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THE SIGHTING

FLYING SAUCERS STILL EVASIVE 70 YEARS AFTER PILOT'S TOUCHSTONE REPORT

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
 EO Media Group

Boise businessman Ken Arnold had no idea he would change the world when he told reporters in Pendleton he saw nine strange objects flying along the Cascades.

But 70 years ago June 25, that's what he did.

East Oregonian reporter Bill Bequette and editor Nolan Skiff didn't figure the 191-word story they banged out that Wednesday just in time for the evening paper and The Associated Press noon wire would take off, well, like a flying saucer.

But it captured the attention of the nation.

The headline at the bottom of the front page of the *EO* for June 25, 1947, reads: "Impossible! Maybe, But Seein' Is Believin', Says Flyer." And in the seven sentences that followed, Bequette and Skiff reported Arnold's claims that, on the day before, he saw "nine saucer-like aircraft flying in formation" at an altitude between 9,500 and 10,000 feet between Mount Rainier and Mount Adams moving at "the amazing speed of about 1,200 miles an hour."

That would make them faster than any aircraft the U.S. or any other nation had back then.

While the imagery was there, the *EO* never used the phrase "flying saucer" in its reporting, contrary to plenty of reports.

Within days of the *EO* breaking the story, some bright newspaper writer elsewhere coined "flying saucer." The term stuck in the lexicon and the American psyche.

A daughter remembers

Kim Arnold, 63, of Meridian, Idaho, said her father was not seeking publicity when he told his story. The objects scared and baffled him, she said, and he wanted to know what they were.

"It didn't make sense to him how fast they flew," she said. "My father was a real nuts-and-bolts realist. He really believed there were explanations for things."

Ken Arnold was 32 at the time of the sighting. He and his wife, Doris, lived in Boise, and had two little girls. He had a reputation as a respected businessman selling fire suppression equipment. Kim came along in 1954 and another daughter followed a few years later. Of the four siblings, Kim Arnold said she knows the most about her father and what happened.

She said the only reason her father said anything about the sighting was out of fear that Russians had developed a craft capable of flying faster than anything the U.S. was flying, and could use that for a nuclear advantage. The U.S. had unleashed the terrifying power of atomic weapons less than two years earlier to end World War II. The Soviet Union, our ally in the war, was now our enemy with impressive military might.

"He believed that our military would come forth and tell everyone what these strange things really were," she said. "And it never happened."

Instead, she said, her parents received 10,000 letters after the story went international, and their home phone rang off the hook.

"My father became the most famous man in the world practically overnight," she said. "It really disrupted their life."

The sighting also launched the UFO wave of 1947, with flying saucer stories grabbing hundreds of newspaper headlines. The county music duo The Buchanan Brothers in mid-July even released the tune "(When You See) Those Flying Saucers."

Yet no subsequent sighting caught the attention of the public the way Arnold's did.

The reporting

Skiff died in 1970, Arnold in 1984 and Bequette in 2011. Bequette in interviews about the sighting reported Arnold came off as honest, level-headed and credible. By all accounts, Arnold — 6 feet tall, 200 pounds, an Eagle Scout and all-state football player in high school — had a reputation as solid as his shoulders were wide.

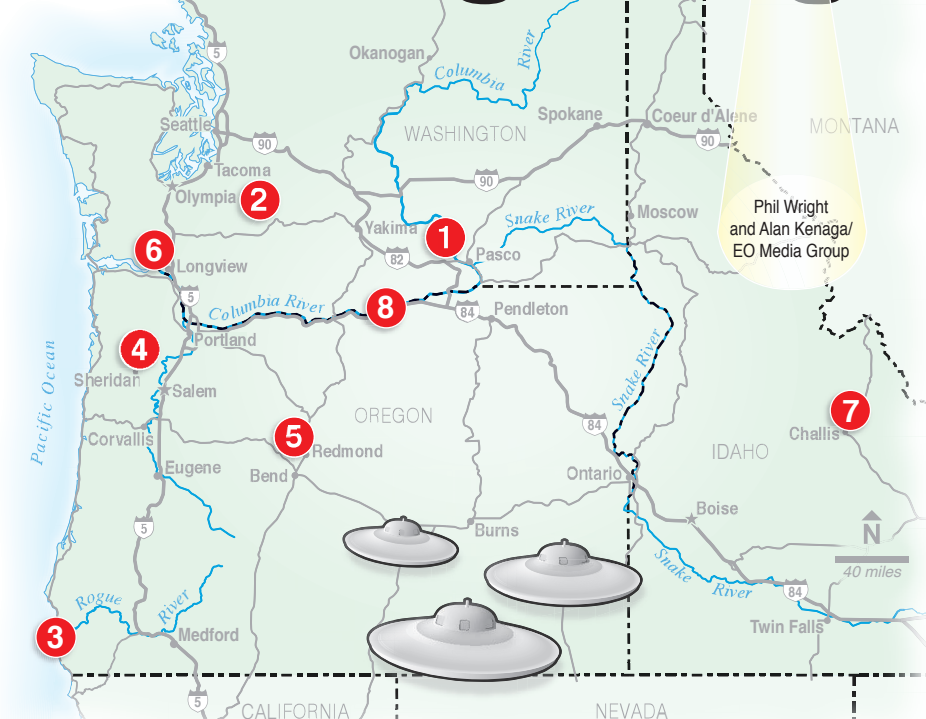
After the *EO*'s first story — not much more than a blurb, really — Bequette interviewed Arnold at length and churned out a feature for the June 26 paper.

Here's what he reported: Arnold was flying from Chehalis, Washington, to Yakima in his single-engine CallAir A-2 when he took a detour around Mount Rainier to look for the wreckage of a Curtis Commando R5C transport plane that crashed Dec. 10, 1946, with 32 Marines aboard. Finding the



Associated Press file photo
 Ken Arnold was photographed in 1947 with his CallAir plane shortly after he reported seeing nine high-speed objects "flying like a saucer would" near Mount Rainier.

Significant Northwest UFO Sightings



Sightings by location

- 1. January 1945, Pasco, Washington** — A fireball on three separate nights flies over the Hanford plutonium production plant and pings on Military radar. Navy fighter planes respond one night but can't catch the object.
- 2. June 24, 1947, Mount Rainier, Washington** — Kenneth Arnold sees nine fast-moving objects near Mount Rainier. His story in the next day's *East Oregonian* leads to the term "flying saucer" and the modern UFO age.
- 3. May 24, 1949, near mouth of the Rogue River** — Five

anglers spot a saucer-shaped craft that still holds up as an unexplained sighting.

4. May 11, 1950, Sheridan — Evelyn and Paul Trent see a large disc-shaped craft near their farm. Paul Trent takes two photos of the object, which become famous.

5. Sept. 24, 1959, Redmond — A police officer and a Federal Aviation Administration employee observe a bright reddish UFO that also shows up on radar.

6. Feb. 25, 1999, Longview, Washington — Fourteen forestry workers witness a craft

lift an adult elk out of the forest and fly off with the dead or unconscious animal.

7. Sept. 27, 2000, Challis, Idaho — Three hunters see a gigantic, triangular craft pass over their campsite.

8. Feb. 19, 2015, Arlington — A driver on Interstate 84 westbound watches a "small domed craft" fly 10-15 feet above the Columbia River before taking off into the sky.

Sources: National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena; National UFO Reporting Center; UFO Evidence; East Oregonian research; Robert Hastings (www.ufohastings.com)

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, REPORT IT

If you see a UFO, Peter Davenport says to write down what you saw as soon as you can.

Davenport is the director of the National UFO Reporting Center. Maybe 15-20 reports a day come into the center, he said, but out of roughly 20,000 "adult, competent, clear-thinking Americans who see a UFO, only one has written it down."

He encouraged anyone who sees a UFO to write down a "factual, objective description" of what they saw and submit it to his organization, or to the Mutual UFO Network, or another credible UFO organization.

The National UFO Reporting Center at www.nuforc.org and the Mutual UFO Network at www.mufon.com have online forms to make reports. You also can call MUFON headquarters at 949-476-8366. And the NUFORC has a hotline for sightings within the last week: 206-722-3000.

plane meant a \$5,000 reward.

He estimated he was 25-28 miles from Rainier and climbed to 9,200 feet and saw to his left a chain of objects, he said, that looked like the "tail of a Chinese kite."

Arnold considered they could be geese, but they were flying south in summer and too high. He wrote off new jet planes because "their motion was wrong for jet jobs." He opened his window in case they were reflections and still saw the objects.

Arnold said they were as "big as a four-engine airplane" and "flat like a pie-pan, and somewhat bat-shaped" and flashed bright enough to temporarily blind him. They were "saucer-like" he said, and moved "like a fish flipping in the sun" and appeared to thread their way along the Cascade peaks.

He told Bequette he timed how fast they flew between Mount Rainier and Mount Adams and came up with 1,200 mph. He added he could have been off by 200-300 mph, but "they were still the fastest things I ever saw."

Later news sources reported he actually clocked the speed at 1,700 mph, which Kim Arnold also confirmed.

The *EO* ran front page follow-ups June 27, 28 and 30 (June 29 was a Sunday, and the *EO* did not publish on Sundays), some with witnesses corroborating Arnold's account. "Flying disc" appears in the June 27 Associated Press story, and Bequette uses it in his story of June 28, but the phrase each time is in quotes without attribution.

The term "flying saucers" finally shows up on June 30 in a short AP story about a La Grande reverend declaring the end of the world was "imminent" after residents there reported UFOs. The "strange zooming objects" according to Rev. Lester Carlson, were "the signs of the second coming of Christ."

Peter Davenport is the director of the National UFO Reporting Center, located in rural northeastern Washington. He said he wonders whether the work the *EO* did covering the Arnold sighting may have been the pinnacle of press coverage of the UFO phenomenon, and whether the coverage has been in decline ever since. He called today's press coverage of UFOs "lamentable."

"For the life of me, I cannot understand why members of the press are not clamoring for information about the UFO issue," he stressed in an email, adding the disinterest of the press, in his judgment, "is even more interesting than the apparent presence on our planet of the UFOs themselves."

Some UFOs make the news, some don't

Arnold's sighting was the first to gain nationwide attention, but it was far from the first unusual flying object to receive press coverage.

Mystery or phantom airships in the late 19th and early 20th centuries captured headlines from the California Bay Area to the Midwest and in New England, Europe and New Zealand. Stories about "foo fighters" — bright, sometimes fiery balls of red, orange or white light — chasing Allied aircraft in Europe made news stories in 1944 and '45.

Other UFO reports from that era would not see the light of day for decades.

Robert Hastings of Colorado is a regular speaker at the annual UFOfest in McMinnville and has worked more than 40 years researching UFOs and their interactions with nuclear weapons. UFOs in January 1945, he said, buzzed the Hanford plutonium production site in Pasco on three separate nights.

The area was top secret, of course, for making the plutonium that would go into the atomic bombs the U.S. dropped months later on Japan to end World War II.

Hastings in his research found base personnel saw the objects, which also appeared on military radar, and one night an F6F Hellcat fighter pilot tried to intercept whatever was flying over the site.

Clarence R. "Bud" Clem was a lieutenant junior grade in U.S. Naval Reserves at the time, and at 84 years of age told Hastings in 2009 how he was in the flight tower and assisted with communications between radar operators and the pilot, Lt. Cmdr. Richard Brown.

Brown reported chasing a bright ball of fire, according to Clem's account, but could never catch the thing, which after a few moments zoomed toward Seattle and off radar.