⁴

They quit town at once, leaving Arnold with "the impression they thought Smith and I were the victims of some silly hoax."⁵

The enquiry ended badly. The two military enquirers lost their lives in the crash of their plane returning to their base after leaving Tacoma. As the press began to take the story up,⁶ one of the two witnesses one disappeared from Tacoma and the other swore to the military enquirers that it had all been a gag. The army published its conclusions, which denied the story any veracity.⁷ Arnold and Smith, at first worried about what would become of them, were not, however, bothered. And Kenneth Arnold, who had lost his enthusiasm at the climax of the drama, threw himself afterwards into other enquiries. In 1950, a journalist reported that:

"to Kenneth Arnold a search for more disks has become a hobby. In his spare time he goes disk-hunting in his plane with a high speed movie camera equipped with a telescope lens. He is determined to prove he saw what he said he saw that June day in 1947."⁸

1 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 66 et sq. See also the press articles reproduced in *Fate*, vol. 1, n° 1 (Spring 1948), pp. 22-28.

7 The Air Force conclusions are cited in D. H. Menzel, *Flying Saucers*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1953, pp. 40-42.

8 *The Humbolt Times*, (Eureka, California), 2 April 1950, p. 24. Cited by Loren Gross in *UFO's: A History. 1950: January-March*, Fremont, California, Privately published, 1983, p. 89-90.

It seems that he had at some time seriously questioned himself about the possibility of re-orienting his life by becoming a full-time enquirer. He told some *Sunday Register* journalists who came to question him at home in Boise at the start of 1950 that he could prove the existence of the saucers if he spent the rest of his days dealing with the matter.¹ In any case, thanks to Palmer and to the journalists who regularly sought him out, Arnold found places to publish his point of view on the flying saucer question.

In the spring of 1948, Ray Palmer, while still concerned with the editing of *Amazing Stories*,² founded with the aid of Curtis Fuller (editor in chief of the magazine *Flying*) a review completely devoted to the occult: *Fate*.³ What interests us is that the first number featured flying saucers. And the article which followed the editorial was a reproduction of the report that Kenneth Arnold had handed over to the army a little more than a year before.⁴ Two other articles in this first issue were devoted to saucers. The article after Arnold's, which was unsigned but possibly by Palmer,⁵ returned to the Tacoma affair - in particular reproducing press articles devoted to the event, Arnold's account of his enquiry, and an analysis of the saucer fragments that Arnold had brought back. The author remarks:

"Nothing of an unusual nature exists in this combination of metals except the unusually high quantity of calcium. Calcium oxidizes when heated, and its presence in high-constituent quantity in a fused metal which has been subjected to extreme heat is hard to explain".⁶

He also remarked that the two soldiers had been killed while trying to bring such fragments back, that perhaps their crash was no accident, and that it was almost certain that, despite the Army's initial denials, there was a box of the fragments aboard the plane. Now no trace of this box had been found. Further, according to the account of one of the two survivors of the crash, the pilots in fact had easily enough time to jump from the plane. For the author, this shows that they considered that the safeguarding of the fragments had a higher priority than their life.⁷ The author concluded that the flying saucers were not military craft, but non-malevolent vessels from another world, such phenomena having being reported for hundreds of years.⁸

The two following issues of *Fate* each contain an article by Kenneth Arnold. Thus in n° 2 he asks: "Are there space visitors here?". Using a few case studies, Arnold endeavours to show how the natural explanations furnished by scientists do not hold water when confronted with the phenomena reported. He notes that certain cases might well look like being meteors or other natural phenomena, but that when they are examined in detail, certain elements can be seen that could not be explained given the current state of knowledge. Thus, for example, in his discussion of the Thomas Mantell affair (the pilot who crashed his plane while following a saucer) Arnold takes as a base the descriptions of the object that witnesses gave (they described it as like "an ice-cream cone with a little fire at the bottom") and uses these to refute the possibility that the images came from the

¹ *Sunday Register* (Des Moines, Iowa), 16 April 1950. Cited by L. Gross in *UFO'S: A History. 1950: April-July*, Fremont, California, Privately published, 1982, p. 24.

² He quit *Amazing Stories* in December 1949 - it is unclear exactly why (it seems that the owners were not happy about the ever greater share accorded to the Shaver mystery, even if this made the journal sell). Cf. Ray Palmer, "The Observatory", *Amazing Stories*, vol. 23, n° 12, Décembre 1949.

³ Cf. Ray Palmer and Richard S. Shaver, *The Secret World*, Amherst, Wi., 1975, p. 25. Fuller's and Palmer's names do not appear in the first numbers of the review, and the latter signed articles and editorials in it under the pseudonym of Robert N. Webster.

⁴ K. Arnold, "I did see the flying disks!", *Fate*, vol. 1, n° 1, Spring 1948, pp. 4-10.

⁵ Anonymous, "The mystery of the flying disks", *Fate*, vol. 1, n° 1, pp. 18-48.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The link between the sightings of the saucers and previous observations of celestial phenomena seems to have been made in the press about 4 July, referring to the wave of "ghost rocket" sightings in 1946.

planet Venus, as an astronomer had affirmed. From this bundle of statements, Arnold concluded that there had undoubtedly been manifestations of craft under intelligent control in the skies. In the other article, which appeared in the third issue of *Fate*, Arnold reported observations of strange lights that some shepherds had made. He notes that the phenomena were not new: "a series was seen in 1922, again in 1927, and others in 1930". What did the lights look like? "The general appearance is as if someone was carrying a lantern, or a car was approaching".¹ Arnold continues: "They are of circular shape, glowing like a fluorescent light, and very often appear to be only twenty or thirty feet ahead of the observer. Yet, when approached, they seem just that much farther away. The lights have been chased as much as two or three miles, but never could the pursuer get close enough to determine the exact nature of the lights". After reporting a few more testimonies, Arnold concludes that there is no easy explanation for these phenomena. These two texts show us that Arnold went beyond his own sighting, and through his enquiries and articles pursued his studies of the saucers. For this reason, we can certainly call him one of the very first ufologists - though the term did not exist at the time.

In 1950, he published a booklet of photos and reproductions of letters and articles.² Each document is accompanied with brief commentary. Thus one consisted of a photo of the team that had discovered the remains of the C-46 that had disappeared over Mt Rainier (the one he was looking for that fateful day), he comments: "The bodies (of the 32 missing marines) were never recovered from the wreckage". Further on, Arnold gives his opinion of the Tacoma Event. He recounts that a third man had died following the affair: a certain Paul Lantz, the reporter from the *Tacoma Times*. As for the fragments he had brought back and that Palmer had analysed, Arnold reports that: "Such an alloy was reputed to be an impossibility under present scientific methods". Arnold then reproduces a letter that Velma Brown, the widow of one of the two soldiers who had disappeared in the B-25 crash, had written to him. "I have never thought that Frank's death was an accident", she wrote to Arnold.

We could of course follow Kenneth Arnold's activities beyond 1950. But having reached this point, we can see how his opinion on the subject developed from his first thoughts on 24 June. The extraterrestrial hypothesis, which knew such popular success after 1950, was accepted by Arnold from 1948. What is more, he participated in the construction of the flying saucer as visitor from another world. It would, of course, be interesting to see how the hypothesis became public, but this is not within the scope of this chapter.

CONCLUSION

There were two ways of telling Arnold's story that had to be avoided. The first of these would have described Arnold as following a path containing many ambushes laid by obstinate scientific rationalists and soldiers who were unwilling to recognise the existence of flying saucers - a bit like Galileo was forbidden to speak the truth because of the closed minds of the inquisitors. The second version of the story to be avoided was to proceed as if Arnold had made a mistake, and persisted in his error. The two versions are similar, except that, in the second, the rational sociologists reverse the rôles: if the scientists refuse to believe in the saucers, it is quite simply because they do not in reality go beyond known natural or artificial phenomena.

When we suspend disbelief about the existence or unreality of UFOs so as to describe how the actors went about reaching their own conclusions, we see that, as is the case for Arnold, all the anthropological explanations needed are provided by the actors themselves. Scepticism, belief and rigour of thought appear as faculties that are shared equally by all, the actors taking it on themselves to distribute the rôles - a task which should not be assigned to the sociologist. The scientists doubt Kenneth Arnold's story,

¹ K. Arnold, "Phantom lights in Nevada", *Fate*, vol. 1, n° 1, p. 97.

² K. Arnold, *The Flying Saucer As I Saw it*, Boise, Privately published, 1950.

because they 'know' that natural phenomena can account for his sighting, the unusual aspects being due to the conditions the sighting was made in and to the psychology of the witness. Arnold in his turn doubts the explanations given by the scientists, and prefers to ally himself with Ray Palmer, who seems to accept his account. The actors appear not as backward or progressive, rigorous or frivolous, but as all equally open in the context of the aims they are pursuing. Will the last person to leave the social studies of UFOs please turn on the tape-recorder?

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